

Spurwinged Goose

Wildemakou

Plectropterus gambensis

The Spurwinged Goose is distributed throughout the Afro-tropics, except for the most densely forested parts of the Zaire basin, the Lesotho massif and the arid southwestern parts of southern Africa. It extends northwards across Africa into southern Egypt, but is absent from Madagascar.

It is widespread in southern Africa, but scarce in the northern Cape Province, southwestern Botswana and Namibia except for the Caprivi Strip. It is a common resident and winter visitor to the southwestern Cape Province where it has increased in numbers recently, probably because of the provision of dams and the planting of grain crops (Hockey *et al.* 1989). It is common in the eastern Cape Province, the Free State, Swaziland and KwaZulu-Natal, especially in the uplands (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Earlé & Grobler 1987; Parker 1994). In the Transvaal, especially on the highveld, numbers may exceed 20 000 birds; over 2000 may gather on the Nyl floodplain (2428DA) in wet years (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Numbers fluctuate markedly from year to year in the Free State (Geldenhuys 1976a). In Zimbabwe it is common only in the major river valleys and the pans of the western parts (Gwaai and Hwange), and on the Mashonaland Plateau where it is essentially a dry-season visitor (Irwin 1981). Several thousand birds may gather at suitable food supplies, such as rice crops in Kazungula at the confluence of the Chobe and Zambezi rivers (Irwin 1981). It is also common on the rest of the Chobe–Linyanti–Okavango floodplain system in northern Botswana (Smithers 1964). The atlas map shows that it has become regular in southeastern Botswana, possibly as a result of the construction of dams; it is a visitor to the seasonal pans of Bushmanland in northeastern Namibia in wet years, but it is a straggler elsewhere in that country.

Its very large size and bold black-and-white coloration render the Spurwinged Goose unmistakable.

Habitat: It is found at any inland waters and prefers larger bodies of water on which to gather for moulting. It forages in

croplands and on floating *Potamogeton pectinatus* (Halse 1985).

Movements: It is somewhat dispersive, but there seem to be no long-distance recoveries of ringed birds (Oatley & Prýs-Jones 1986). An annual moult-migration is made to Barberspan (2625DA) and to waters in the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal in the dry season (Milstein 1975; Geldenhuys 1976a; Dean 1978). Ringing recoveries from Barberspan extend only as far as the Witwatersrand, the Free State and the eastern Cape Province (Milstein 1975). The models show fluctuations, with a general winter decline, but this appears to be correlated with breeding and probably reflect reduced conspicuousness.

Breeding: Egg-laying occurs in August–March in KwaZulu-Natal, mainly November–April in the Transvaal with a peak in January–February, and December–May in Zimbabwe, but it can breed in any month (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). A summary of breeding data for the whole of southern Africa (Clark 1980b) showed a peak December–March and a season extending August–April; this is broadly confirmed by the models which also indicate earlier breeding in the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4).

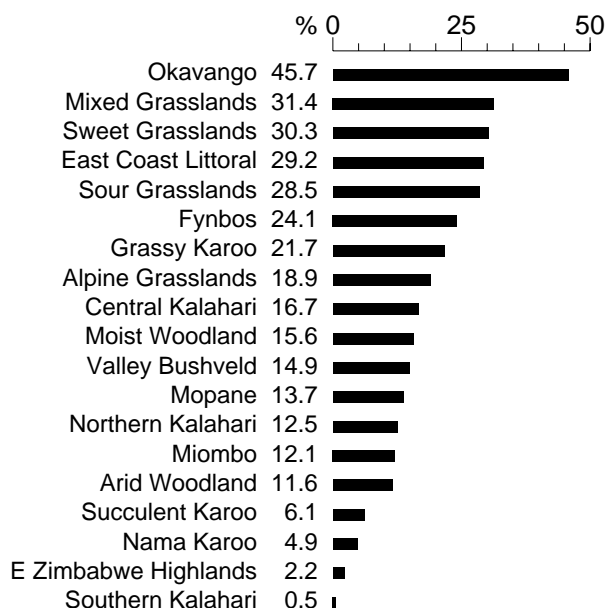
Interspecific relationships: During moult it may associate with large numbers of Egyptian Geese *Alopochen aegyptiacus* on larger bodies of water, especially in the dry season.

Historical distribution and conservation: From comparison with Stark & Sclater (1906) it appears that the Spurwinged Goose has not changed its distribution significantly, though it may have spread into drier areas as a result of dam-building. As with the Egyptian Goose, it may be identified as an agricultural pest, with unpredictable consequences for non-target species. No special conservation measures are necessary at present.

G.L. Maclean

Recorded in 1661 grid cells, 36.6%
Total number of records: 28 592
Mean reporting rate for range: 24.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in Namiib and Namibian Escarpment.

