

## Blackwinged Plover

### Grootswartvlerkkiewiet

*Vanellus melanopterus*

The Blackwinged Plover has two disjunct ranges: the nominate race *V. m. melanopterus* breeds from eastern Sudan and Ethiopia to northern and central Kenya (Hayman *et al.* 1986), and in southern Africa, the endemic race *minor* breeds from the eastern Transvaal and Swaziland, through KwaZulu-Natal to the southern Cape Province.

The eye-ring is dark, except in the breeding season when it turns red (Ward 1987; *contra* Sinclair 1984; Ginn *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b). This feature is similar in the Lesser Blackwinged Plover *V. lugubris* during the nonbreeding season. In addition, the size of the white forehead patch is variable in both these species, making this an unreliable identification feature. The Blackwinged Plover tends to be much paler around face and neck than the Lesser (Ward 1987). Also, the legs of the Blackwinged Plover range from dull brown to purple-red during breeding; the legs of the Lesser are always black. The most reliable characters for separating these two species are the calls (Ward 1989b) and the black-tipped (rather than white-tipped) secondaries of the Blackwinged Plover.

It tends to be inconspicuous and is often found in mixed-species flocks with the noisy, more brightly coloured Crowned Plover *V. coronatus* (Ward & Maclean 1988), hence it was probably under-reported.

**Habitat:** Although it is most widely recorded in Valley Bushveld and East Coast Littoral, it is found only in short and burnt grassland within these vegetation types. It is found mostly at higher altitudes in the northern part of its range, but near the coast in the eastern Cape Province. The limits of its range probably approximate the 15°C isotherm (Stuckenberg 1969; Ward & Maclean 1989).

**Movements:** In KwaZulu-Natal it moves during winter from high-altitude areas to the coast (Ward 1987), where some birds may occasionally remain to breed (Cyrus 1982). In most of KwaZulu-Natal, birds occur at low altitudes for most of the year, move to higher altitudes to breed during spring, and return once the young are independent (Ward 1989b). In the eastern Cape Province and Transkei, populations may be year-round residents, although there is wide-ranging movement in

response to rainfall. In Swaziland, it is present in the highveld throughout the year, but undertakes seasonal movements over short distances in order to utilize areas of short grass (Parker 1994).

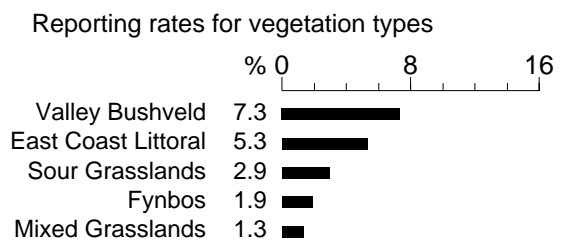
**Breeding:** Breeding is mostly recorded in spring, August–November, with a September peak (Dean 1971); evidence for breeding activity was recorded until February, but this is most likely to have been dependent young. As with other *Vanellus* plovers in the summer-rainfall areas of southern Africa, breeding commences in the latter part of the dry season.

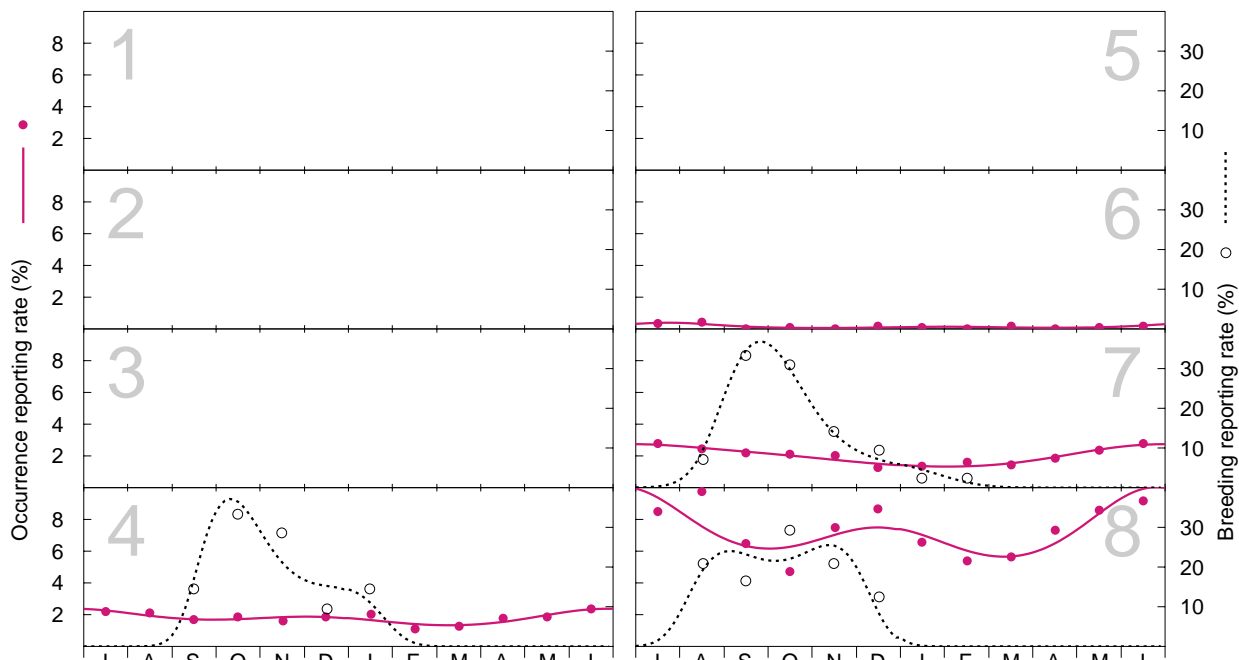
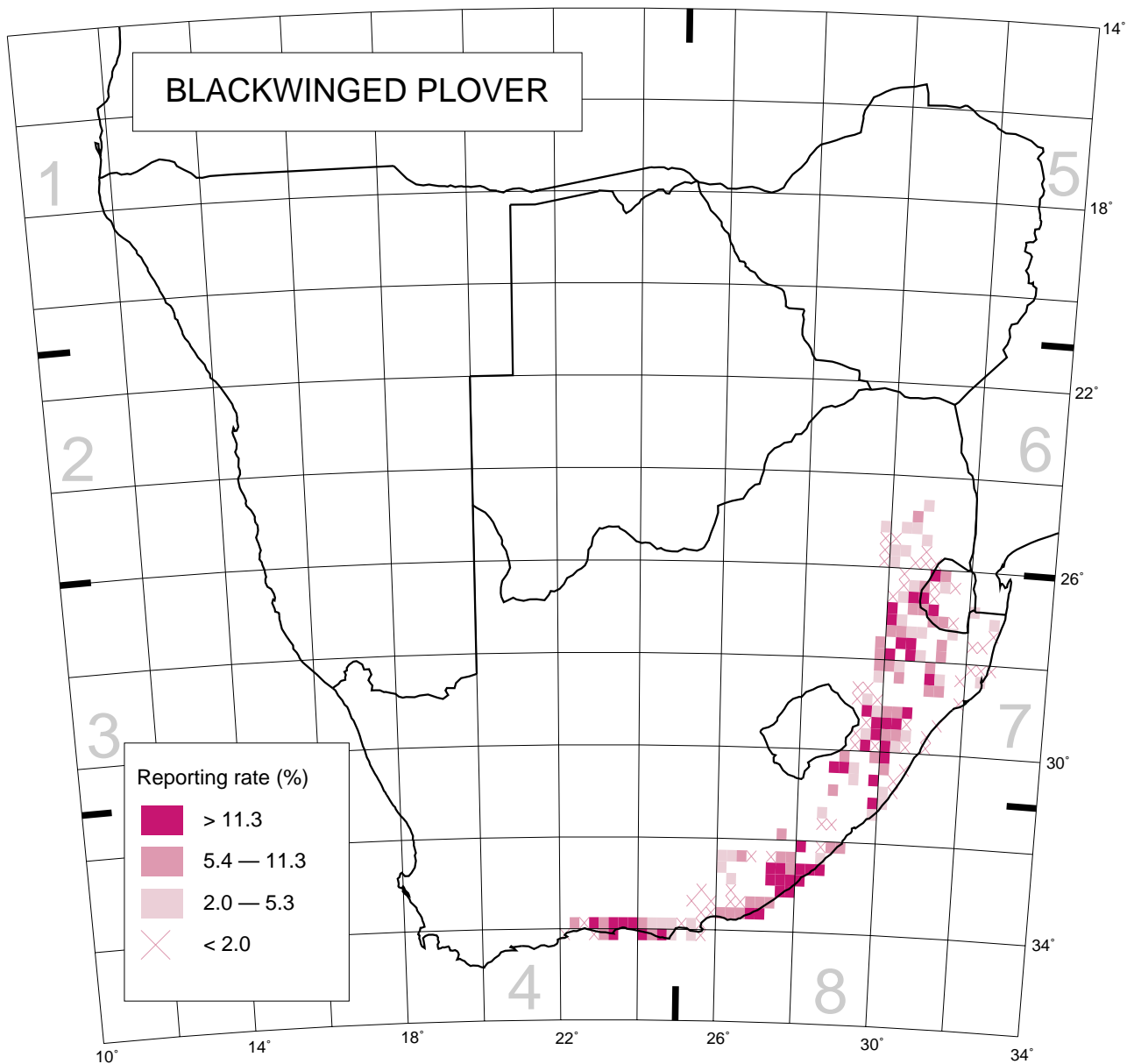
**Interspecific relationships:** It has a mutualistic association with the Crowned Plover, described in the text for that species.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** There is no record of historical changes in distribution. It is extremely difficult to census because of its wide, irregular movements, and because of its occurrence in small populations at high altitudes. The Blackwinged Plover is nowhere abundant, and its conservation status deserves closer scrutiny. Habitat reduction through changes in grazing and burning practices needs to be verified (see texts for Crowned and Lesser Blackwinged Plovers). It is infrequently commensal with humans and seldom breeds in areas of intense human activity, although it does feed on ploughed fields, golf courses and other short-grass areas (Ward & Maclean 1988, 1989).

D. Ward

Recorded in 190 grid cells, 4.2%  
Total number of records: 2257  
Mean reporting rate for range: 8.5%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 461, 0, 37, 902, 856; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 21, 0, 0, 42, 24.