

## Western Banded Snake Eagle

Enkelbandslangarend

*Circaetus cinerascens*

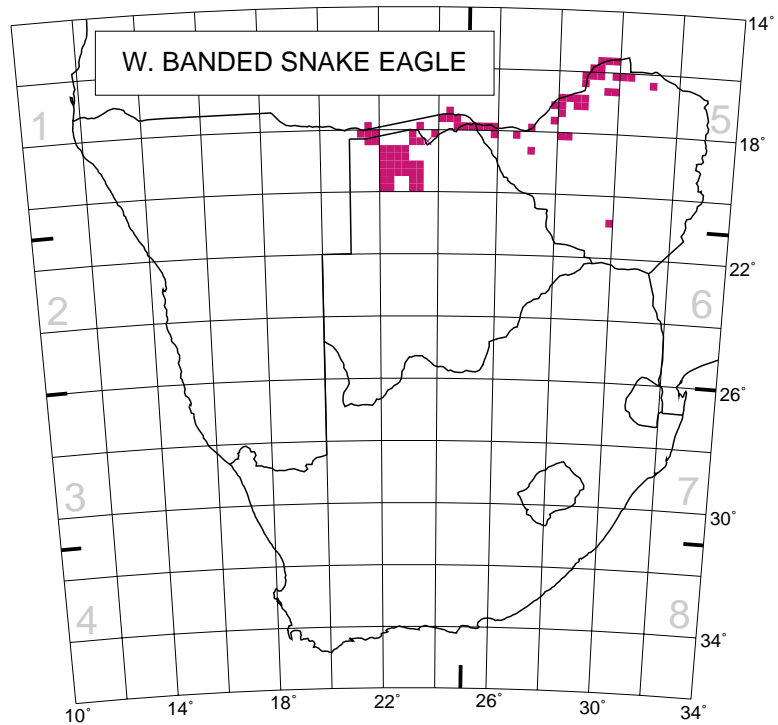
The Western Banded Snake Eagle occurs in sub-Saharan Africa from Senegal in the west to Ethiopia in the northeast, south to southern Africa (Brown *et al.* 1982). It is present in the atlas region along the Okavango and Zambezi rivers and some of their tributaries. The Namibian population has been estimated at c. 14 pairs (Brown & Hines 1987). Contrary to predictions made by Irwin (1981), the atlas did not reveal the existence of this species along the Mazoe or Ruenya rivers in north-eastern Zimbabwe, nor were there any reliable records from the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe.

It is a specialist of riparian forest and woodland (Brown & Hines 1987); the vegetation analysis indicates that its southern African range falls within the Okavango basin and Mopane woodland along the Zambezi drainage. It usually hunts from a perch on the lower branches of a shady tree, rendering it inconspicuous and almost certainly under-recorded. But it is not a shy eagle and, early in the breeding season, it makes peculiar, loud cackling calls, reminiscent of the distress calls of the domestic chicken. It is unlikely, however, that many observers attributed these vocalizations to this species.

There is some evidence for movements elsewhere in its range (Brown *et al.* 1982), and Edwards (1985) suggested that it may leave the vicinity of its breeding territories during summer. In general, it appears to be resident in southern Africa, but reporting rates were lower during summer in Zimbabwe (Zone 5). Few nests have been documented from the region: Steyn (1982b) reported a bird on a nest in the Okavango, apparently incubating in December; Edwards (1985) described a small chick in early May from the Zambezi National Park, and breeding displays were observed in May in the Caprivi, with a recently fledged juvenile recorded there in November (Brown & Hines 1987). Egg-laying has been recorded in March and June in the Caprivi (Brown & Clinning in press) and nests at Xaxaba (1923C) and Shakawe (1821B) in the Okavango were active during the dry season (E. Pryce & R.D. Randall pers. comm.; pers. obs.), while a fledgling was observed at Shakawe in April (Skinner 1996b).

It appears that in southern Africa the ranges of this species and the Southern Banded Snake Eagle *C. fasciolatus* are well separated. It occurs widely alongside the Brown Snake Eagle *C. cinereus*, which is also a perch hunter. The latter prefers drier and more open woodland, and perches mostly on the tops of trees and on dead branches. In complex habitat ecotones, such as the Okavango, these two species co-occur, apparently without much interaction.

The Western Banded Snake Eagle is dependent on well-developed riparian woodland and it is uncommon in the region. In unprotected areas its habitat is locally under threat by the expansion of human populations (Brown & Hines 1987), while in some protected areas riparian strips are degraded by elephants.



Recorded in 83 grid cells, 1.8%  
Total number of records: 296  
Mean reporting rate for range: 12.6%

### Reporting rates for vegetation types

