



Redknobbed Coot

Bleshoender

Fulica cristata

The Redknobbed Coot has a disjunct distribution with small populations in southern Spain and northern Morocco, a more continuous range from Ethiopia south through eastern and central Africa to the Cape, and a fragmented distribution in Madagascar (Urban *et al.* 1986; Langrand 1990). It is locally uncommon to abundant in sub-Saharan Africa, and in South Africa the largest concentrations are reported from Barberspan (2625DA) (up to 27 000 birds) and De Hoop Vlei (3420AD) (30 000+) (Urban *et al.* 1986; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), but numbers at individual wetlands vary enormously: e.g. minimum and maximum counts of 1794 and 18 698 at the Wilderness Lakes System (3322D) over four years (Boshoff *et al.* 1991b). The atlas data confirm that it is the most numerous and frequently reported rallid in southern Africa, distributed throughout the region except in low-rainfall areas lacking in open waters, and that it is relatively scarce on the KwaZulu-Natal littoral plain and the Swaziland lowveld (Clancey 1964b; Cyrus & Robson 1980; Parker 1994), and remarkably absent from most of the Okavango.

Habitat: Predominantly open fresh water of lakes, lagoons, ponds, permanent and temporary pans, dams and vleis, floodplains, reedy swamps and sewage ponds; it sometimes occurs on rivers and tidal lagoons, but prefers still water (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). It requires submerged aquatic vegetation for food and, when breeding, frequents waters with fringing or emergent vegetation (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). When not breeding it is highly gregarious, occurring in large flocks on open water, and in spring and summer in the southwestern Cape Province large numbers move to estuaries and coastal lagoons (Hockey *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b). The vegetation analysis shows the highest reporting rates from biomes which may be expected to contain suitable natural and artificial waterbodies.

Movements: No regular migrations are known but it is nomadic and opportunistic, showing marked fluctuations in numbers on waters throughout its range. In South Africa concentrations occur on large permanent waters in the dry months and birds disperse to smaller permanent and temporary waterbodies during the rains (Urban *et al.* 1986; Earlé & Grobler 1987; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The models do not reflect such movements, showing only minor seasonal fluctuations. The most obvious drop in reporting rate (Zone 4, February–April) occurred when inland waterbodies were presumably at their lowest levels. Ringing recoveries from a study at Barberspan (2625D) showed that the mean distance

travelled was 270 km, the longest distances being in January–April when numbers decreased at Barberspan during the rains; recoveries have been obtained in southern Zambia, Namibia, Botswana, southern Mozambique, and near Cape Town (3318CD) (Skead 1981).

Breeding: In southern Africa breeding is reported to occur in all months with a March–August peak in Zimbabwe, and two peaks elsewhere, July–September and January–March (Maclean 1993b). The atlas records show breeding in every month in all Zones, except for Zone 1, where only 16 records were made. The models show a peak for Zone 5 (Zimbabwe) June–October and indicate that breeding peaks progressively later southwards in the eastern Zones, with a September–December peak in Zone 8. The displacement of the peak in Zimbabwe from that previously recorded presumably reflects the inclusion of young birds as evidence of breeding. With the exception of Zone 3, there is no suggestion of bimodality in breeding seasonality; here the bimodal pattern of breeding is likely to be real, reflecting a composite of records from the winter-rainfall region along the coastal strip and from the summer-rainfall region farther into the interior.

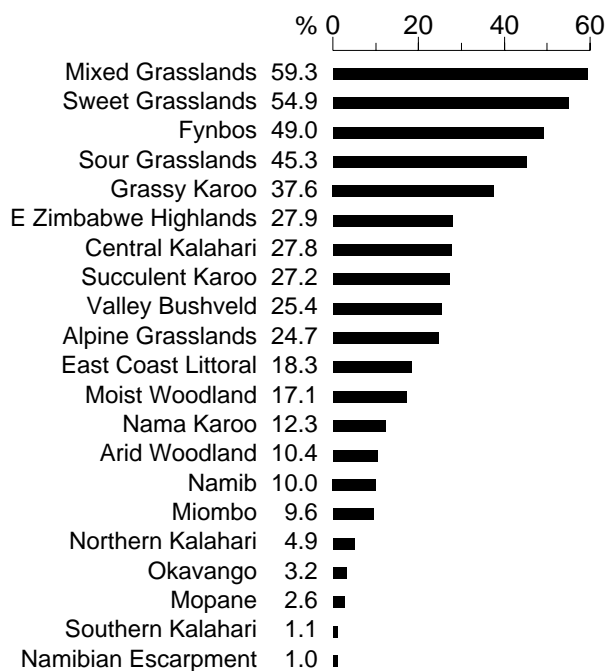
Interspecific relationships: It has similar habitat requirements to the Common Coot *F. atra*, with which only the isolated population of Redknobbed Coots in northwestern Africa and southern Iberia overlaps (Urban *et al.* 1986).

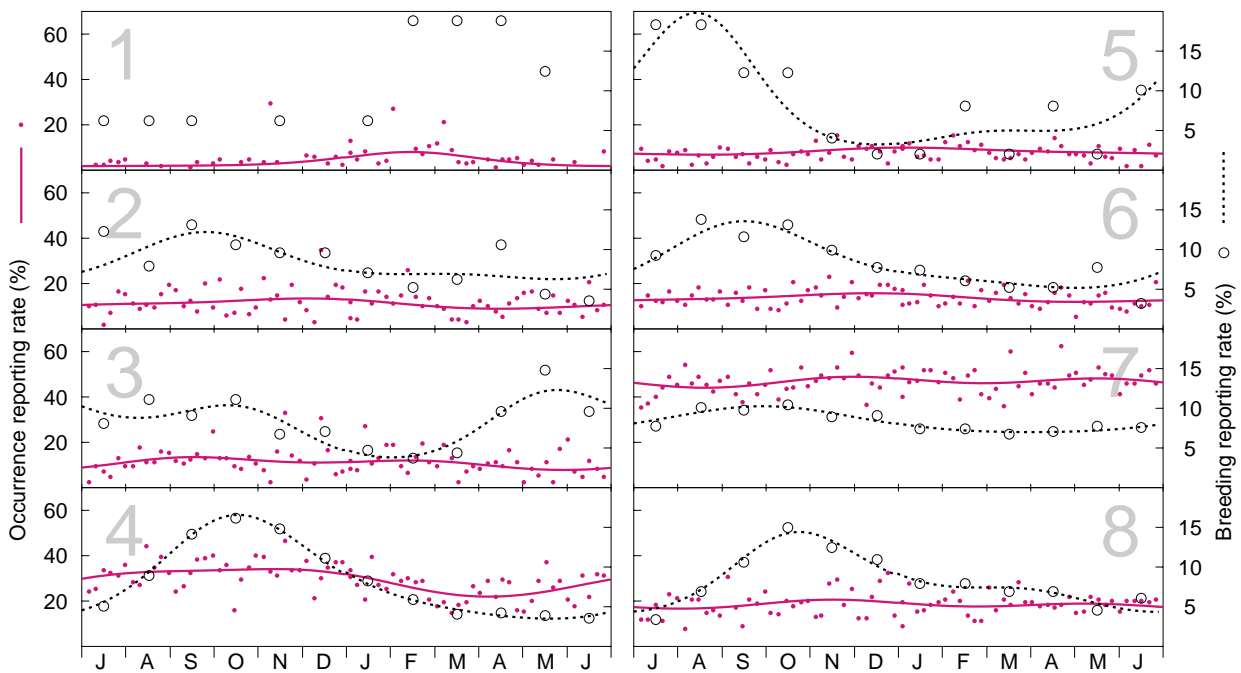
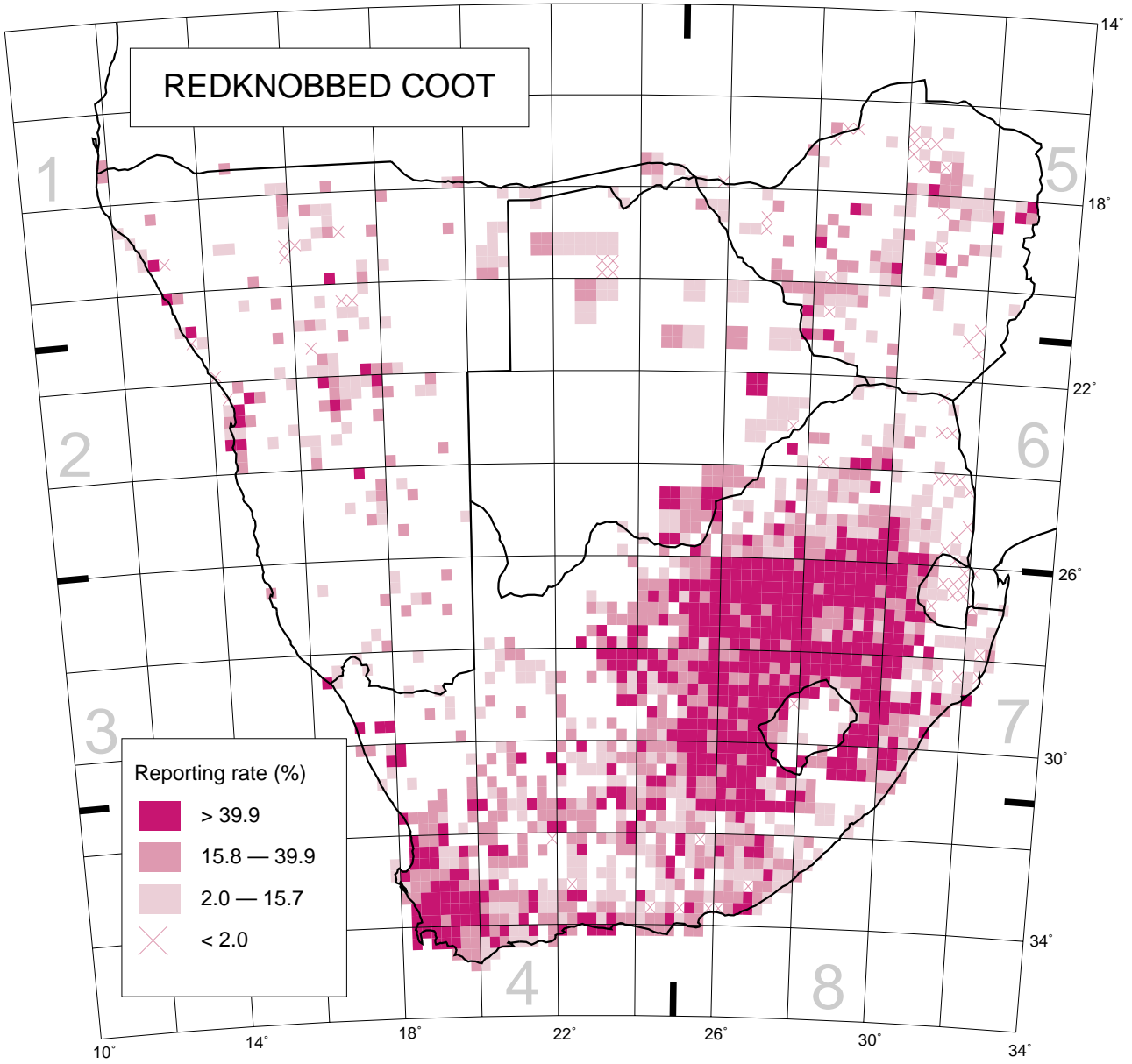
Historical distribution and conservation: In the recent past it has extended its range and has increased in numbers locally as a result of the proliferation of farm dams and other artificial waterbodies, especially as it can breed on waters of 1 ha or less (Irwin 1981; Hockey *et al.* 1989; pers. obs). Such changes in distribution and status are especially noticeable in the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989), and in Zimbabwe where it previously occurred only at a few semi-permanent pans on the central plateau but is now common and widespread on artificial impoundments with suitable open water (Irwin 1981).

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Recorded in 1642 grid cells, 36.2%
Total number of records: 43 296
Mean reporting rate for range: 36.8%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 118, 390, 596, 2538, 713, 1553, 9152, 1017; Breeding: 16, 114, 209, 1724, 49, 312, 3966, 328.