



## Hamerkop

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*Scopus umbretta*

The Hamerkop is widespread in southern Africa, being common in the higher-rainfall areas of the eastern half of South Africa and Swaziland, and in the southern Cape Province. It occurs throughout Zimbabwe, and is common in the Chobe–Okavango–Zambezi river systems of the northern Kalahari. It is sparsely distributed throughout most of Namibia and the northern Cape Province, with its distribution being confined to wetland habitats; in particular note the narrow range along the Orange and Vaal rivers, and along the Fish River in southern Namibia. It is widespread to the north of the atlas region, occurring in aquatic habitats south of the Sahara Desert. The nominate race occurs in southern Africa (Clancey 1980b).

It is usually solitary, sometimes in pairs or small groups of 3–5 birds; larger groups are rare. It is unmistakable and conspicuous, hence the atlas data are reliable and comprehensive.

**Habitat:** It occupies inland waters, but very occasionally uses the seashore. It frequents many aquatic habitats, ranging from large, perennial waterbodies and rivers, to vleis and ephemeral wetlands. It roosts in or near its nest. The atlas data indicate that it is commonest in the Okavango basin and at wetlands in the mesic eastern parts of the sub-continent.

**Movements:** The models are almost flat, and do not suggest any seasonal movements, although nomadic movements in response to rainfall in the arid areas occur (Maclean 1993b). Brown *et al.* (1982) considered that there may be some wet-season dispersal to ephemeral waterbodies in arid and semi-arid areas and that breeding in these areas may occur during inundations.

**Breeding:** The models show that breeding activity was reported throughout the year, but some records may reflect the presence of nests, rather than prove breeding activity. In Zimbabwe, egg-laying takes place throughout the year (Irwin 1981). In all Zones, egg-laying peaks mainly August–

September; this is the late dry season in the summer-rainfall area, but towards the end of the wet season in the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4) (Winterbottom 1968a; Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brown & Clinning *in press*; N.J. Skinner *in litt.*). The models also suggest that breeding is more seasonal in the southern Zones.

**Interspecific relationships:** Many other animals, e.g. Barn Owl *Tyto alba*, Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*, genets *Genetta* spp. and snakes, either usurp the nest, use abandoned nests, or rest in the nest while the Hamerkops are absent (Brown *et al.* 1982).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** Historically it was probably less widespread than at present, particularly in the arid western parts of southern Africa. A range expansion into these areas is related to man-made aquatic habitats, such as impoundments and irrigation systems. It has been negatively impacted by the degradation of wetlands, particularly as a result of cattle trampling in floodplains, and the loss of riparian woodland has resulted in loss of nest sites (C.J. Brown *in litt.*). It has decreased in numbers in the southwestern Cape Province; Hockey *et al.* (1989) attributed this to its nest being regularly usurped by the Egyptian Goose which is becoming more abundant in that region. However, on balance, the Hamerkop remains widespread and common and is currently not of conservation concern.

M.D. Anderson

Recorded in 2238 grid cells, 49.3%  
Total number of records: 43 465  
Mean reporting rate for range: 33.0%



