

Great Crested Grebe

Kuifkopdobbertjie

Podiceps cristatus

The Great Crested Grebe is distributed mainly in the Transvaal and the western Cape Province, with scattered records from the eastern Cape Province, western Free State and Swaziland. It is largely absent from Botswana, with the exception of a cluster of records in the southeast, particularly around Gaborone (2425D). There was a single record during the atlas period in Zimbabwe, where it is a rare breeder (Irwin 1981). Outside of southern Africa, it is present on the Rift Valley lakes in East Africa, and along the North African coast (Brown *et al.* 1982). It has a discontinuous distribution in the Old World; the subspecies *P. c. infuscatus* occurs in Ethiopia, eastern and southern Africa (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). It can be locally common on suitable waters, but is generally fairly sparse, with no more than one or two pairs usually seen. However, there may be local aggregations, particularly in winter (Dean 1977; Bishop 1994).

Its distinctive plumage makes it unlikely to be confused with any other species.

Habitat: It is found on inland waters, mainly at higher elevations, but it is present on lakes at or near sea-level in the southern and western Cape Province. It occurs on more permanent waters, such as lakes and dams, and on endorheic pans where there is emergent vegetation. At times it is present on temporary vleis (e.g. in the semi-arid and arid west), but it apparently avoids shallow, ephemeral pans. It seldom occurs at sea. Reporting rates suggest that it is most abundant in south-central Transvaal and the southwestern Cape Province, both areas in which there appears to be a high incidence of impoundments associated with agriculture. It requires clean

oligotrophic waters, and Clinning (1995) considered that it could be used as an indicator of water quality.

Movements: The models show that there may be some movement of birds from the southwestern and southern parts of the range during winter, with a concomitant increase in numbers of birds in the northeastern parts of the southern African range. This is supported by reports of increases in numbers during winter at Barberspan (2625DA) and near Gaborone (2425) in the northwestern part of the range (Dean 1977; Bishop 1994). A large influx into southeastern Botswana coincided with the widespread drought in the Transvaal during 1993 (Bishop 1994). Although it is beyond doubt that movements occasionally occur, the possibility that it is more conspicuous during breeding, and therefore reported more frequently at this time, should also be considered.

Breeding: Breeding was reported from throughout its range, with records virtually throughout the year in all areas. There are, however, differences in peak breeding season between the western, eastern and northeastern parts of the range. In the southwest (Zones 3–4), it has a marked summer (November–February) peak which shifts to autumn (February–May) in the Free State, northern KwaZulu-Natal and southern Transvaal (Zone 7), and shifts to a winter peak further north in the Transvaal and adjacent Botswana (Zone 6).

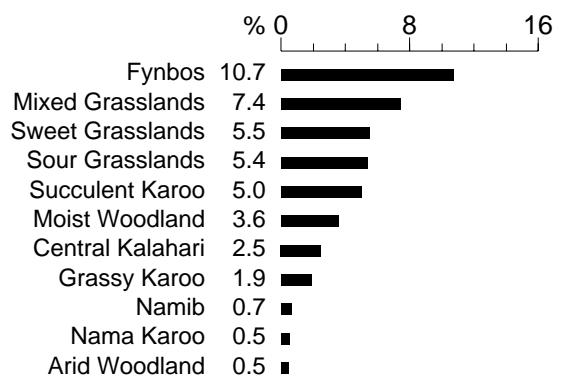
Interspecific relationships: It often occurs with Dabchick *Tachybaptus ruficollis* on suitable waters, and may occur with Blacknecked Grebe *P. nigricollis* at times, but is generally on waters deeper than those favoured by Dabchicks and less ephemeral than those favoured by Blacknecked Grebes.

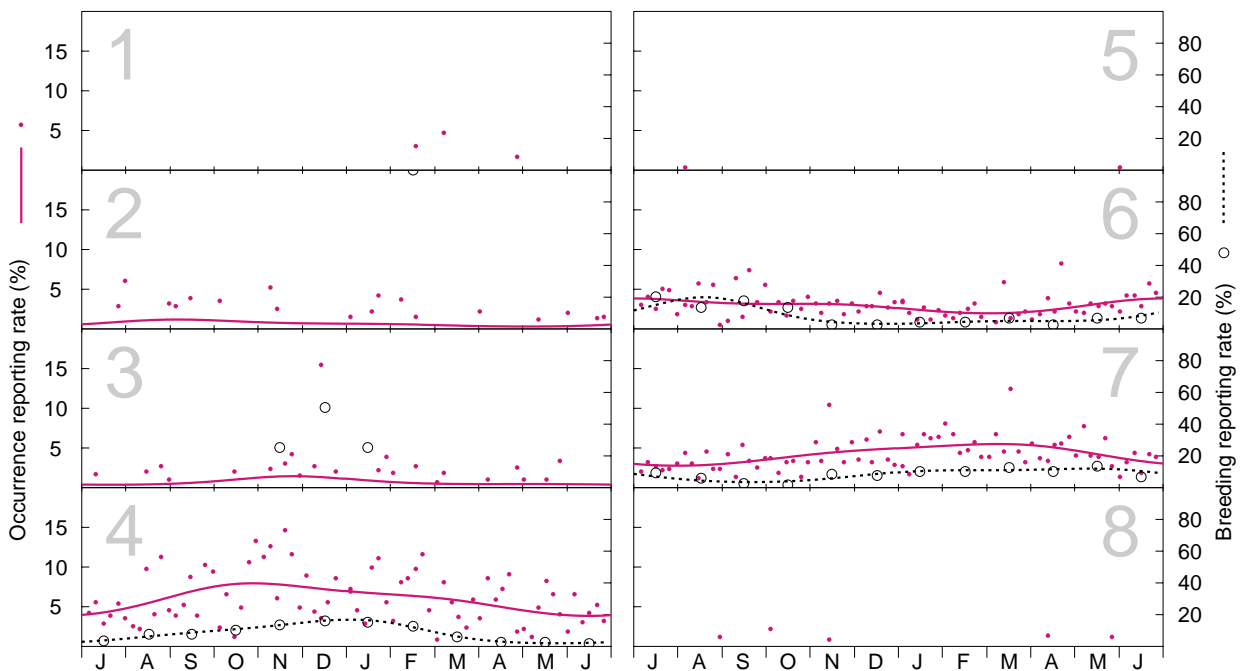
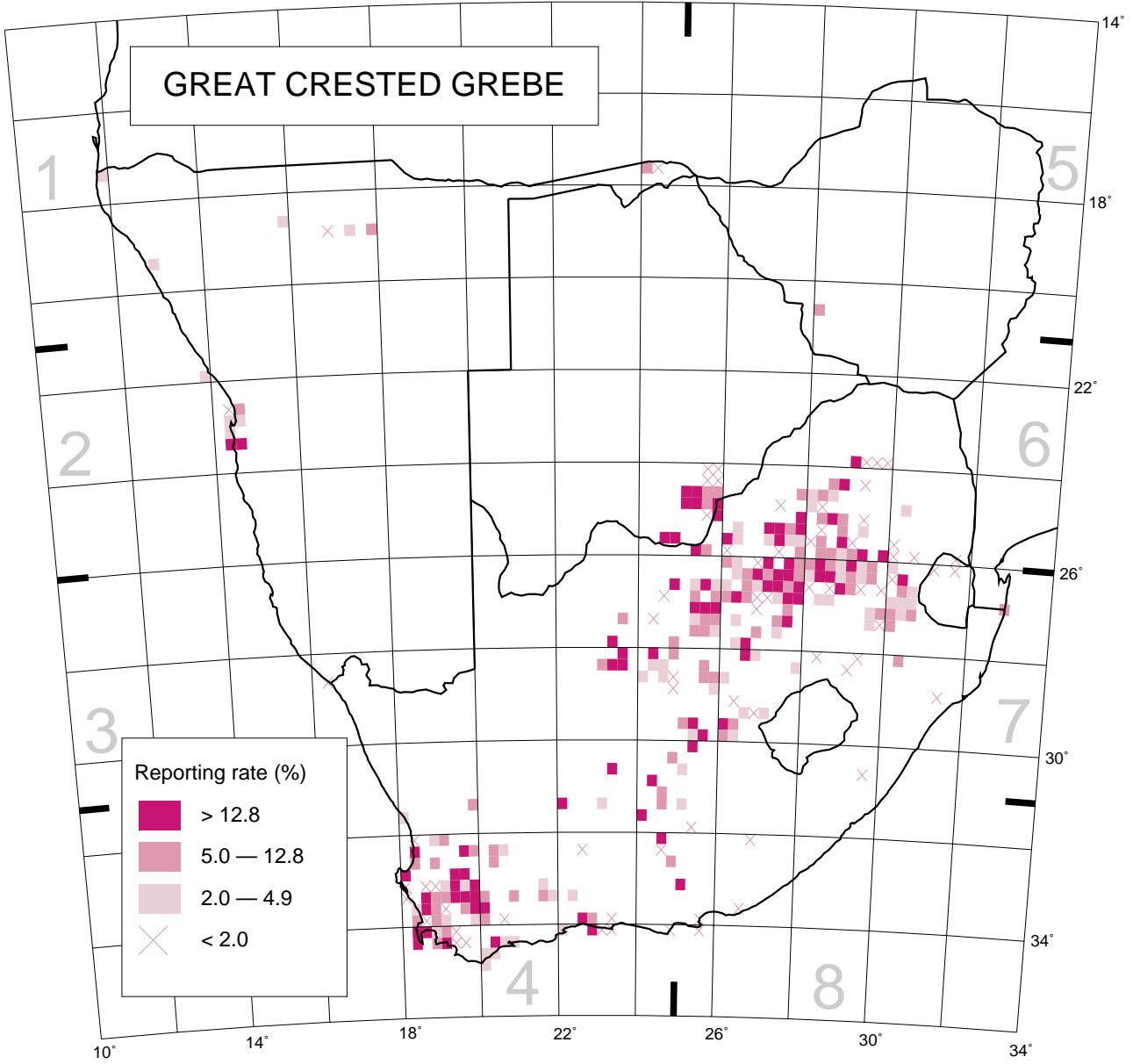
Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence that the geographical range in southern Africa has changed, but the species may now be resident on permanent waters in the semi-arid and arid areas where it formerly occurred as a visitor only, and its abundance may have increased locally as a result of man-made impoundments. Clinning (1995) noted that eutrophication and pollution had led to their disappearance from dams on the Witwatersrand where they previously bred, and that they were sensitive to human disturbance, especially watersports. Overall, however, the Great Crested Grebe is not considered threatened in southern Africa.

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Recorded in 315 grid cells, 6.9%
Total number of records: 5602
Mean reporting rate for range: 12.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 4, 23, 36, 516, 2, 334, 827, 6; Breeding: 0, 1, 4, 183, 0, 45, 309, 0.