

## Bateleur

### Berghaan

#### *Terathopius ecaudatus*

The Bateleur is a widespread resident eagle found in most of sub-Saharan Africa (Brown *et al.* 1982). In southern Africa, it is found in northeastern Namibia, throughout Botswana, and Zimbabwe (except the northeastern plateau), in the extreme northern and eastern parts of South Africa, and in eastern Swaziland. Areas of high reporting rates were closely associated with large conservation areas, such as the Kruger, Etosha, Hwange, Moremi, Chobe and Central Kalahari parks. Outside protected areas in South Africa it is almost entirely absent as a breeding species.

Its aerial habits make it conspicuous. Adults may be confused with adult Jackal Buzzards *Buteo rufofuscus* by novices.

**Habitat:** It occurs in a wide variety of woodland types, from open, semi-arid Kalahari to well-developed, relatively mesic miombo.

**Movements:** Immature birds are nomadic, which may account for seasonal fluctuations in reporting rates. Breeding birds may also become less conspicuous during the nesting period (midsummer to early winter). Non-adult birds increase in winter in the Kalahari Gemsbok Park (Herholdt & De Villiers 1991) and in summer in the Kruger National Park (Watson 1990). Pre- and post-rains' concentrations also occur in the Zambezi Valley (A.J. Tree pers. comm.), and a few hundred birds concentrate each year during the late wet and early dry season in the Khwai–Savuti region (1923B, 1824C) of northern Botswana (M. Herremans pers. comm.). Some of these concentrations of nonbreeding birds are regular every season, others coincide with incidental food gluts, but they all are most likely in response to a sudden increase in food availability (Watson 1990). Hence large-scale wandering of non-adult Bateleurs occurs throughout the region, and wildlife areas periodically attract important numbers. Two ringing

recoveries of young birds indicate short movements of 77 and 54 km within South Africa (SAFRING).

**Breeding:** Egglaying in South Africa and Zimbabwe begins in summer, mainly January–March, coincident with the main rains (Steyn 1982b; Tarboton & Allan 1984; Watson 1986). The wide spread of atlas records was due largely to the protracted nesting cycle. Where they occur, tall *Acacia* spp. and *Diospyros mespiliformis* trees along watercourses are preferred breeding sites (Watson 1988).

**Interspecific relationships:** Foraging Bateleurs usually cruise at great speed at low level and are among the first raptors to detect carrion (including small poisoned bait). Juveniles also scavenge at carcasses of large game, where they are generally subordinate to all other scavengers (Steyn 1982b). This eagle is frequently subject to piracy by Tawny Eagles *Aquila rapax* and Whiteheaded Vultures *Trigonoceps occipitalis* (Mundy *et al.* 1992). The former may rob them of up to 18% of their prey (Watson & Watson 1987).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** Within historical times it has undergone a severe range contraction and population decrease (Tree 1978a; Boshoff & Vernon 1980a; Tarboton & Allan 1984; Hustler 1985b). In South Africa it now breeds only in the Kruger and Kalahari Gemsbok National Parks and nearby conservation areas, and in northern KwaZulu-Natal (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Watson 1986; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Herholdt & De Villiers 1991). Historically it occurred widely, as far south as the southern Cape Province (Boshoff *et al.* 1983). Having probably once numbered 2500 pairs (Steyn 1982b), the current breeding population in South Africa is estimated at 600 pairs in the Transvaal (Tarboton & Allan 1984) and 22 pairs in the Cape Province (Herholdt & De Villiers 1991).

There is virtually unanimous agreement that this 'vulnerable' Red Data species (Brooke 1984b) has decreased owing to indiscriminate poisoning by livestock farmers (Watson 1986). Bateleurs exist in substantial numbers only in regions with tribal livestock-farming communities, i.e. in large parts of Botswana and northeastern Namibia. A few large-scale commercial farmers are responsible for most deaths (Davies 1988; Brown 1991a); identifying and re-educating them could help alleviate the poisoning problem. On their own, pesticides in eggs and habitat destruction are unlikely to have reduced the range of the Bateleur (De Kock & Watson 1985; Watson 1986).

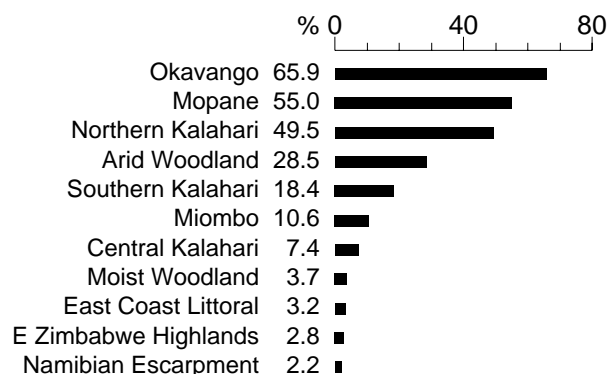
R.E. Simmons

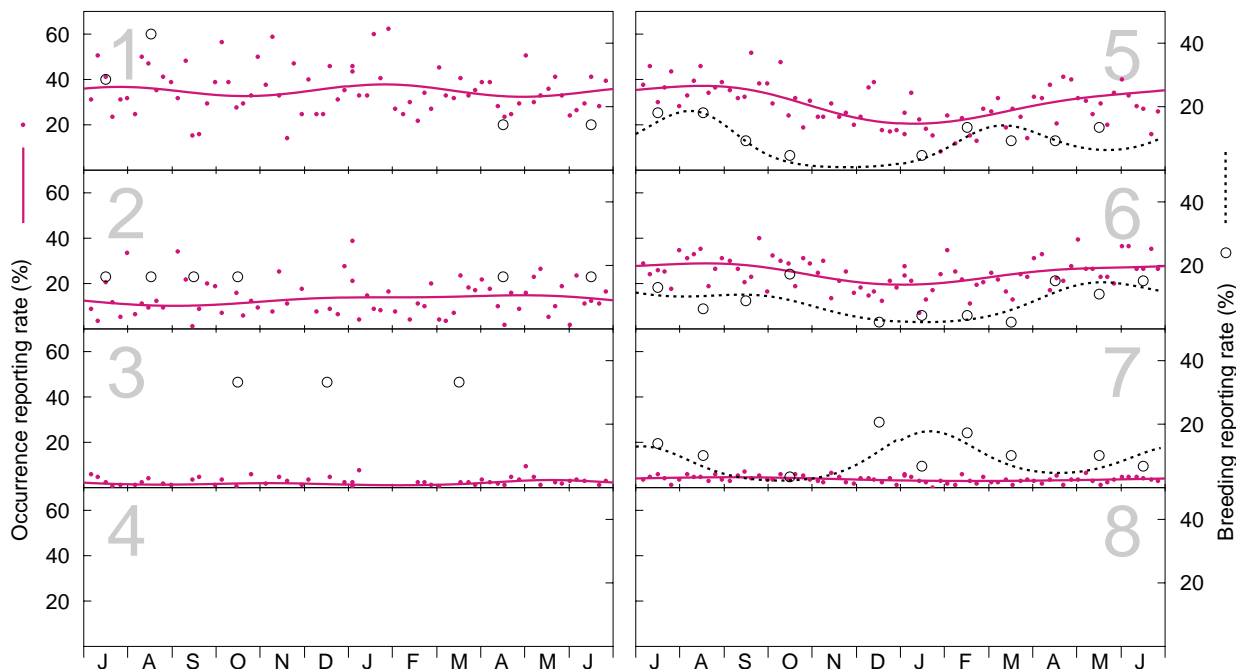
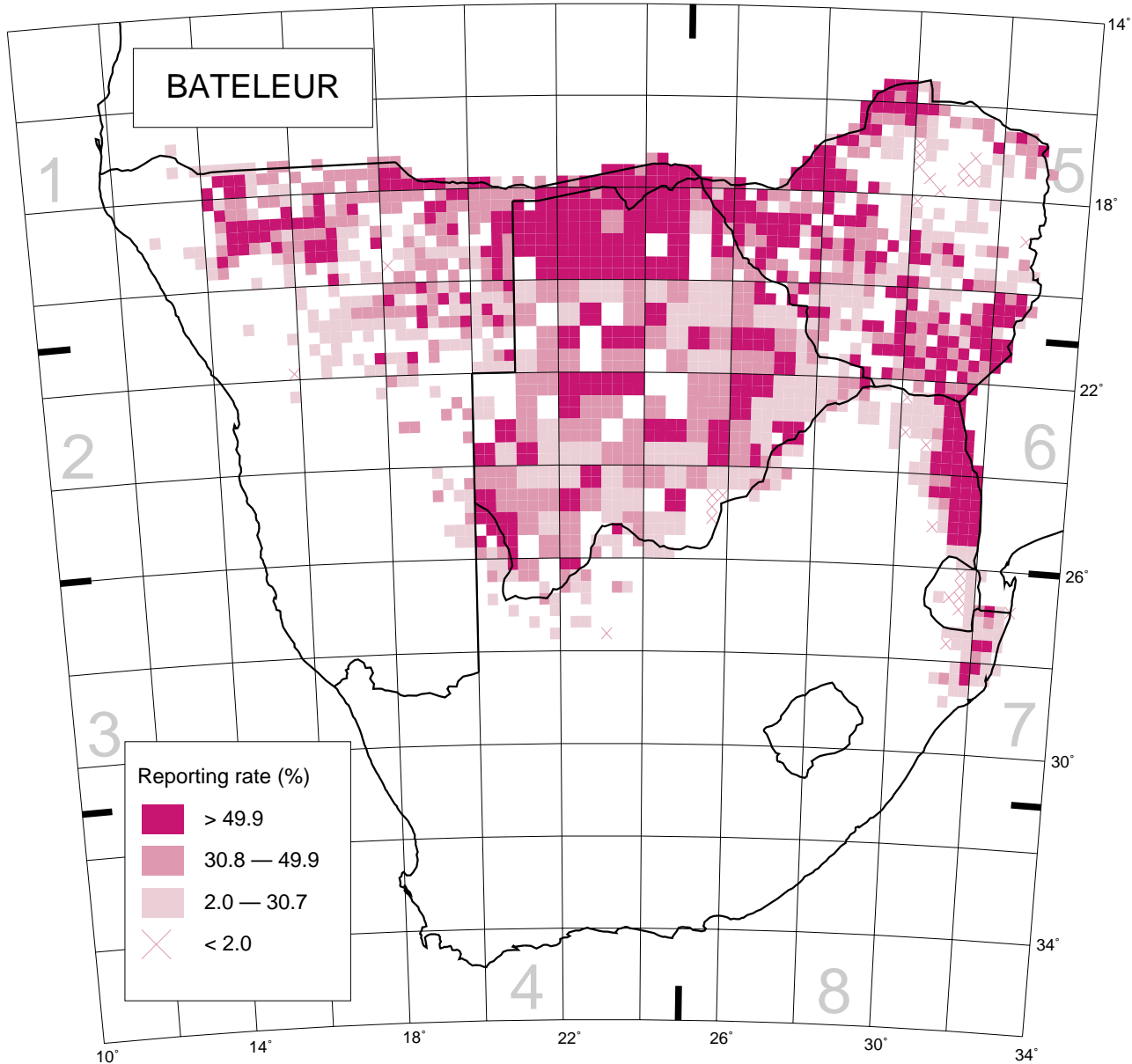
Recorded in 1615 grid cells, 35.6%

Total number of records: 13 243

Mean reporting rate for range: 39.8%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 1149, 472, 107, 0, 2613, 2832, 723, 0; Breeding: 14, 6, 3, 0, 22, 46, 29, 0.