

## African Jacana

### Grootlangtoon

#### *Actophilornis africanus*

The African Jacana is endemic to sub-Saharan Africa, with a wide range extending from Senegal to Ethiopia and southwards through the savanna belt into southern Africa (Hayman *et al.* 1986). Here it is concentrated, as a breeding species, to the subtropical east and north. The largest population concentration in southern Africa is in the Okavango Delta, with high reporting rates also in Zimbabwe, the Caprivi Strip, the eastern Transvaal and Swaziland, and coastal KwaZulu-Natal. Scattered records elsewhere provide evidence of a high incidence of vagrancy. There is a band of records running along the Vaal River, from the Transvaal into otherwise inhospitable territory in the northern Cape Province. The cluster of records along the Fish River south of Ai-Ais (2717CD), and along the Orange River in the Richtersveld (2817A), appears not to have been detected previously (e.g. Hockey & Douie 1995).

In optimum habitat it may be found at high densities (e.g. 3–5 birds/ha), and a single large (16 000 ha) wetland, such as the Nyl floodplain (2428DA), may support up to 800 birds when conditions are suitable. Ephemeral wetlands of this type provide important breeding areas but, since they dry and flood erratically and unpredictably, do not provide permanent habitat and the species is consequently subject to much local movement. On the Nyl floodplain a 57% per month turnover of individuals at one locality was recorded during the course of one breeding season (Tarboton 1993a).

**Habitat:** It is always associated with aquatic habitats; it frequents a variety of wetlands, being most typically found on seasonal pans and floodplains, and along the fringes of slow-flowing, meandering rivers in warm to hot areas where emergent, floating hydrophytes provide it with its preferred foraging substrate. Vagrant birds that move beyond the normal

breeding range may be found on estuaries, lagoons, sewage disposal works, ornamental ponds and elsewhere. At Gobabeb Research station (2315CA) in the Namib Desert, one arrived and spent time at a birdbath (C.F. Clinning pers. comm.).

**Movements:** The models reveal no evidence for seasonality. On the other hand, the high incidence of vagrancy into marginal areas, the measured turnover of individuals on the Nyl floodplain, and ringing results, demonstrate that it is an itinerant wanderer, capable of wide-ranging dispersal away from breeding areas. Adult birds ringed in Zimbabwe and the Transvaal were recovered and resighted, respectively, 186 and 300 km away from the point where they were ringed (SAFRING).

**Breeding:** The models show that breeding occurs throughout the year, but is concentrated in summer. The timing of the peak varied regionally, from early summer (October) in the northwest (Zone 1) to late summer (April) in the east (Zone 7). Tarboton (1993b) showed that it has a strictly summer breeding season in the south of the range (e.g. in KwaZulu-Natal 97% of records show egg-laying occurring November–March), but the breeding season becomes more extended northwards (e.g. in Zimbabwe only 68% of records were November–March) (Irwin 1981). The bimodal peak of breeding in Zone 1, and to a lesser extent in Zone 5, is also confirmed by egg-laying data (Irwin 1981; N.J. Skinner *in litt.*).

**Interspecific relationships:** See the species text for Lesser Jacana *Microparra capensis*.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** The current distribution closely resembles that given by Stark & Sclater (1906). Wetlands suitable for the African Jacana to breed are becoming increasingly threatened by water management schemes, but it does adapt to artificial wetlands; at Lake Kariba it is abundant on the floating weed *Salvinia molesta* (Irwin 1981). Although not currently considered to be at risk, the species could become threatened in the future.

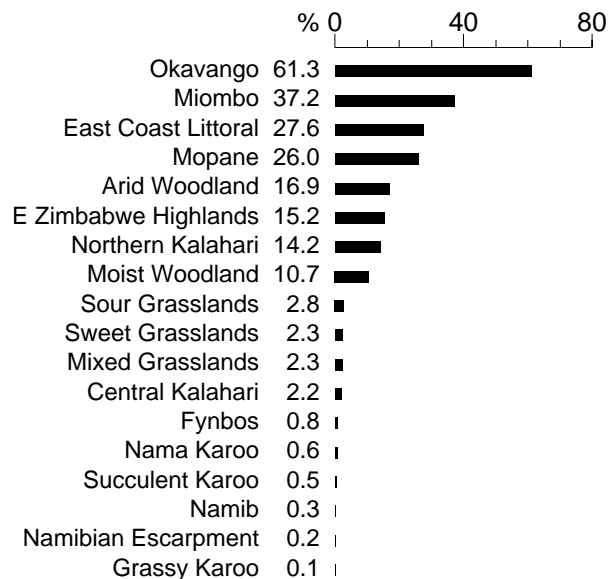
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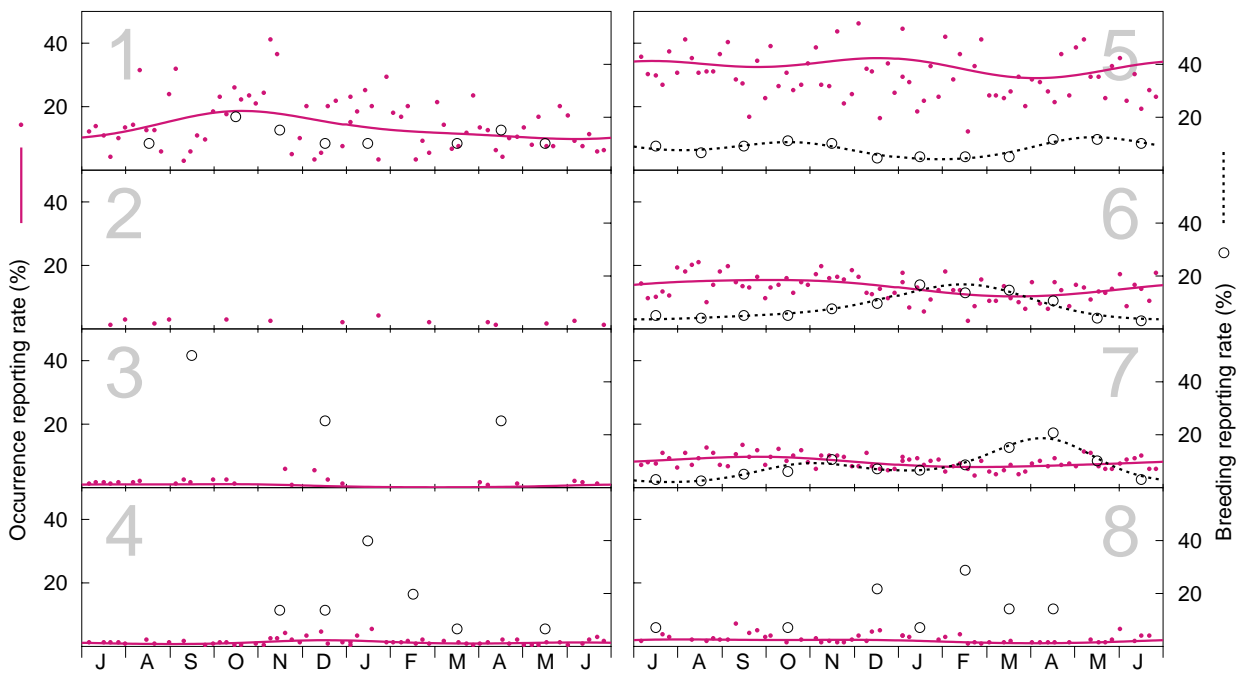
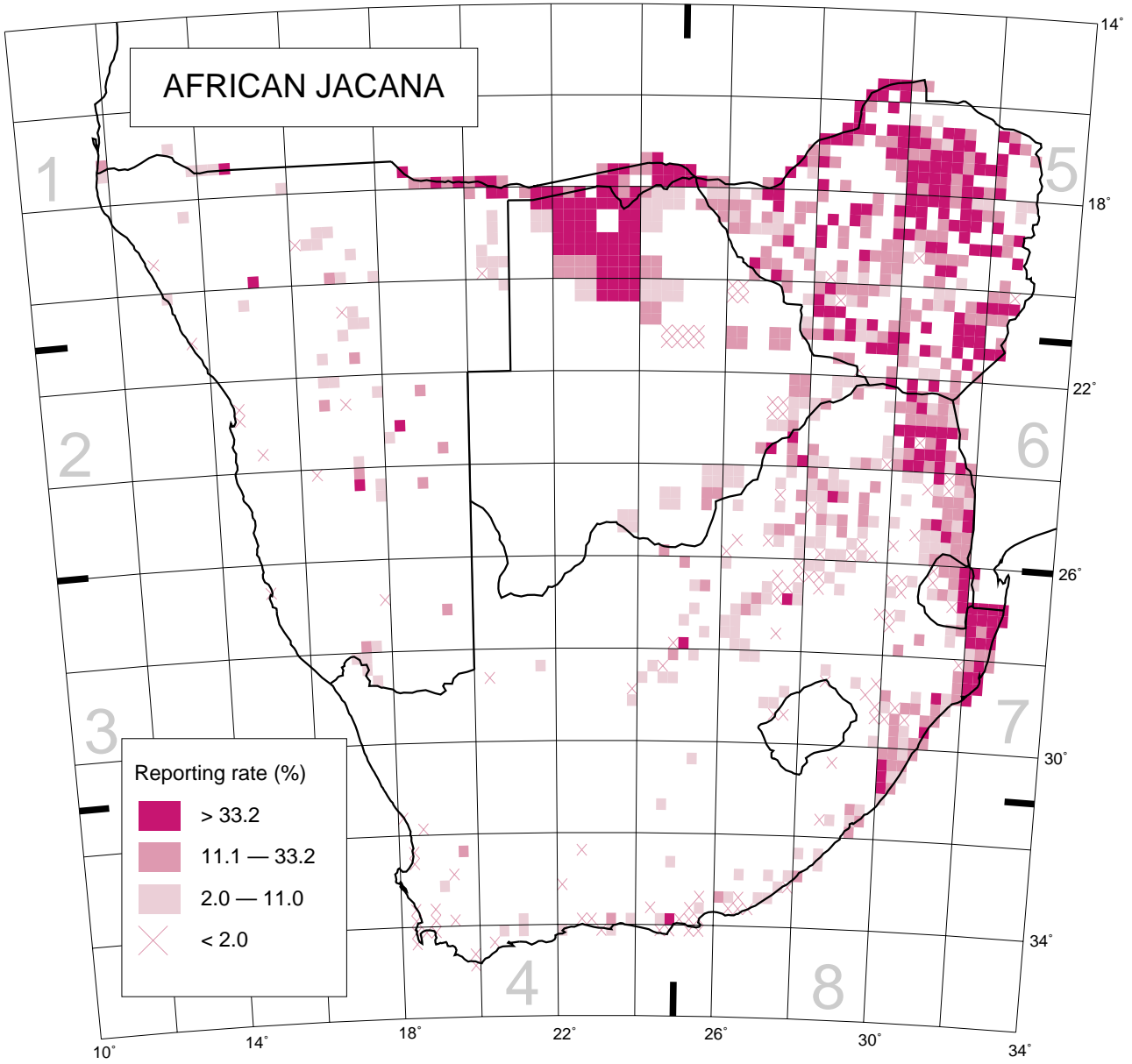
Recorded in 954 grid cells, 21.0%

Total number of records: 13 265

Mean reporting rate for range: 16.8%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 432, 15, 36, 102, 2853, 1495, 1556, 94; Breeding: 20, 0, 4, 15, 153, 101, 150, 14.