

Crowned Plover

Kroonkiewiet

Vanellus coronatus

The Crowned Plover is one of 11 *Vanellus* plovers restricted to Africa; it occurs southeast of a line from Ethiopia to central Angola (Hayman *et al.* 1986). It is found almost throughout southern Africa, with the core of its distribution in the western Transvaal, Free State and Botswana. It is largely absent from Lesotho, the Transkei, the northwestern Cape Province and southwestern Namibia. Birds in the Cape Province south of the Orange River, and parts of KwaZulu-Natal, are placed in the nominate subspecies, while populations further north belong to *V. c. suspicax* (Clancey *et al.* 1991).

During the breeding season it occurs in pairs and is often loosely colonial, but for the remainder of the year may gather in loose flocks of varying sizes (Skead 1955). With its distinctive head-pattern plumage and raucous alarm call it is unlikely to have been misidentified.

Habitat: The favoured habitat is that of dry, short and over-grazed or burnt grassland, as well as sports fields, golf courses and airports. It is widespread in a number of grassland and woodland vegetation types, especially Central Kalahari and Sweet Grasslands. The area of absence centred on the Namib Desert is roughly delineated by the 200-mm-p.a. isohyet. It is absent from mountainous areas, notably the Alpine Grasslands and the Eastern Zimbabwe Highlands. Breeding sites are in open habitats, with a commanding view in all directions (Skead 1955).

Movements: In Zambia and the higher-rainfall areas of Zimbabwe, it is essentially a dry season visitor, April–December, although in years of poor rainfall small numbers will remain at suitably managed sites (Tree 1969; Taylor 1979; Ginn *et al.* 1989). Large-scale movements into northern Botswana have been noted during the wet and early dry seasons, particularly in years of good rainfall (A.J. Tree *in litt.*).

Elsewhere in the region no long-distance movements have been recorded, but it frequently undertakes local movements. Neither the scale nor regularity of these movements is understood. The models show that movements occur and that the species is more frequently reported in the mesic east and north (Zones 1, 5–8) in the dry season, while reporting rates are higher from the late wet to early dry season in the dry west (Zones 2–3).

Breeding: As with other *Vanellus* species in southern Africa, breeding peaks in spring (September–November)

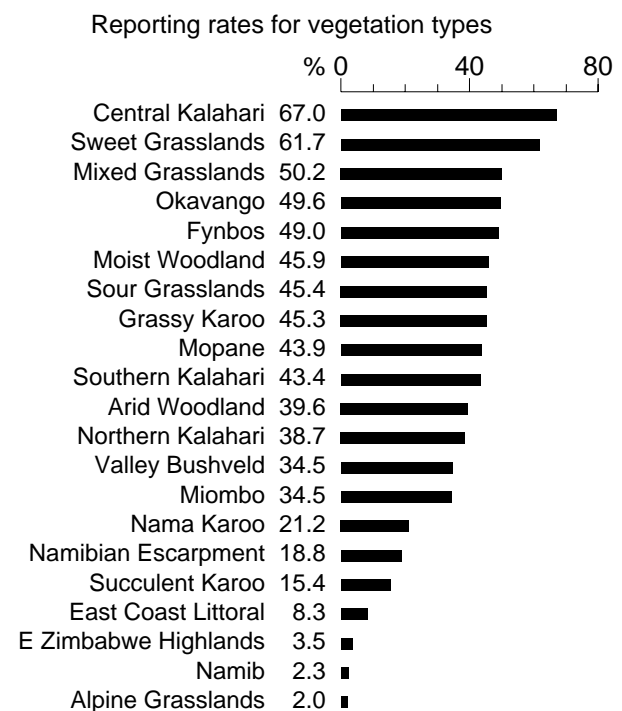
throughout the region. It may breed throughout the year, especially when outbreaks of the Harvester Termite *Hodotermes mossambicus* occur (Ward 1989b,c). There is a suggestion of slightly earlier breeding in the winter-rainfall area (Zone 4) compared to the arid Zones 2 and 3 further north, where breeding late in the summer wet season is relatively more frequent.

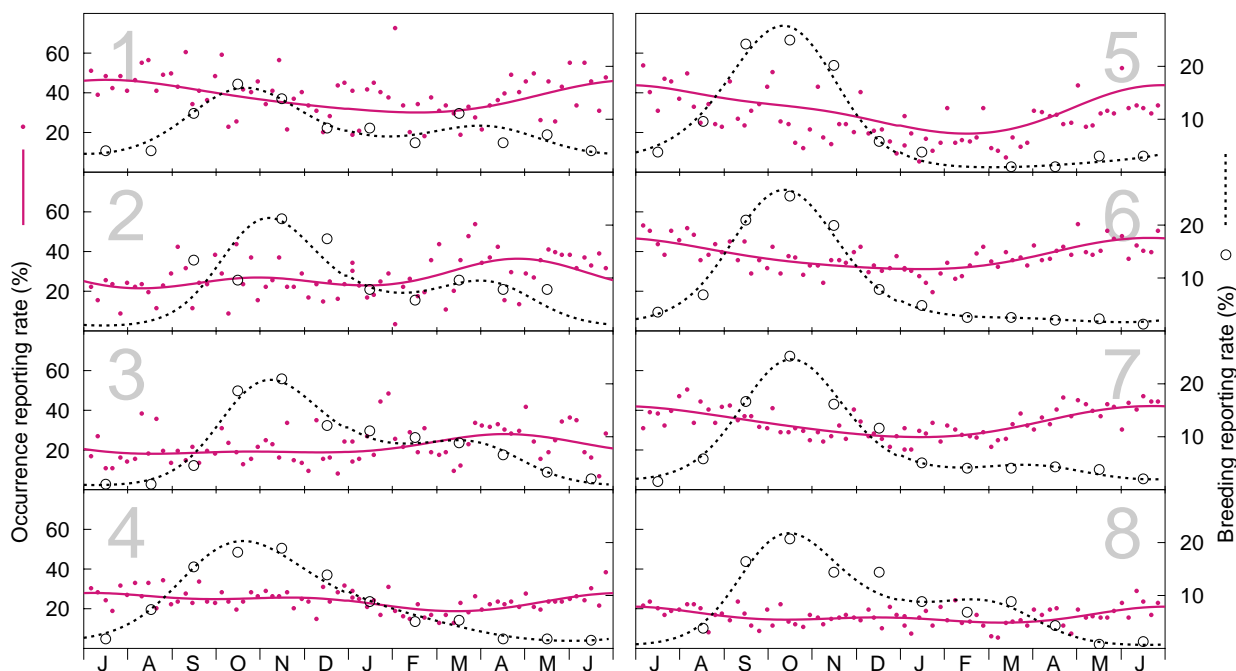
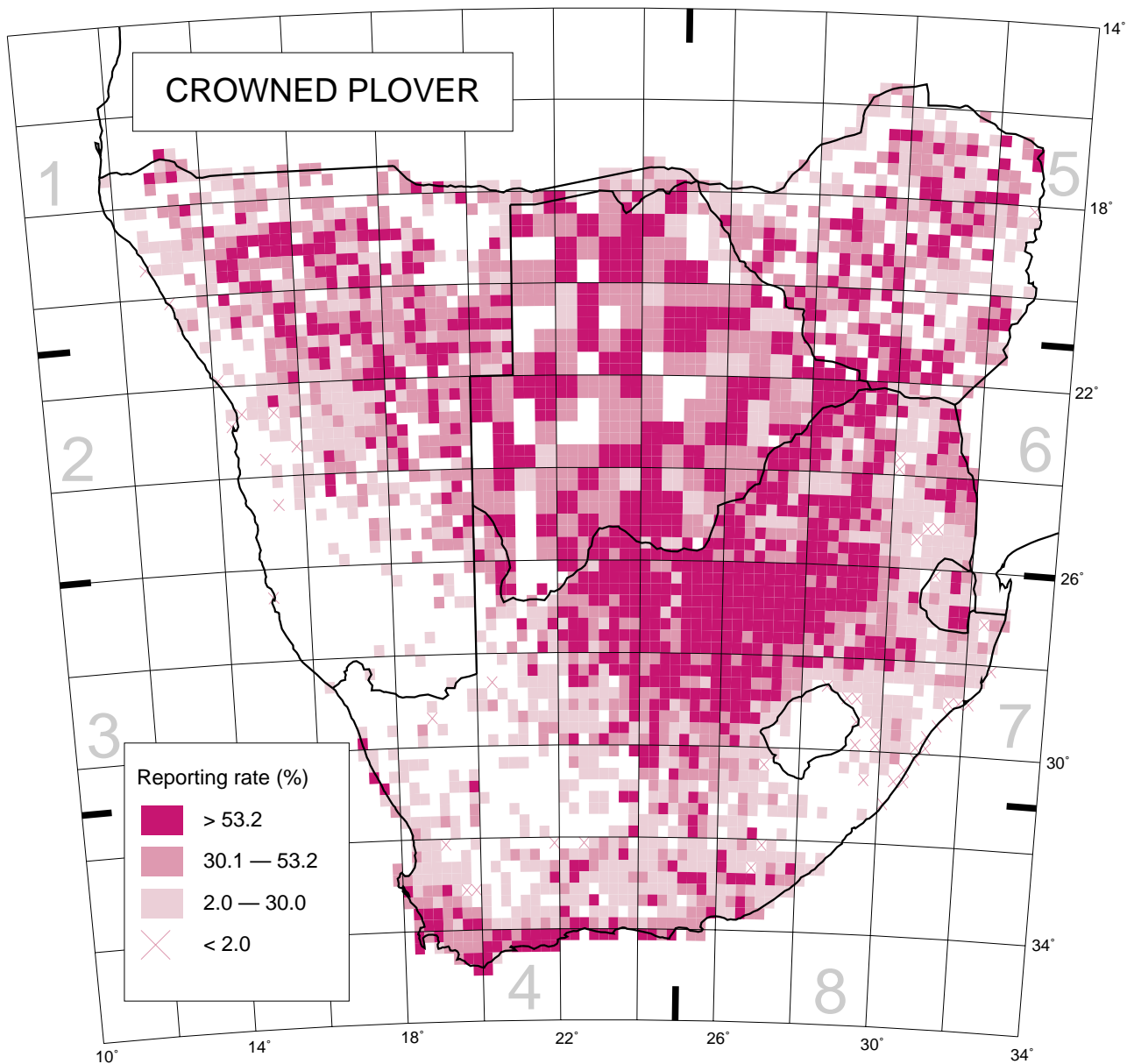
Interspecific relationships: All vanelline plovers are closely related (Brown & Ward 1990; Ward 1992). The Crowned and Blackwinged *V. melanopterus* Plovers are frequently closely associated in mixed-species flocks and may breed in close proximity (Skead 1955; Ward & Maclean 1988). This association is mutualistic; the Crowned Plover helps to defend the less aggressive Blackwinged Plover from potential predators, while the Crowned Plover is able to increase time spent feeding and decrease vigilance in the presence of the alert Blackwinged Plover (Ward & Maclean 1988). Both may nest in association with the Spotted Dikkop *Burhinus capensis*, but no behavioural interaction has been recorded (Ward 1987).

Historical distribution and conservation: It has expanded its range as a result of human activities. Agricultural practices have resulted in the clearing of vast areas of bush and woodland, particularly in the eastern half of the region. Other practices, such as grazing and allowing ploughed fields to lie fallow, create suitable habitat, as does the development of large areas of mown grass in suburban areas. Improved grazing practices with lower stocking rates and hence longer grass may have a negative effect on the abundance of this and other specialist short-grass species which evolved in tandem with heavily grazed grassland ecosystems created by large herds of migratory ungulates and, more recently, also by domestic livestock (or both), as is still seen in Serengeti (Folse 1982) and many parts of Botswana.

D. Ward

Recorded in 3196 grid cells, 70.4%
Total number of records: 58 561
Mean reporting rate for range: 43.2%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):

Occurrence: 1268, 999, 1207, 2088, 2785, 4326, 6609, 881; Breeding: 72, 52, 91, 803, 104, 401, 781, 160.