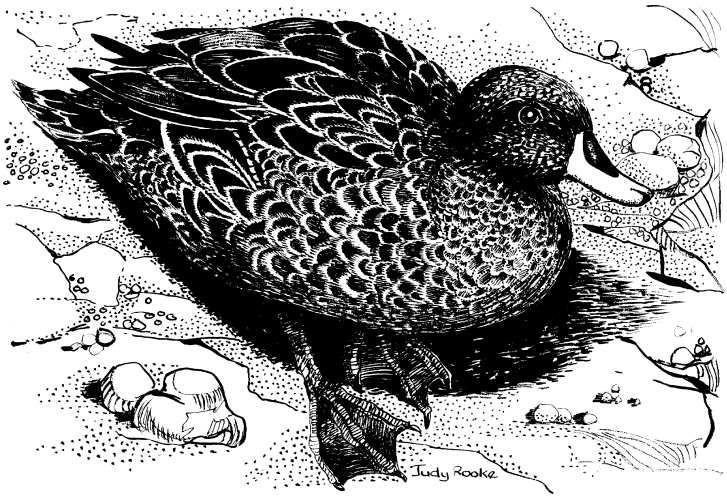


Yellowbilled Duck

Geelbekeend

Anas undulata

The Yellowbilled Duck is common and widespread in southeastern Africa. It also occurs northward through eastern Africa to Ethiopia (Maclean 1993b).

It is most abundant on the central plateau (excluding the Lesotho massif), especially in the southern Free State and southern Transvaal where it is the commonest and most frequently hunted duck, numbering about 100 000 birds; flocks may number 5000 birds during the moult or on large permanent lakes which act as drought refuges (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It is the commonest duck in the eastern Cape Province (Skead 1967b). It is regarded as a common resident and 'winter visitor' in the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989), but is scarce in the more arid parts. In the Free State it is common, but absent from the most arid part west of Jacobsdal (2924BB)–Koffiefontein (2925AC)–Petrusburg (2925AB) (Earlé & Grobler 1987). It is widespread in KwaZulu-Natal (Cyrus & Robson 1980). In Swaziland it is common in the west and scarce in the drier east (Parker 1994). It is rare in southern Mozambique and Zimbabwe, though a few breeding records exist (Clancey 1971a; Irwin 1981; Milstein 1984). It is scarce in Namibia, being confined mainly to the Caprivi; elsewhere it is a straggler (Rowan 1963b). It is present in the Okavango Delta, Linyanti and Chobe rivers in northern Botswana, but generally avoids the Makgadikgadi Pans (Penry 1994). The distribution in the Transvaal extends into southeastern Botswana.

Its reporting rates are slightly lower than those of the Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus* and considerably higher than those of any other medium-sized waterfowl species in southern Africa. The Yellowbilled Duck is conspicuous, vocal and often gregarious. It is likely to be confused only with the African Black Duck *Anas sparsa* if the bill cannot be seen.

Habitat: It occurs on inland waters of almost any kind, especially farm dams (Rowan 1963b) and also on estuaries, mostly with marginal vegetation, especially reeds. It tends to avoid fast-running water. Although it prefers fresh water, it can also occur on brackish water (Geldenhuys 1976a). However, it avoids the major saline pan systems, e.g. Etosha and Makgadikgadi, and highly acidic waters (Brown *et al.* 1982).

Movements: Although dispersive and nomadic, it appears not to have regular migrations, and movements are mostly less than 1000 km in extent (Oatley & Prŷs-Jones 1986). Its movements are governed by rainfall and drought, with wide dispersal after good rains and concentration on larger waters during droughts. The longest recorded movement was between Barberspan (2625DA) and Mwandi in Zambia (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It is largely sedentary in the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989). The models show a largely static population in all Zones.

Breeding: Egglaying occurs throughout the year in the Transvaal, peaking December–April (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Egglaying in the southwestern Cape Province occurs mainly June–November (Winterbottom 1968a). The atlas data confirm both the increased seasonality and earlier breeding with increasing latitude. Only four breeding records exist for Zimbabwe, in March, April and October (Irwin 1981).

Interspecific relationships: It often occurs with other waterfowl, but may compete disadvantageously with the Redbilled Teal *A. erythrorhyncha* in Zimbabwe where it appears to have decreased with an increase in the latter (Irwin 1981).

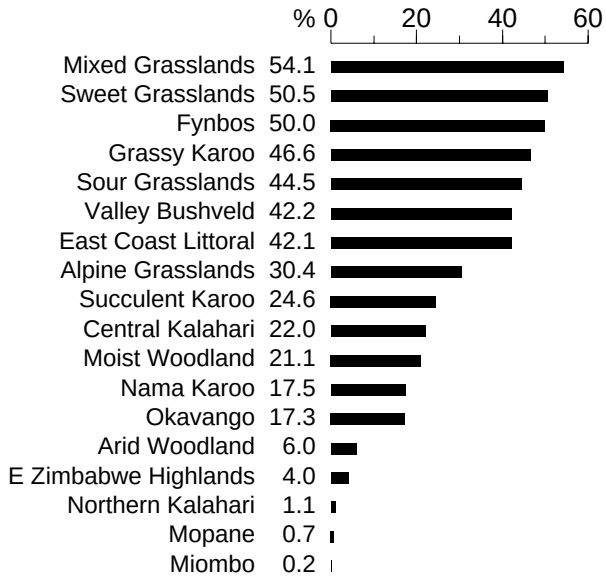
Historical distribution and conservation: Its overall distribution does not seem to have changed much in the past 100 years, except for a possible decrease in numbers in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981). Elsewhere it has probably become more common, benefiting from artificial waterbodies.

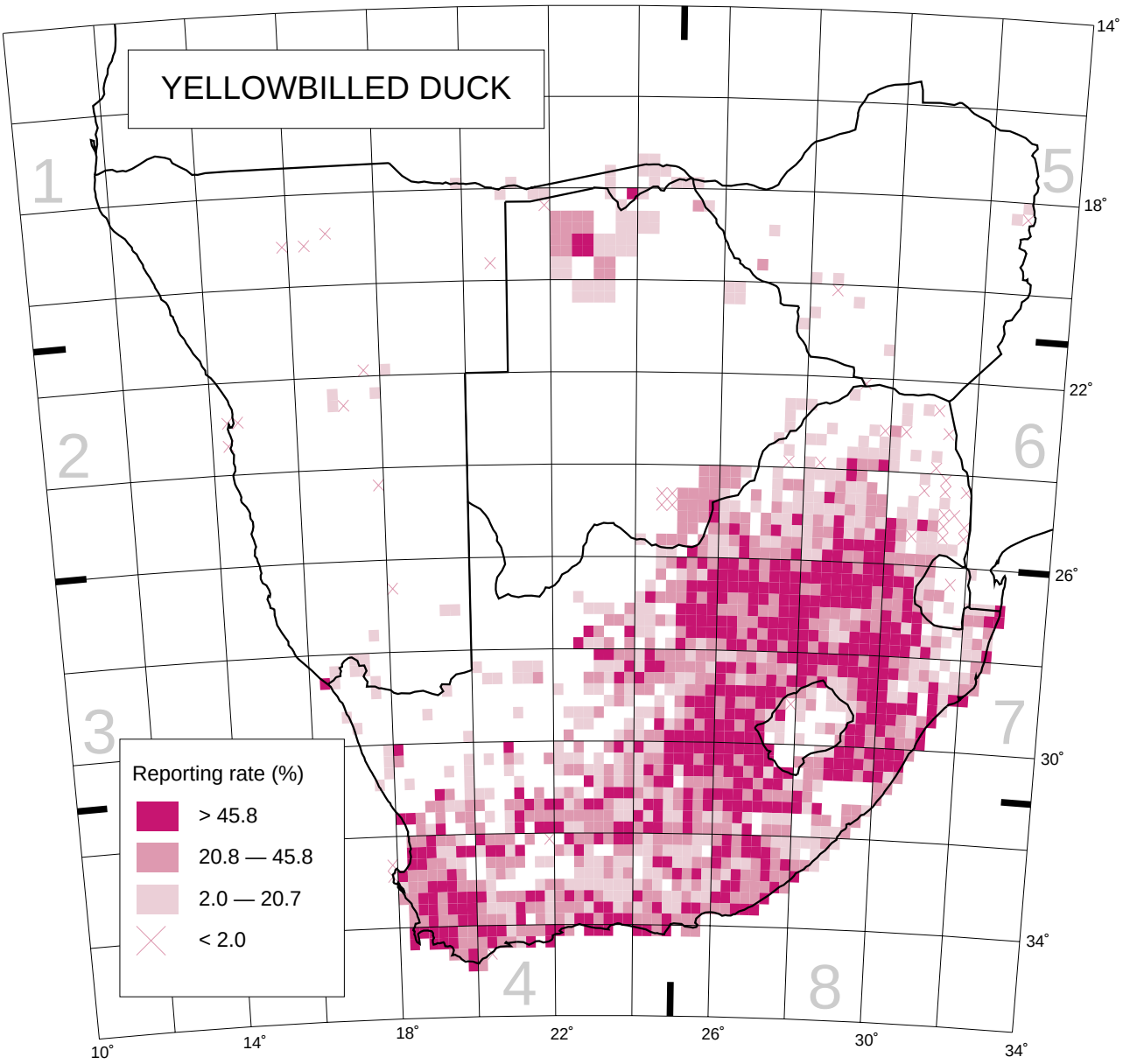
A potential threat to certain populations of the Yellowbilled Duck, notably in urban areas, is dilution of native stock by hybridization with feral Mallard Ducks *A. platyrhynchos* (Hockey *et al.* 1989). However, because of its abundance and adaptability, it is likely to survive as a species throughout its southern African range (Maclean & Darroll 1986).

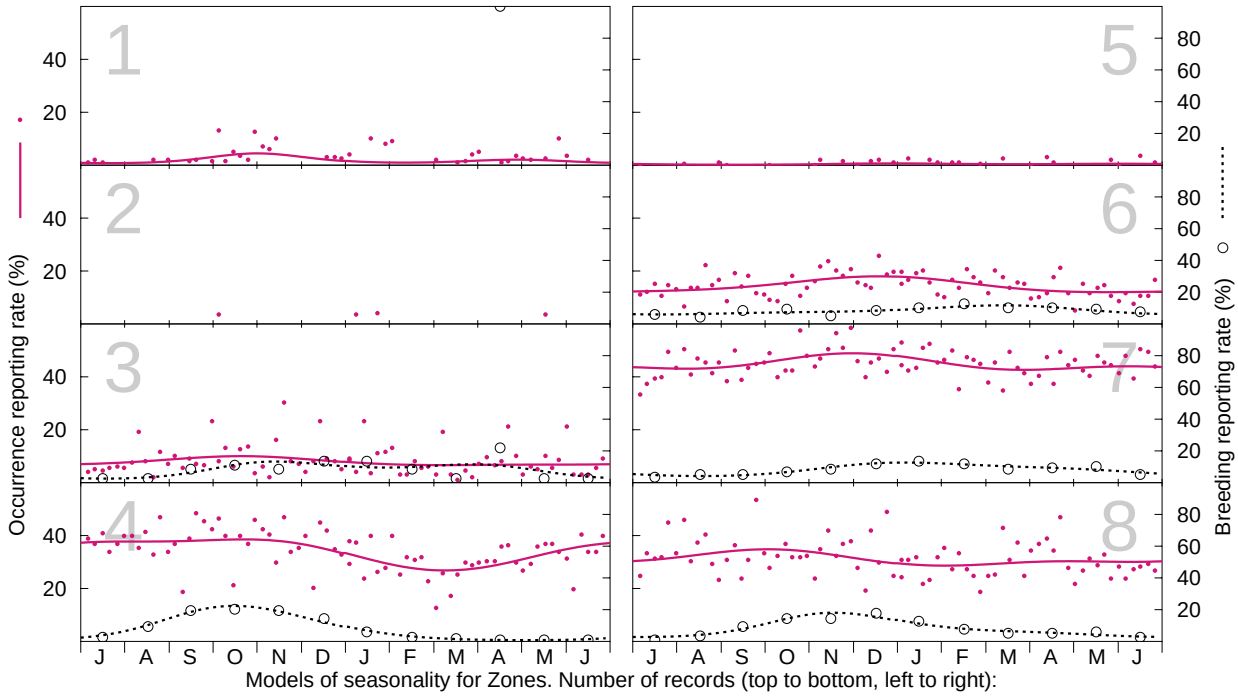
G.L. Maclean

Recorded in 1477 grid cells, 32.6%
Total number of records: 44 103
Mean reporting rate for range: 40.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 61, 5, 428, 2979, 35, 1645, 8790, 1715; Breeding: 1, 0, 36, 596, 0, 169, 1122, 310.