

## Knobbilled Duck

### Knobbeleend

#### *Sarkidiornis melanotos*

The Knobbilled Duck is a tropical species which occurs throughout sub-Saharan Africa, except for the arid southwest and the more temperate parts of South Africa. Two strongly differentiated subspecies occur, *S. m. sylvicola* inhabiting tropical South America, and *melanotos* in Africa, Madagascar and discontinuously in tropical Asia from India to southeastern China (Maclean & Darroll 1986); these two forms may be separate species (Madge & Burn 1988).

The Knobbilled Duck is at the southernmost end of its range in KwaZulu-Natal (Cyrus & Robson 1980). In the Free State it is a scarce straggler and the least common of all the waterfowl (Geldenhuys 1976a; Earlé & Grobler 1987). In the Transvaal it is scarce on the highveld and in the west (Milstein 1975), but widespread in the lowveld, mainly from December–July. Its numbers depend on rainfall and over 2000 birds may occur on the Nyl floodplain (2428DA) in a wet season (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It has increased in numbers in Zimbabwe, probably partly as a result of the building of farm dams. It occurs in the wetlands of northern Botswana and into the Caprivi, as well as in the wetter eastern and southern parts of Botswana. In northcentral Namibia it appears to be a wet-season visitor only. It is widespread in southern Mozambique but uncommon in Swaziland (Clancey 1971a; Parker 1994).

The Knobbilled Duck cannot be confused with any other southern African waterfowl; the white underparts, black upperparts and all-black wings make it quite distinctive.

**Habitat:** Almost any inland waters, but it prefers seasonally flooded pans and vleis in savanna and woodland for breeding (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), especially in Mopane woodland in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981). It has also adapted to artificial dams, especially small, shallow dams with grass, but not for breeding.

**Movements:** The Knobbilled Duck undergoes extensive movements and at least part of the population is migratory

over distances of more than 1000 km. About 10% of those ringed in South Africa travelled over 2000 km to sites well north of the equator (Oatley & Prÿs-Jones 1986). Birds ringed in Zimbabwe have been recovered in Swaziland, Mozambique, the Transvaal, Zambia, Zaire (2200 km), the Sudan (3500–4000 km) and Chad (3800 km) (Irwin 1981). The models and seasonal maps clearly illustrate the large-scale movement out of the region during winter. Despite extensive wetland habitat with maximal flooding in the dry season being available in northern Botswana, no significant dry-season refuges could be found in that region during surveys in 1992, 1993 and 1994 (M. Herremans unpubl. data).

**Breeding:** Egg-laying occurs in January–February in KwaZulu-Natal, February–April in the Transvaal and mainly December–February in Zimbabwe or into March–April (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Late-summer breeding is confirmed by the models.

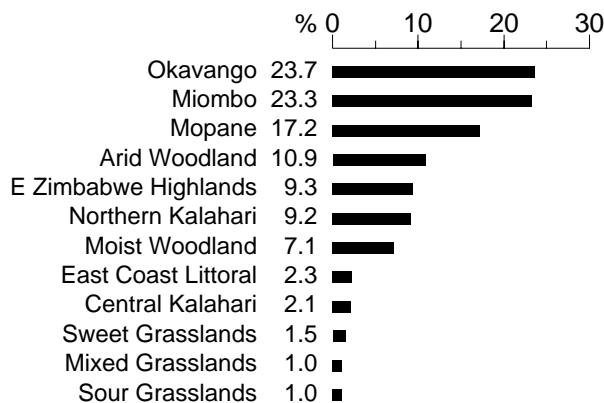
**Historical distribution and conservation:** Its distribution has apparently not changed. The Knobbilled Duck has always been a vagrant beyond its largely subtropical to tropical distribution, wandering occasionally even as far as the southwestern Cape Province (e.g. Allan 1994c).

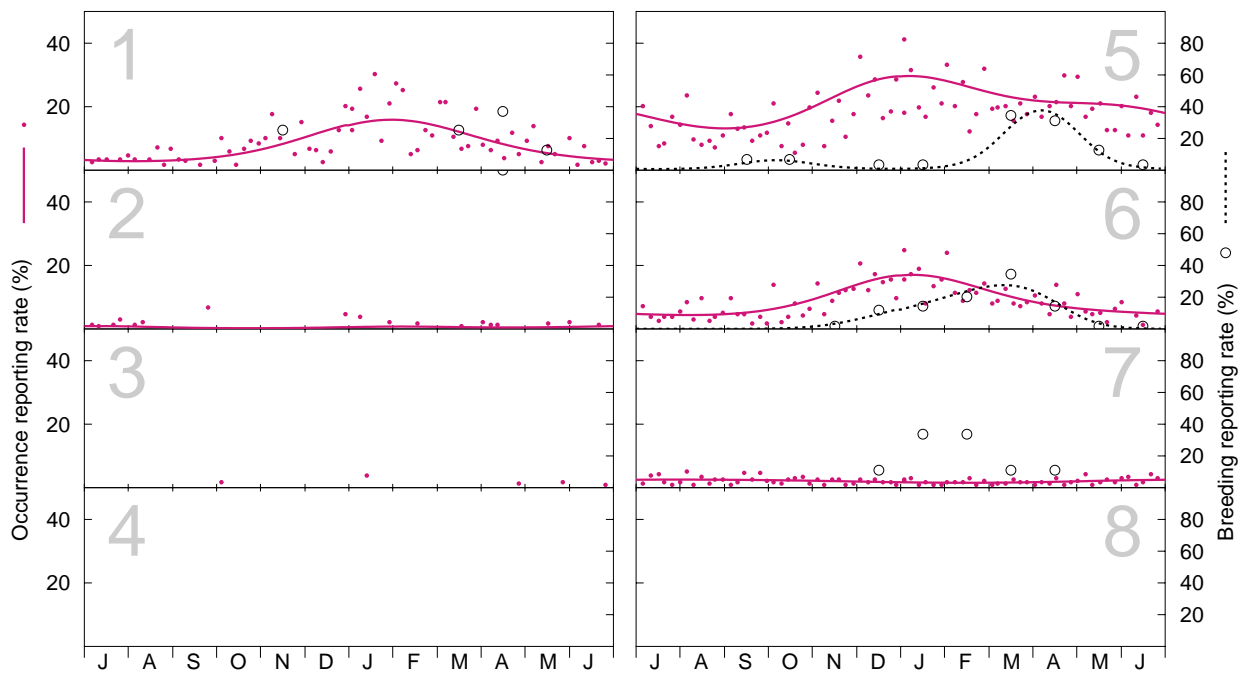
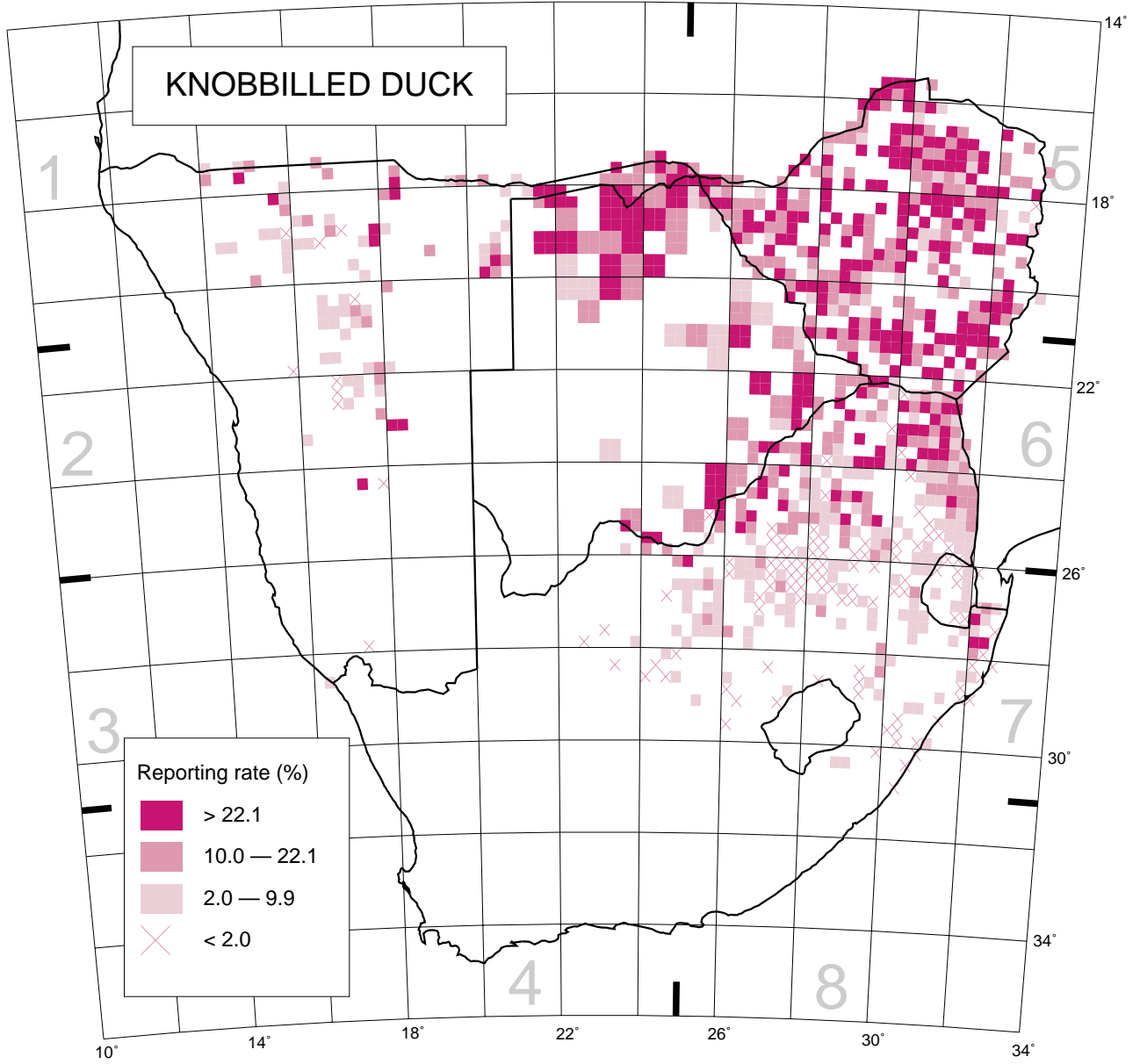
It is a favoured species for hunting and constitutes over 30% of the annual bag in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981). In view of its adaptability to dams, the Knobbilled Duck presents no obvious conservation problems, beyond the conservation of wetlands in general.

G.L. Maclean

Recorded in 1009 grid cells, 22.2%  
Total number of records: 6569  
Mean reporting rate for range: 9.9%

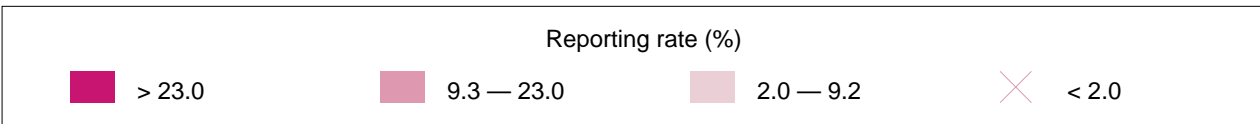
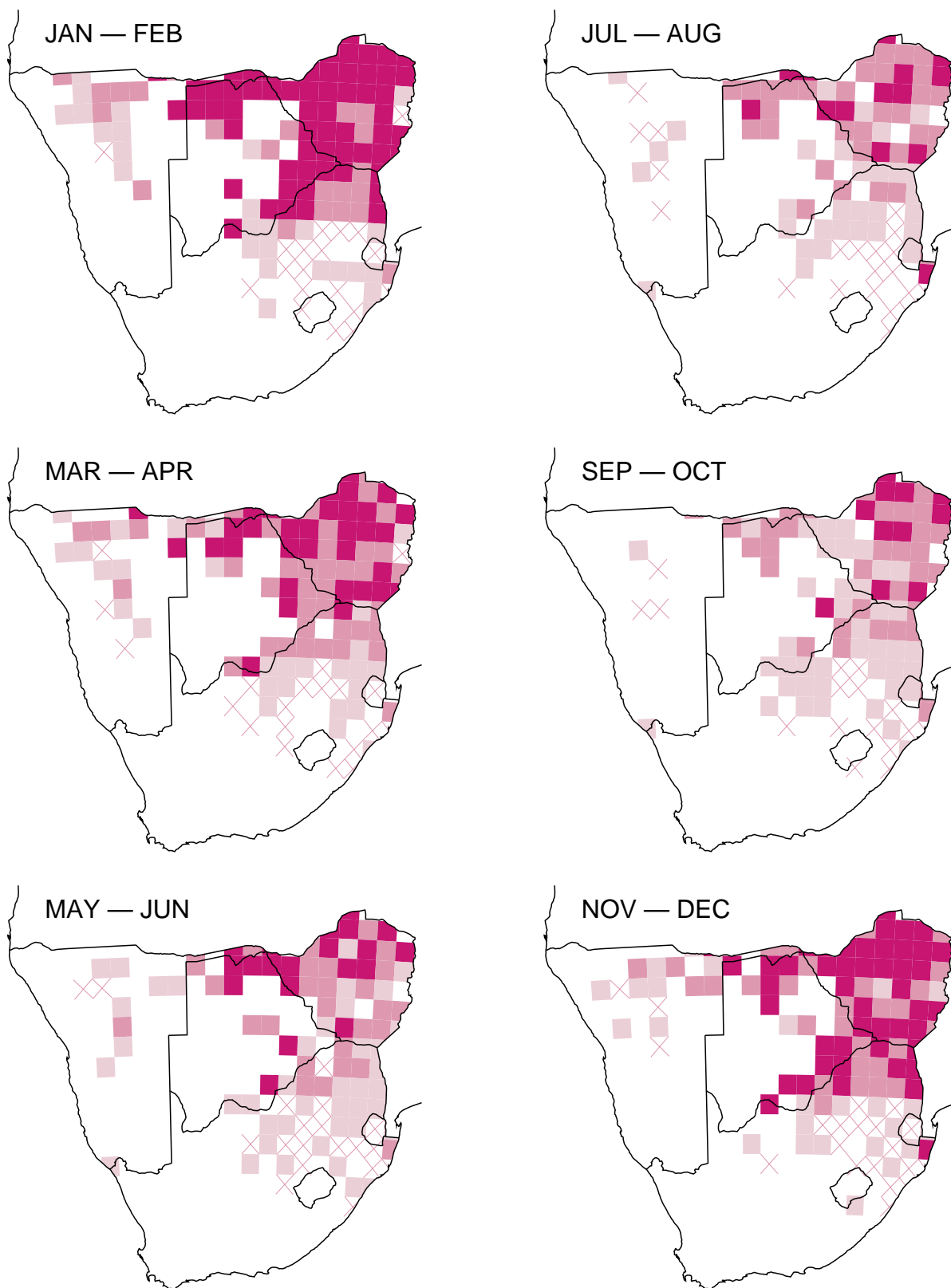
#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 241, 21, 5, 0, 1800, 1030, 405, 0; Breeding: 8, 1, 0, 0, 32, 50, 9, 0.

KNOBBILLED DUCK



Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.