

Spotted Crake

Gevlekte Riethaan

Porzana porzana

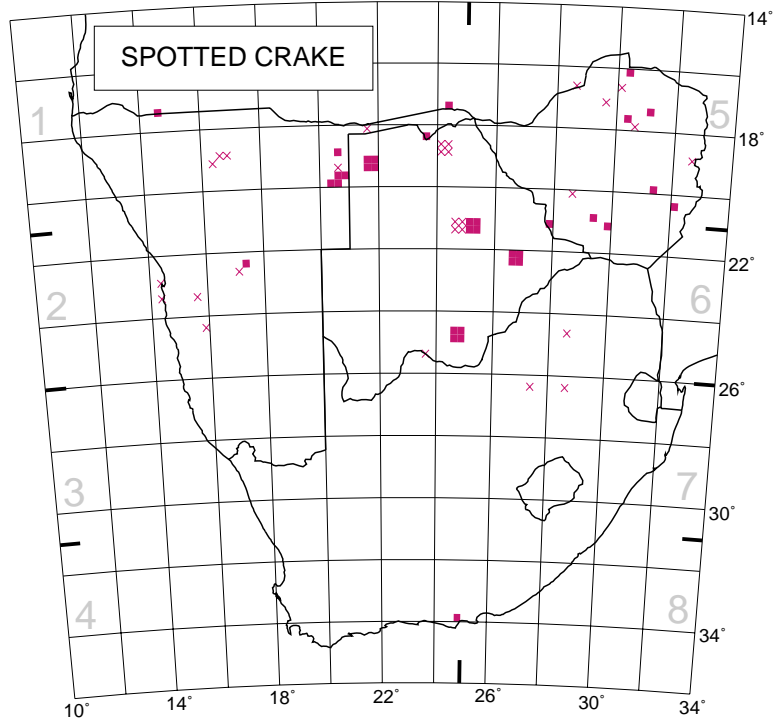
The Spotted Crake is a Palearctic migrant, breeding from Europe eastward to central Siberia and Iran, and wintering in southern Europe, the Middle East, Africa and southern Asia (Cramp *et al.* 1980; Urban *et al.* 1986). Because of its secretive habits and its occurrence in dense wetland vegetation, its breeding and nonbreeding distributions are imperfectly known, but its centre of abundance in Africa encompasses Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe and probably Mozambique (Urban *et al.* 1986). Atlas data confirm that it is generally uncommon in southern Africa, especially in South Africa (Hopkinson & Masterson 1984; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b), but the distribution map shows a concentration of records in extreme northeastern Namibia where it is apparently common at some temporary wetlands in Bushmanland and Kavango (Hines 1993). One at Mondplaa (3325DD) from December 1990 to January 1991 (Hockey *et al.* 1992) is the second Cape Province record, the first being from La Rochelle (3223CA) (South African Museum skeleton).

In southern Africa its occurrence is erratic; numbers fluctuate markedly and the birds are itinerant in their nonbreeding quarters (Brooke 1974b; Hopkinson & Masterson 1984; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Taylor 1987). This is undoubtedly because of their preference for seasonally wet habitats of a temporary nature (Taylor 1987). They frequent dense vegetation, usually grass or sedge with mud or shallow pools, moist to shallowly flooded ground at dam margins, marshes, dambos, seasonally flooded grasslands and sewage settling ponds. The habitats they exploit are often subject to rapid drying or flooding, and are not normally occupied by any breeding Afrotropical, wet-grassland rallids (Taylor 1987).

It normally arrives in southcentral Africa from mid-December; occurrences peak in January–March and most birds leave before the end of April (Irwin 1981; Hopkinson & Masterson 1984; Urban *et al.* 1986; Taylor 1987). This pattern is reflected in the atlas data.

The Spotted Crake's numbers are decreasing in its breeding areas as a result of habitat destruction (Cramp *et al.* 1980), and this may be reflected in its African nonbreeding range.

P.B. Taylor



Recorded in 62 grid cells, 1.4%
 Total number of records: 72
 Mean reporting rate for range: 1.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

