

## Wattled Plover

### Lelkiewiet

#### *Vanellus senegallus*

The Wattled Plover occurs widely in sub-Saharan Africa, but is absent from tropical rainforest and arid regions in the north-east and southwest. The distribution in southern Africa shows three strongholds: the Caprivi Strip and Okavango basin (subspecies *V. s. solitaneus*), the central plateau and eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, and the southern Transvaal, Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal. The gap along most of the Limpopo River drainage system, between Zimbabwe and the Transvaal, is particularly striking. Populations on both sides of this gap are considered to belong to subspecies *lateralis* (Clancey 1980b).

Its phylogenetic relationships are uncertain (Ward 1992). It was placed in a monotypic genus *Afribyx* (Peters 1934), but later it and the Whitecrowned Plover *V. albiceps* were placed in *Xiphidiopterus* (Wolters 1975) on the basis of superficial similarities (white face, yellow wattles, wing spurs). This is not supported either behaviourally or morphologically (Brown & Ward 1990; Ward 1992). Its closest relatives may be the extralimital Masked Plover *V. miles* (Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea) and the probably extinct Javanese Wattled Plover *V. macropterus* (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Ward 1992).

It occurs in pairs during the breeding season and in small flocks when not breeding; this seasonal change in flocking behaviour makes it difficult to interpret seasonal variation in reporting rates. It can be distinguished from the only other wattled plover, the Whitecrowned Plover, by a generally darker appearance, dark brown (not white) breast, black-tipped (not white-tipped) secondaries, and brown (not black) upper wing coverts (Hayman *et al.* 1986).

**Habitat:** It inhabits wet, short grasslands and marshes near vleis, streams, and on river floodplains. In Zimbabwe it is attracted to pastures irrigated with sewage water (A.J.T. pers. obs.). It moves to burnt grasslands and vleis and other open sites near water to forage. The highest reporting rates were in those vegetation types in which sufficient damp marshlands occur.

**Movements:** The models do not suggest large-scale migration, but it moves considerably during the nonbreeding season (e.g. Little 1967 for Carolina (2630AA)). This appears to

be caused by seasonal changes in habitat quality, mostly the availability of short-grass habitat near water. Cold winters at high altitudes with heavy frosts may reduce prey levels to the extent that birds are forced to move. Numbers in Zimbabwe increase during the period late-March to August (Tree 1977). Wattled Plovers arrived to breed at Carolina during September, left during March (Little 1967), and the timing suggests that they move to Zimbabwe. In Zambia there is considerable movement out of the country during the rains when habitat becomes flooded and overgrown, and it is likely to move to the Caprivi Strip and Okavango Delta (Tree 1969; Aspinwall 1986). Little (1967) found that birds were already in pairs when they arrived and that these pairs were philopatric.

**Breeding:** The season is September–January, with most breeding recorded October–November. The nest site is usually in open grassland, with good visibility. It is highly territorial during the breeding season, excluding conspecifics and many

other bird species from its territory which can be large (3–6 ha) and does not necessarily include the nest site (Little 1967).

**Interspecific relationships:** It does not breed within the habitat of any other plover and does not appear to compete with them. It sometimes feeds in loose association with Blacksmith *V. armatus*, Crowned *V. coronatus*, Blackwinged *V. melanopterus* and Lesser Blackwinged *V. lugubris* Plovers, and Temminck's Courser *Cursorius temminckii* (Ward 1989a). No behavioural interactions have been recorded while feeding. During the nonbreeding period, it may respond to the alarm calls of other vanelline plovers, even when feeding apart, and it assists in mobbing and driving off predators (Ward & Maclean 1988).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** No historical changes in distribution have been recorded. It appears to be fairly common throughout its range. In certain areas, including suburban Johannesburg (2628A), it has adapted to man-modified habitats, but still associates with waterbodies, even where these are streams a few metres wide. As with other *Vanellus* species, the primary requirement in these areas is the presence of short grass. The Wattled Plover is not of conservation concern.

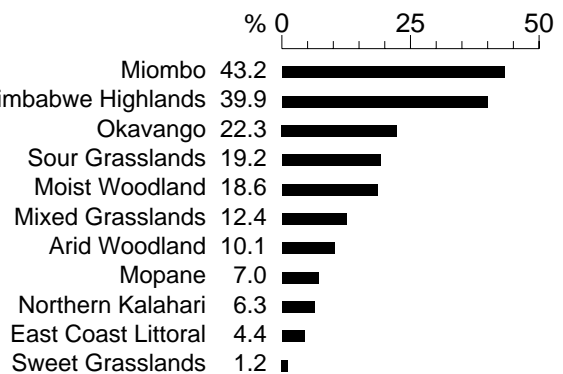
*D. Ward and A.J. Tree*

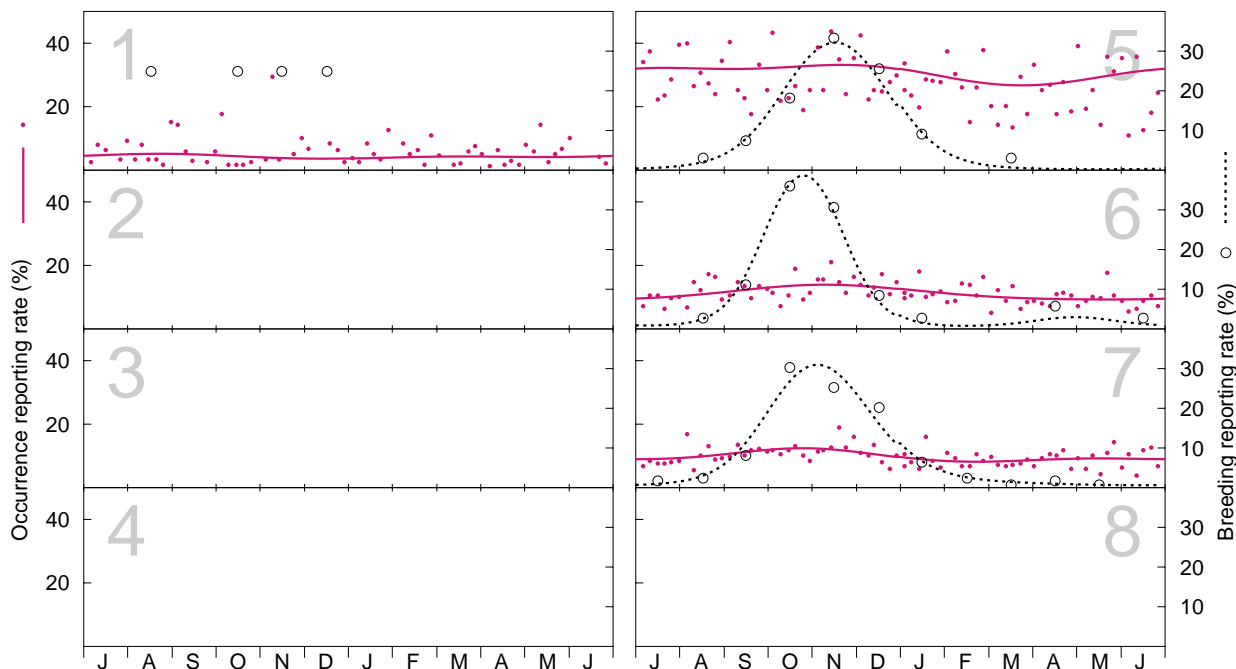
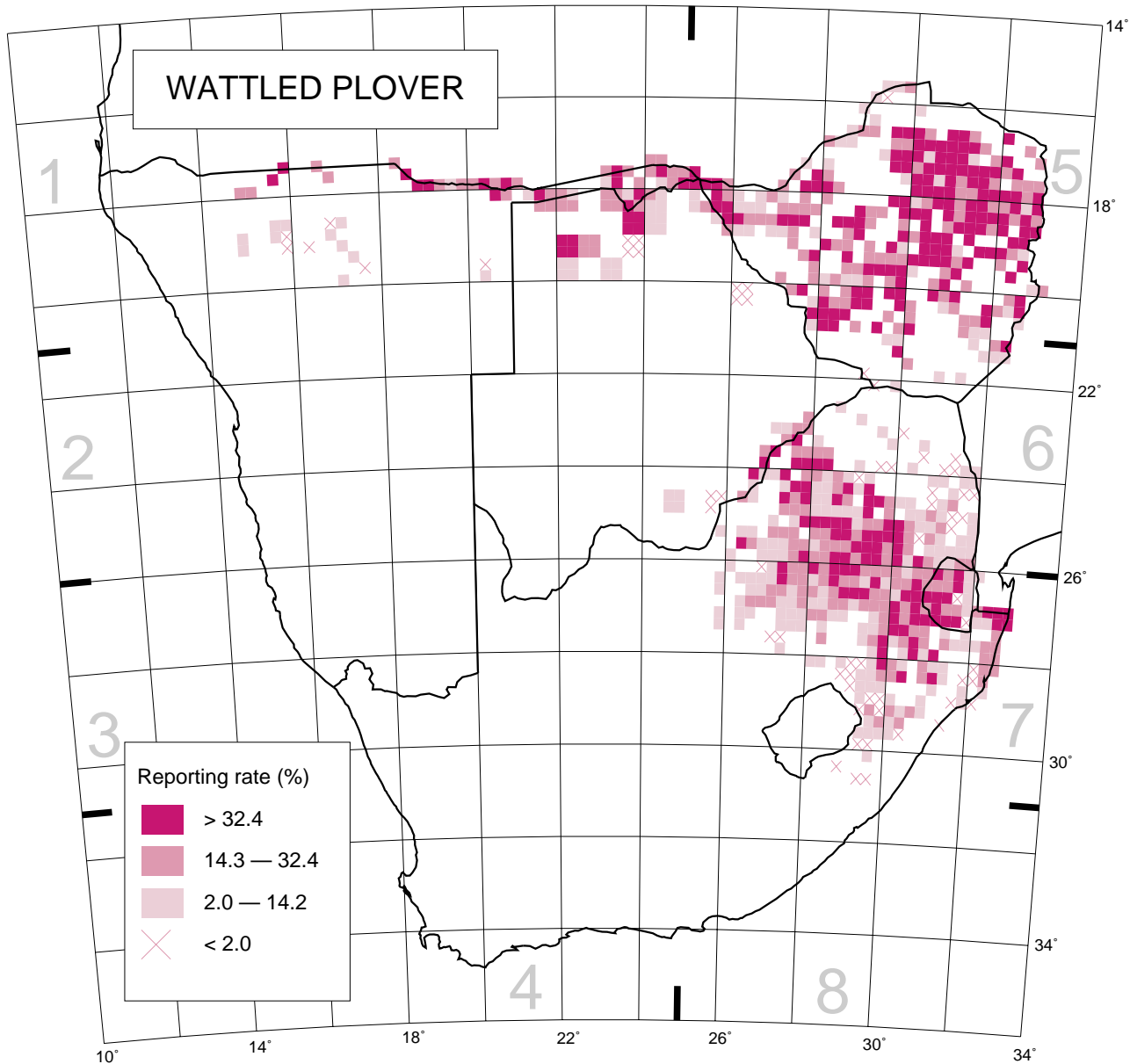
Recorded in 824 grid cells, 18.2%

Total number of records: 13 852

Mean reporting rate for range: 22.5%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 145, 0, 0, 0, 2683, 1274, 1918, 0; Breeding: 4, 0, 0, 0, 66, 36, 123, 0.