

Baillon's Crake

Kleinriethaan

Porzana pusilla

Widely distributed in the Old World, occurring from Europe across Asia to Japan and south to Australasia, as well as in Africa and Madagascar (Cramp *et al.* 1980; Urban *et al.* 1986). There is a small North African breeding population. Palearctic birds winter in Africa, almost certainly south to the tropics, where they may occur alongside the characteristically smaller and darker birds (*P. p. obscura*) which make up the largely resident population of eastern, central and southern Africa, where it is widespread and locally common (Snow 1978; Urban *et al.* 1986).

Atlas records confirm that it is widespread but infrequently recorded. Its secretiveness and preference for the interior of dense, flooded vegetation result in its being overlooked. In South Africa it has been described as 'probably rare' (Brooke 1984b). However, part of a 120-ha KwaZulu-Natal wetland held an estimated 120–140 breeding pairs in January 1992, with unsurveyed potential habitat for many more (pers. obs).

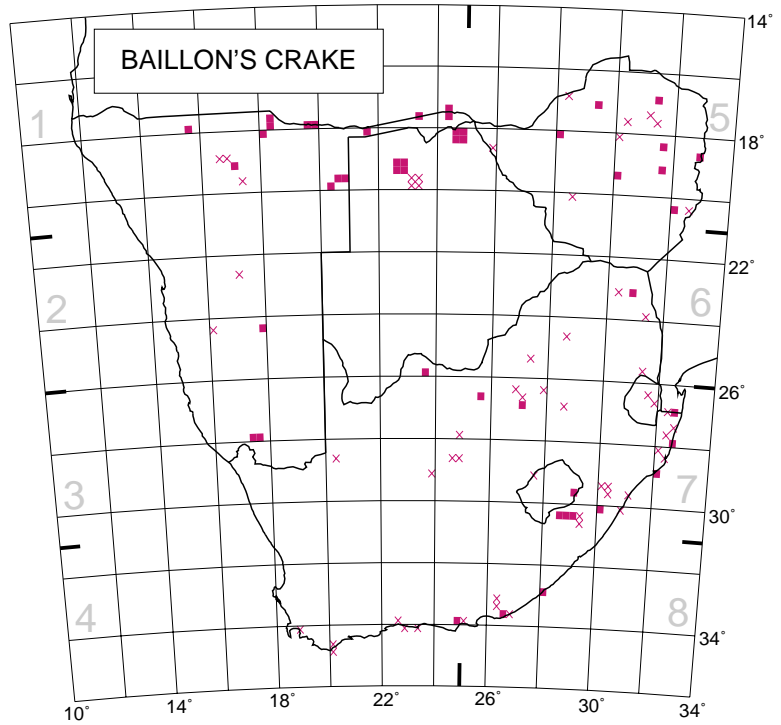
It inhabits dense vegetation of marshes, pans, vleis, seasonally inundated grasslands and the margins of open water (Irwin 1981; Urban *et al.* 1986). Preferred breeding habitat often has relatively short, flooded vegetation, especially grass or other fine-stemmed and lightly foliated emergent plants. Nonbreeding birds occupy a wider range of wetland vegetation, often feeding at wet mud and shallow muddy puddles (pers. obs). The vegetation analysis confirms that it is linked to areas of higher rainfall. In KwaZulu-Natal it breeds up to 1300 m (pers. obs) and occurs up to 1500 m (Clancey 1964b).

In central and southern Africa it is generally regarded as resident, but with at least local movements where habitat is seasonal (Brooke 1984b; Urban *et al.* 1986; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The models indicate seasonality or irregularity of occurrence, principally in the arid western Zones 1–3. The information from Zone 1 is suggestive of a passage migrant. In Zimbabwe most records fell within the rainy season, but a few winter records have been obtained (Irwin 1981).

Breeding is poorly known but occurs during or just after the rains; recorded September and November–March in South Africa, and January–March in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981; Urban *et al.* 1986; Maclean 1993b).

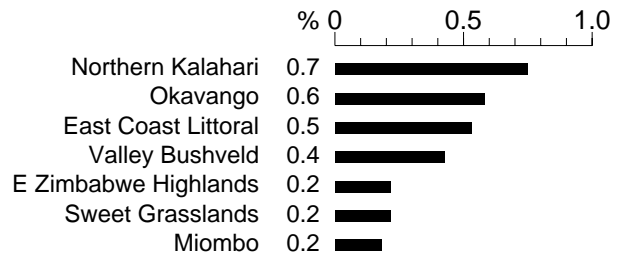
It is sympatric with the Palearctic Spotted Crake *P. porzana* over much of the latter's nonbreeding range in Africa (Urban *et al.* 1986). When breeding, it prefers finer, more deeply flooded vegetation than do Spotted Crakes, but nonbreeding birds may forage together. In such situations Spotted Crakes often tolerate less dense cover and a wider range of flooding conditions, and possibly take larger prey (Taylor 1987).

The atlas has records from several new localities in the arid central, western and southern areas. Existing evidence does not justify Baillon's Crake being regarded as rare and it is under no immediate threat, although the continuing destruction of suitable wetland habitats (Taylor 1994) must be affecting it adversely. In South Africa it has 'indeterminate' status (Brooke 1984b). Its breeding localities are probably few and should be afforded special protection.

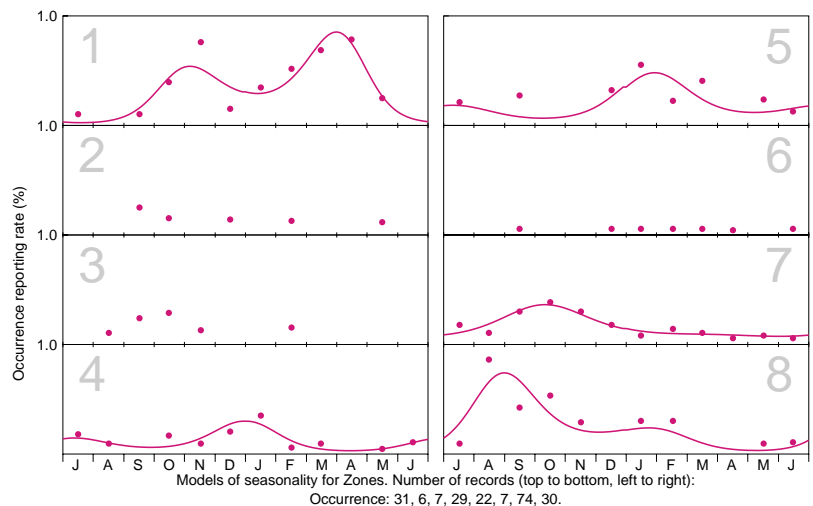


Recorded in 103 grid cells, 2.3%
 Total number of records: 213
 Mean reporting rate for range: 1.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also Mopane, Fynbos, Mixed Grasslands, Nama Karoo, Central Kalahari, Alpine Grasslands, Arid Woodland, Sour Grasslands and Moist Woodland.



P.B. Taylor