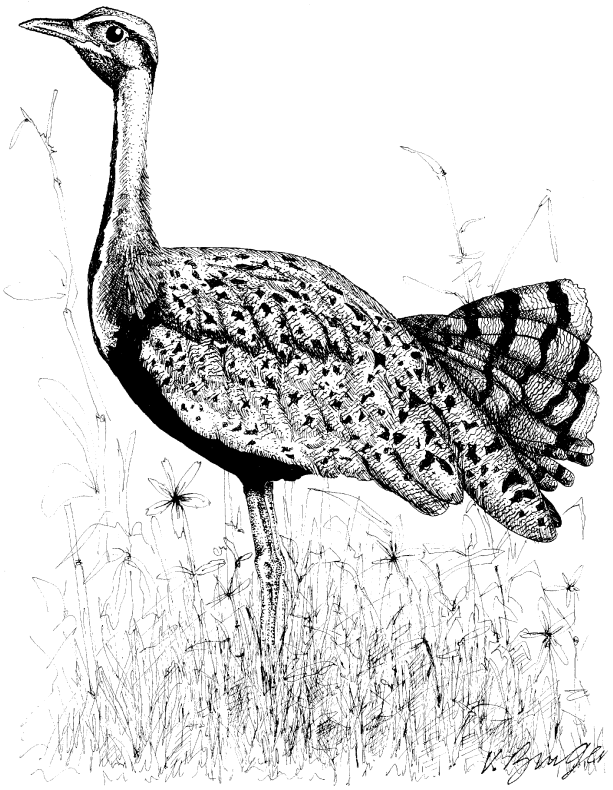


Blackbellied Korhaan

Langbeenkorhaan

Eupodotis melanogaster

The Blackbellied Korhaan is found largely east of the great escarpment in South Africa, in northern Transkei, KwaZulu-Natal and the eastern Transvaal, and throughout Swaziland. Elsewhere in southern Africa it occurs in northeastern Namibia and the Caprivi Strip, in northern Botswana, and in most of Zimbabwe, but it is rare or absent in southern Zimbabwe. To the north it is widely distributed in Africa south of the Sahara. The subspecies found in southern Africa, *E. m. notophila*, is endemic to the region and is replaced by the nominate subspecies north of the Zambezi River. The birds recorded in northern Namibia, northern Botswana, and possibly extreme northwestern Zimbabwe, may belong to the northern race (Clancey 1980b).

Its abundance varies widely within its range (e.g. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The Swaziland population has been estimated at 400 birds (Parker 1994). It is usually encountered solitarily (Kemp & Tarboton 1976). The tall vegetation that it inhabits renders it fairly inconspicuous. It has a striking but rarely performed aerial display by males and a distinctive call. It overlaps widely with the Redcrested Korhaan *E. ruficrista* and these two species are frequently confused. It overlaps peripherally with the Whitewinged Black Korhaan *E. afraoides* and these two species are also frequently confused by observers. The atlas data were vetted carefully and suspect records removed.

Habitat: Its habitat is tall, fairly dense grassland in relatively high-rainfall regions (over *c.* 600 mm p.a.). It occurs in both open grassland, e.g. in the southeastern Transvaal, and densely wooded savanna. It is the only bustard found throughout the miombo woodlands of Zimbabwe. Reporting rates are highest in the Okavango and Arid, Mopane and Miombo Woodland types, and markedly lower in open grasslands.This korhaan appears to be attracted to the edges of wetland areas (e.g. Clancey 1964b).

Movements: It is believed to be largely sedentary in South Africa (e.g. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Kemp (1974), however, suggested a southward movement in the Kruger National Park during summer. Maclean (1993b) suggested local southward movements in southern Africa as a whole during winter, and Urban *et al.* (1986) stated that it occasionally wanders to the south and west of the breeding range in South Africa. This last statement may be based on misidentifications with Redcrested and Whitewinged Black Korhaans; for example, the single historical record from the southwestern Cape Province is now considered doubtful (Hockey *et al.* 1989). Populations elsewhere in Africa apparently show seasonal movements (Urban *et al*. 1986). The models show higher reporting rates in summer throughout the range; this may be due to increased calling and displaying by males during the summer breeding season.

Breeding: Egglaying in Zimbabwe spans October–February with a November peak (Irwin 1981). Egglaying in the Transvaal spans September–January with most records from December (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

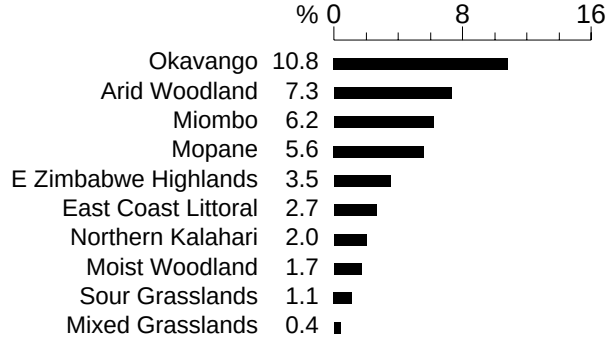
Historical distribution and conservation: There is evidence that this species has decreased in parts of southern Africa. In the Transkei at the start of the 20th century, Lt. C.G. Davies reported it to be uncommon but found all along the northern coastal region (Quickelberge 1989). There were no subsequent records until 1983 and it was thought to have become extinct in Transkei. During the atlas period there were a few more records from northern Transkei and adjacent southern KwaZulu-Natal. In southern KwaZulu-Natal it was reported as 'much reduced' by 1973 (Clancey 1973), and threatened by habitat destruction. Very few records were reported from this region during the atlas period. It would appear that the northern Transkei and adjacent southern KwaZulu-Natal population is now isolated (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Quickelberge 1989) and this remnant population is likely to be small and highly threatened.

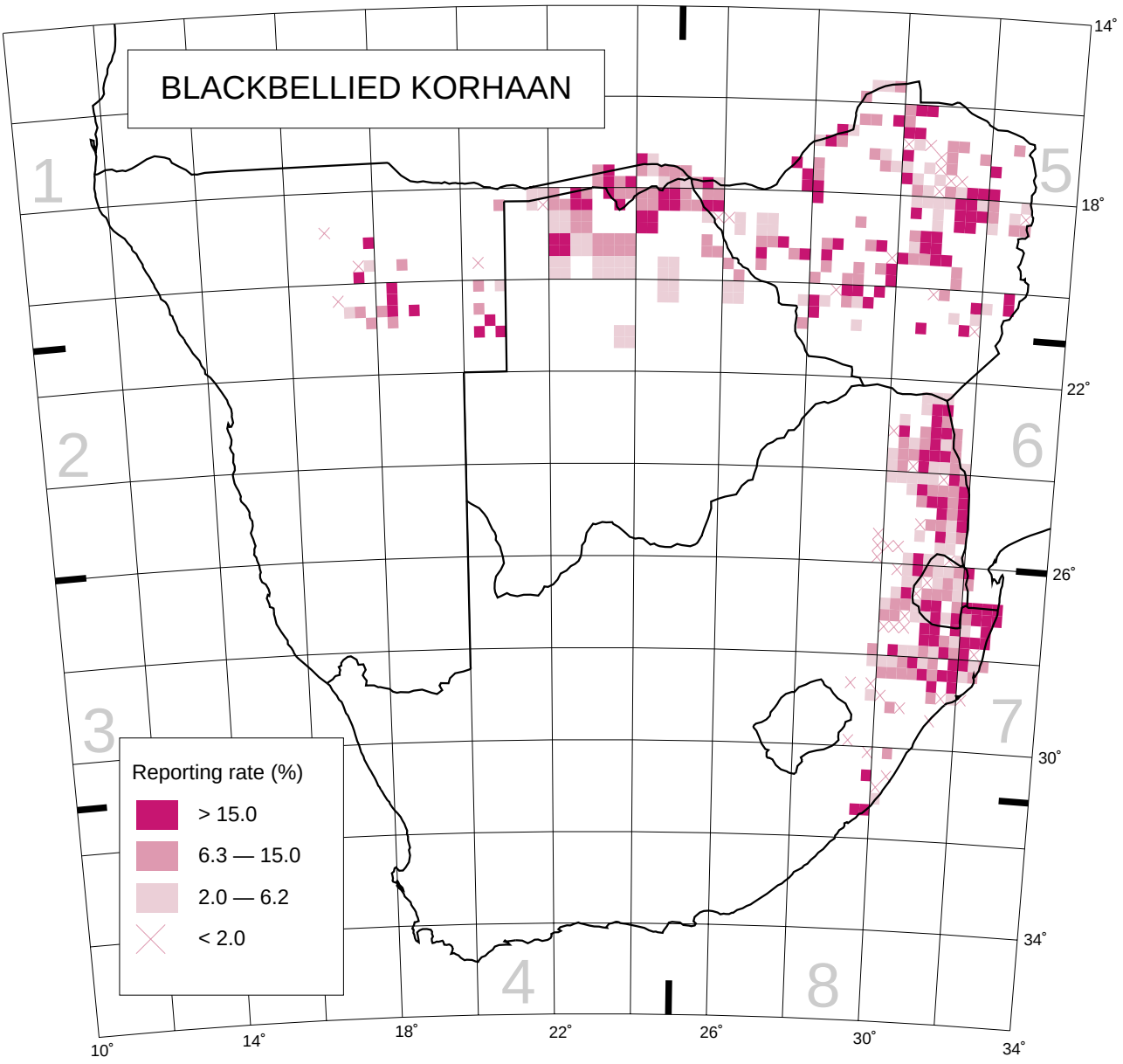
It has also decreased in northern KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland in the face of habitat loss through crop farming, commercial afforestation and the destruction of woodland (Clancey 1973). In Zimbabwe it may have decreased owing to overgrazing by livestock (Irwin 1981). Boobyer (1988) stated that the Blackbellied Korhaan is the only southern African korhaan to have seriously declined. The South African Red Data book (Brooke 1984b) did not list it as threatened but considered it worthy of monitoring; this appears to be currently applicable.

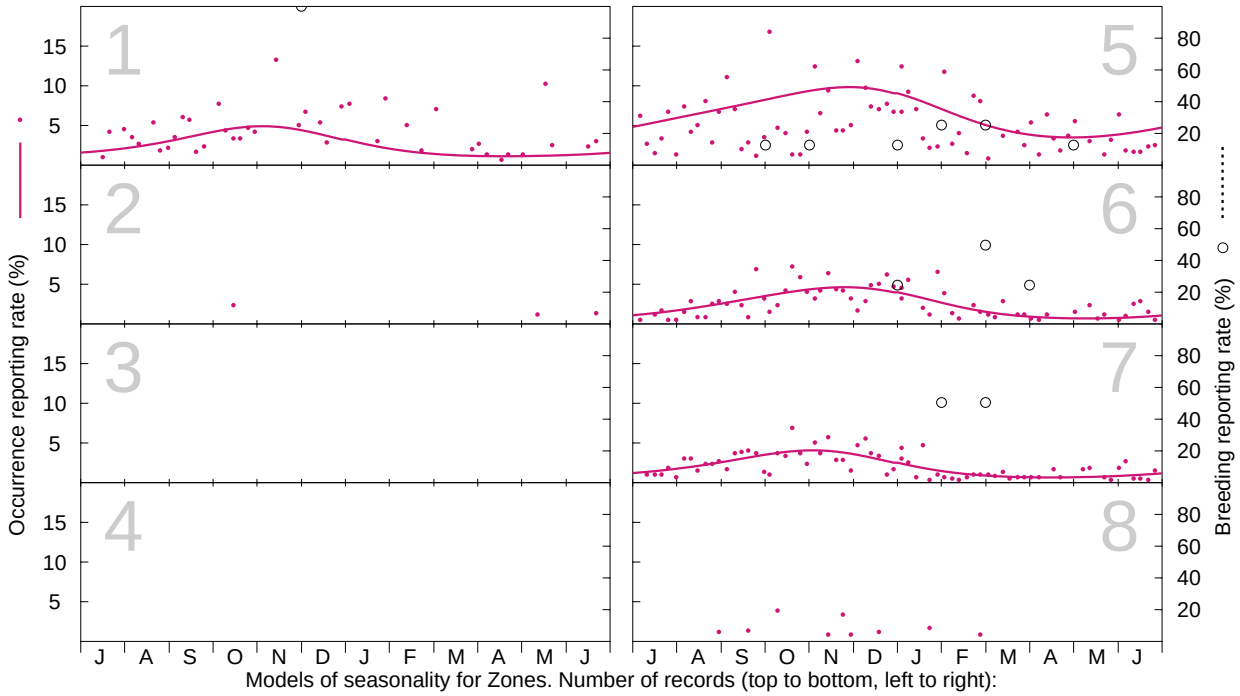
D.G. Allan

Recorded in 476 grid cells, 10.5%
Total number of records: 3040
Mean reporting rate for range: 10.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 77, 3, 0, 0, 565, 267, 389, 13; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 0, 8, 4, 2, 0.