



African Black Duck

Swarteend

Anas sparsa

The distribution of the African Black Duck in southern Africa is similar to that of the Yellowbilled Duck *A. undulata*, but it is absent from the Okavango–Chobe floodplain region and it is more widespread and abundant in Zimbabwe. It is common in the Lesotho highlands where the Yellowbilled Duck is scarce. It extends northward through eastern Africa to Ethiopia and into the Congo basin. Isolated populations are found in Gabon, Cameroon and Nigeria.

It occurs on major and minor river systems, both perennial and annual, such as the Orange and Fish rivers, respectively. Its preference for rivers is evident in the distribution map: its major distribution is in the eastern drainage of southern Africa where most perennial rivers occur. Not surprisingly the species is absent from the drier parts of the Karoo, the northern Cape Province, Namibia and almost the whole of Botswana. Its absence from the Okavango Delta is not easy to explain, nor does it seem to occur on the Zambezi River system, despite the statement by Clancey (1971a) that it was recorded on the Zambezi by Kirk, presumably on its lower reaches in Mozambique. The African Black Duck is said to occur on suitable rivers in southern Mozambique, but is very rare (Clancey 1971a; Milstein 1984).

It is fairly common in the southwestern Cape Province and locally in the Free State, especially in the east (Earlé & Grobler 1987; Hockey *et al.* 1989). It is similarly localized in the Transvaal, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, though quite widely distributed (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Parker 1994).

The African Black Duck is not abundant; its generally low numbers are reflected in the relatively low reporting rates. It is highly territorial, each pair occupying several kilometres of river, hence its relative scarcity. Measured densities range between 1 bird/0.9–4.4 km on large rivers to small streams, respectively: 1 bird/4.4 km of the lower Orange River (Allan & Jenkins 1993); 1 bird/0.7–0.9 km of the Malibatso River in the Lesotho highlands (D.G. Allan pers. obs); and 1 bird/1.1 km of the upper Steelpoort River in the Transvaal (Allan 1995e). It accounts for only 1.7% of the annual waterfowl game bag in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981).

Because of its territoriality and somewhat cryptic behaviour, the African Black Duck was probably often overlooked. It is most likely to be confused with the Yellow-

billed Duck, but is longer-bodied and darker with conspicuous white patches on its back, and it has a blackish bill.

Habitat: This duck is associated mainly with rivers, especially with running water, pools and wooded banks, though loose groups may roost on farm dams at night (Siegfried *et al.* 1977).

Movements: It is generally considered to be sedentary, as confirmed by the models. Some short-distance local movements may occur, e.g. in Zimbabwe a westward movement onto Kalahari sandveld during rains (C.W. Hustler *in litt.*).

Breeding: It is essentially a winter to early-summer breeder. Egg-laying occurs in Zimbabwe throughout the year, with a winter/spring peak (June–October) (Irwin 1981). Egg-laying in the Transvaal spans June–January, with a July peak (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In the southwestern Cape Province, egg-laying spans July–December, with an August–September peak (Frost *et al.* 1979). The models show a spring peak in records, probably mainly representing sightings of ducklings. Breeding appears to be initiated slightly later in the southern parts of the range, compared with the northern regions.

Interspecific relationships: It comes into contact with other waterfowl relatively seldom because of its specialized habitat and feeding requirements.

Historical distribution and conservation: Although recorded along the extreme eastern border of Botswana and at the extreme eastern tip of the Caprivi, it was not mentioned by Smithers (1964). Stark & Sclater (1906) listed a record of from 'Bechuanaland – Botletli River (Bryden)', but this is surely an error.

Although not presently a conservation priority, the water extraction from, and the silting up, damming and pollution of rivers, are all inimical to the survival of the African Black Duck; its status should be monitored.

G.L. Maclean

Recorded in 1275 grid cells, 28.1%
Total number of records: 14 793
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



