

Blackshouldered Kite

Blouvalk

Elanus caeruleus

The Blackshouldered Kite is widely distributed, both in southern Africa and elsewhere, ranging through most of Africa, parts of southern Europe, and Asia. Closely related species occur in North and South America (Whitetailed Kite *E. leucurus*) and Australia (Blackwinged Kite *E. axillaris*) (Clark & Banks 1992). While most abundant in the eastern and southern parts of southern Africa, it occurs virtually all over the region. Only in the most arid areas of the Namib Desert, and in forest and dense woodland, is it consistently absent. Areas of greatest abundance are in the southwestern Cape Province, the grasslands of the Transvaal, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and, to a lesser extent, the eastern Cape Province, and in northeastern Zimbabwe. An association with river valleys in drier regions is evident in the concentration of atlas records along the lower Orange River, and along the Skeleton Coast in northern Namibia where several ephemeral rivers cross through the Namib Desert.

Population and density estimates are available for the Transvaal, where a total population of 44 000 birds has been estimated, with densities varying from 3 to 30 birds/100 km² in different habitats (Tarboton & Allan 1984). Swaziland is estimated to hold 800 birds (Parker 1994).

Habitat: In keeping with its wide distribution and abundance, it was recorded in a variety of habitats, with reporting rates exceeding 10% in most vegetation types. It is most abundant in grasslands and fynbos, especially where cultivated areas are interspersed with these habitats. It is also in these open habitats that it is most conspicuous, frequently seen hunting from utility lines or hovering in search of prey.

Movements: It is known to move frequently, often over great distances; of 82 ring recoveries, 11 (13%) were at distances exceeding 100 km from the ringing locality, and birds ringed in southern Africa have been recovered in Mozambique, Malawi and Uganda (SAFRING; Mendelsohn 1983). Most movements are of an erratic and nomadic nature; about 25% of the population 'turned over' each month in a study area in the Transvaal (Mendelsohn 1987). Aggregations of up to hundreds of kites roosting communally occur and probably function as information centres, allowing attendant birds to find new and better hunting areas (Mendelsohn 1988a). In southeastern Botswana, where it is relatively uncommon, it generally increases in the dry winter season, but numbers decrease during drought years (Herremans & Herremans-Tonnoeyr 1994e).

Breeding: Nesting may occur at any time of the year in southern Africa, although peaks of breeding activity vary from region to region. In the southern Cape Province, a single peak occurs in spring, while autumn and spring peaks each year are known from the northeastern regions. These peaks in breeding and the ability of birds to breed at any time of the year are responses to erratic fluctuations in populations of their favoured rodent prey (Mendelsohn 1984b).

Historical distribution and conservation: The cultivation of large areas of southern Africa has resulted in substantial population increases, both as a result of the planting of crops and the removal of woodlands. While modern agriculture has benefited the Blackshouldered Kite, the heavy use of agricultural pesticides may have local detrimental effects.

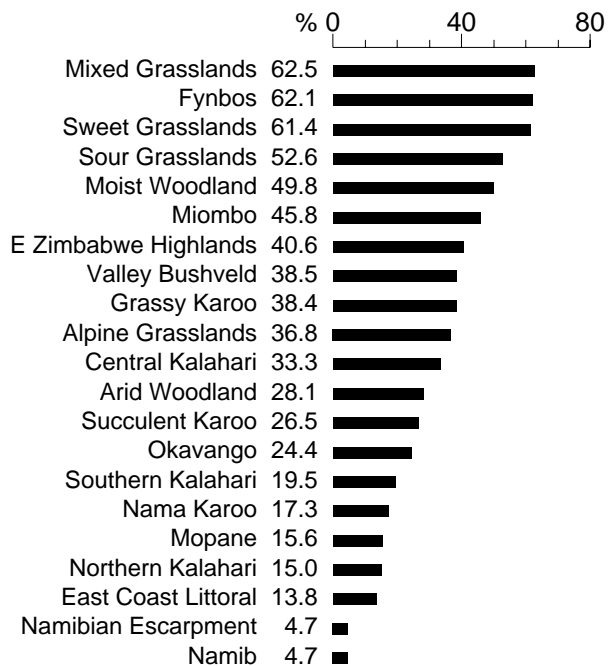
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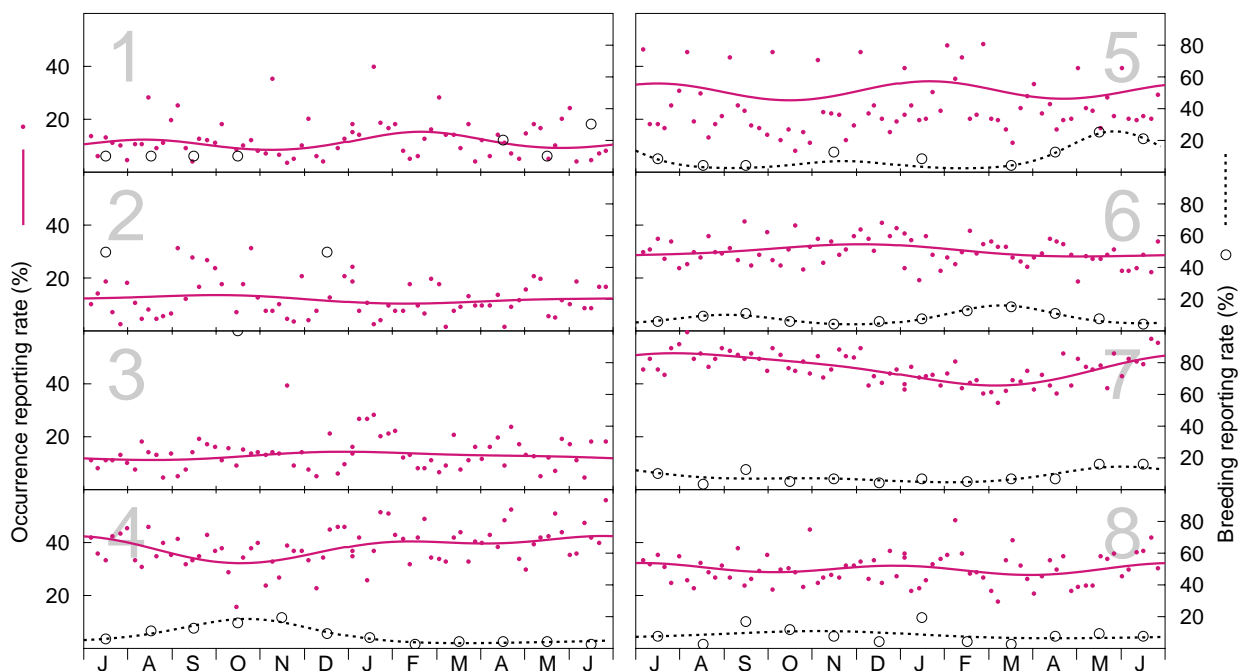
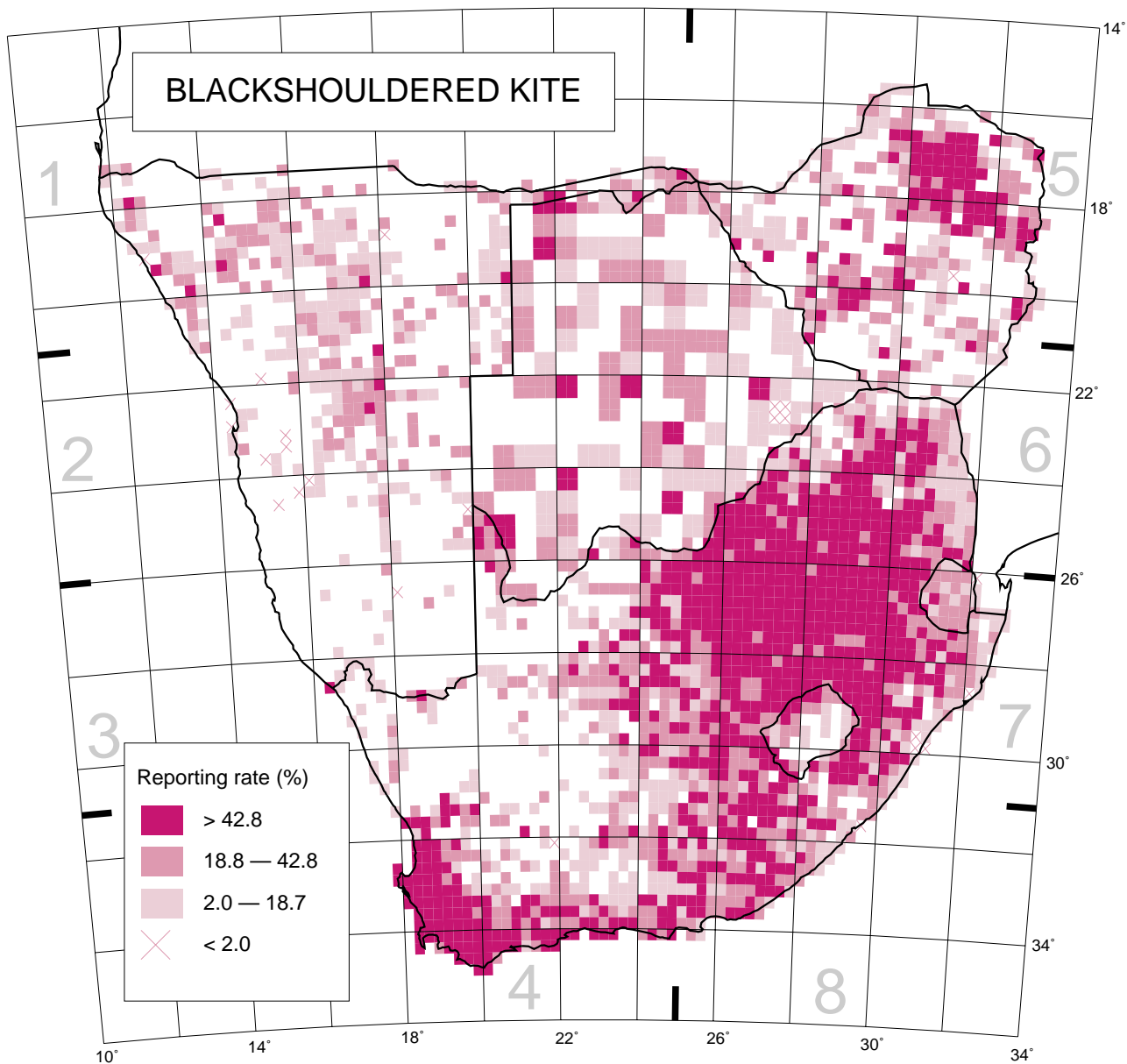
Recorded in 2625 grid cells, 57.9%

Total number of records: 59 312

Mean reporting rate for range: 43.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 370, 430, 700, 3337, 2670, 3433, 8976, 1646; Breeding: 10, 2, 1, 105, 24, 53, 95, 42.