

Steppe Eagle

Steppe-arend

Aquila nipalensis

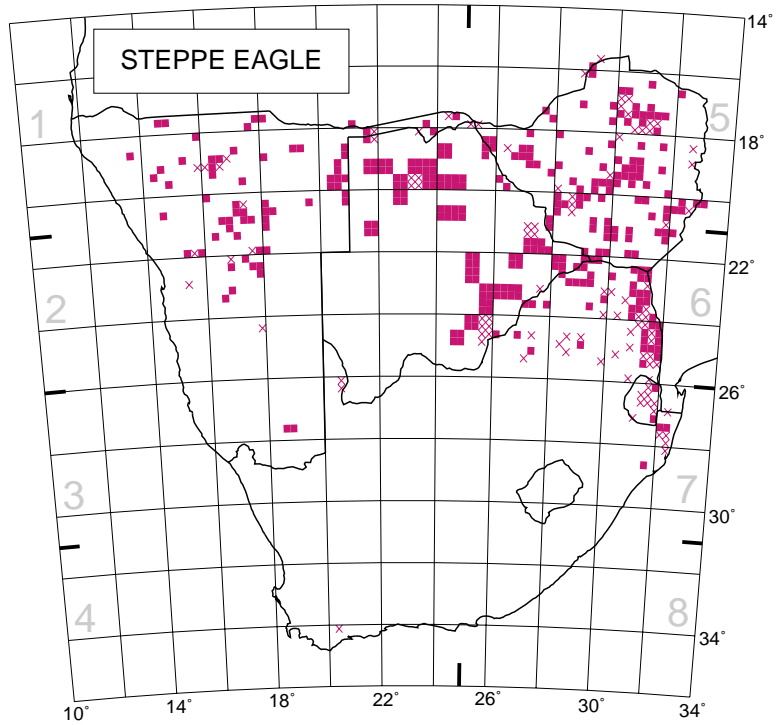
The Steppe Eagle is seen by some authorities as the Palearctic race of the Tawny Eagle *A. rapax* (Brown *et al.* 1982), a position contested by several taxonomists (Brooke *et al.* 1972; Clark 1992). Thus it is little surprise that identification is difficult. The Steppe Eagle generally has darker plumage and a more extensive gape, and often occurs in large flocks (Steyn 1982b).

It is present in southern Africa chiefly October–March in woodland habitats, and it rarely occurs further south than about 26°S. It may occur in flocks of a hundred or so birds, and it is attracted to areas with recent rainfall (Brooke *et al.* 1972; Steyn 1982b). There is a report of a mixed flock of grounded Steppe Eagles and some Lesser Spotted Eagles *A. pomarina* that numbered at least 10 000, possibly 50 000 birds, just south of Chobe National Park in northern Botswana in mid-January 1993 (P. Barnard pers. comm.). This flock stretched over 10 km of woodland savanna. Such flocks are thought to follow rain fronts, as did this one, and the emergence of *Hodotermes* termites which the rains precipitate (Jensen 1972). Curiously, its distribution as depicted in the atlas map does not coincide well with the known distribution of *H. mossambicus* (Coaton & Sheasby 1975), its principal prey in southern Africa (Steyn 1982b). It is also attracted to Redbilled Quelea *Quelea quelea* colonies (Steyn 1982b).

It is more widespread than the Lesser Spotted Eagle which occurs further west, and may be less reliant than that species on well-developed woodlands.

There is no evidence that it has either increased or decreased in numbers in southern Africa. The Steppe Eagle is one of the commonest eagles of its size in the world, but is known to have disappeared from large areas in the west of its breeding grounds (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994). Research employing satellite telemetry is currently underway (Chittenden 1994) and should help in unravelling the movements of these highly mobile birds.

R.E. Simmons



Recorded in 423 grid cells, 9.3%
 Total number of records: 827
 Mean reporting rate for range: 3.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

