

## Ruff Kemphaan

*Philomachus pugnax*

The Ruff occurs at wetlands throughout southern Africa. The main concentrations are in the panveld region of the Transvaal–Free State highveld (Allan *et al.* 1995c), northern and southeastern Botswana.

It breeds across Siberia, mainly in the forest-tundra ecotone and the shrub-tundra subzone at latitudes 65–73°N (Rogacheva 1992). In Europe it nests in damp meadows, and the breeding range extends southwards to about 50°N. It migrates mainly to Africa south of the Sahara, excepting deserts and humid forests, with concentrations of over a million birds recorded at several localities across the Sahel inundation zone (Cramp *et al.* 1983). A small proportion of the population migrates to India.

The population in southern Africa consists overwhelmingly of females; the ratio has been estimated to lie between 8:1 and 15:1 in favour of females (Tree 1985a).

**Habitat:** Suitable habitat may be characterized as shallow water, muddy margins and short emergent vegetation. It occurs at vleis, pans, sewage works and saltworks, tolerating fresh, brackish, alkaline and saline wetlands, and is less frequent on the coastline and tidal estuaries. It is the only scolopacid in southern Africa that regularly feeds on seeds away from wetlands, and frequently occurs in large flocks in pastures and wheat stubble. Even on its breeding grounds it is noted as being partly herbivorous, consuming large quantities of the seeds of the buttercup *Ranunculus pallasii* (Chernov 1985).

**Movements:** Of 5720 ringed in southern Africa, 12 have been recovered in the northern hemisphere (Tree 1985a; SAFRING). Four recoveries made between 13 May and 2 June and north of 62°N were probably at or close to their breeding sites; they were at longitudes 131°, 145°, 148°, 153° and 164°E in the Kolyma River basin in far eastern

Siberia. Ruffs, along with Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula* and Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus*, breed further east than any of the other Palearctic migrants to southern Africa. Eight recoveries (in Malawi, Uganda, near the Black and the Caspian seas, in Kazakhstan and three in the southern Lena River basin in Yakutia) indicate a route through the eastern half of Africa, the Middle East and north of the central Asian plateau. However, an adult female ringed on 28 August 1969 near Potsdam (53°N 13°E) on the Baltic Sea coastline, Germany, was recovered at Doringbaai (3118CC) on 10 February 1970, six months later, and a first-year female ringed on 27 September 1983 near Bharatpur (27°N 78°E), just south of the Himalayas in India, was retrapped at Steynsrus Dam (3326DC) on 2 January 1984, four months later. These records probably indicate circuitous routes to the eastern Siberian breeding grounds (Tree 1985a; Rogacheva 1992).

The seasonality models show that arrival and departure are well synchronized across all Zones; September is the month in which reporting rates increase most rapidly, and March and April are the main departure months.

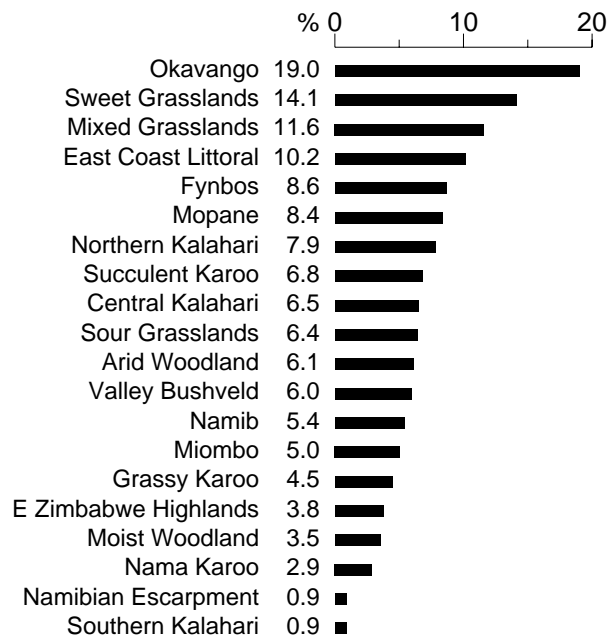
Small numbers are regularly found in the region during the austral winter, particularly in the northern Zones (Day 1971; Tree 1972b; Schmitt & Whitehouse 1976; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Penry 1994), but relatively fewer birds overwinter than in other large scolopacid waders.

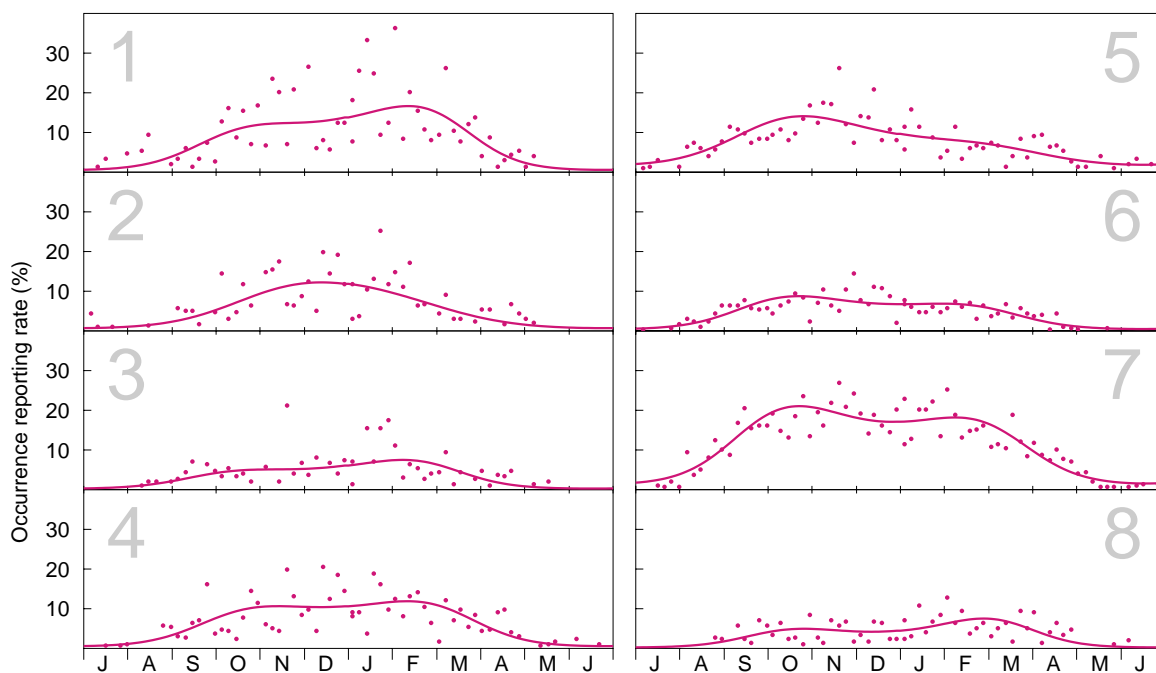
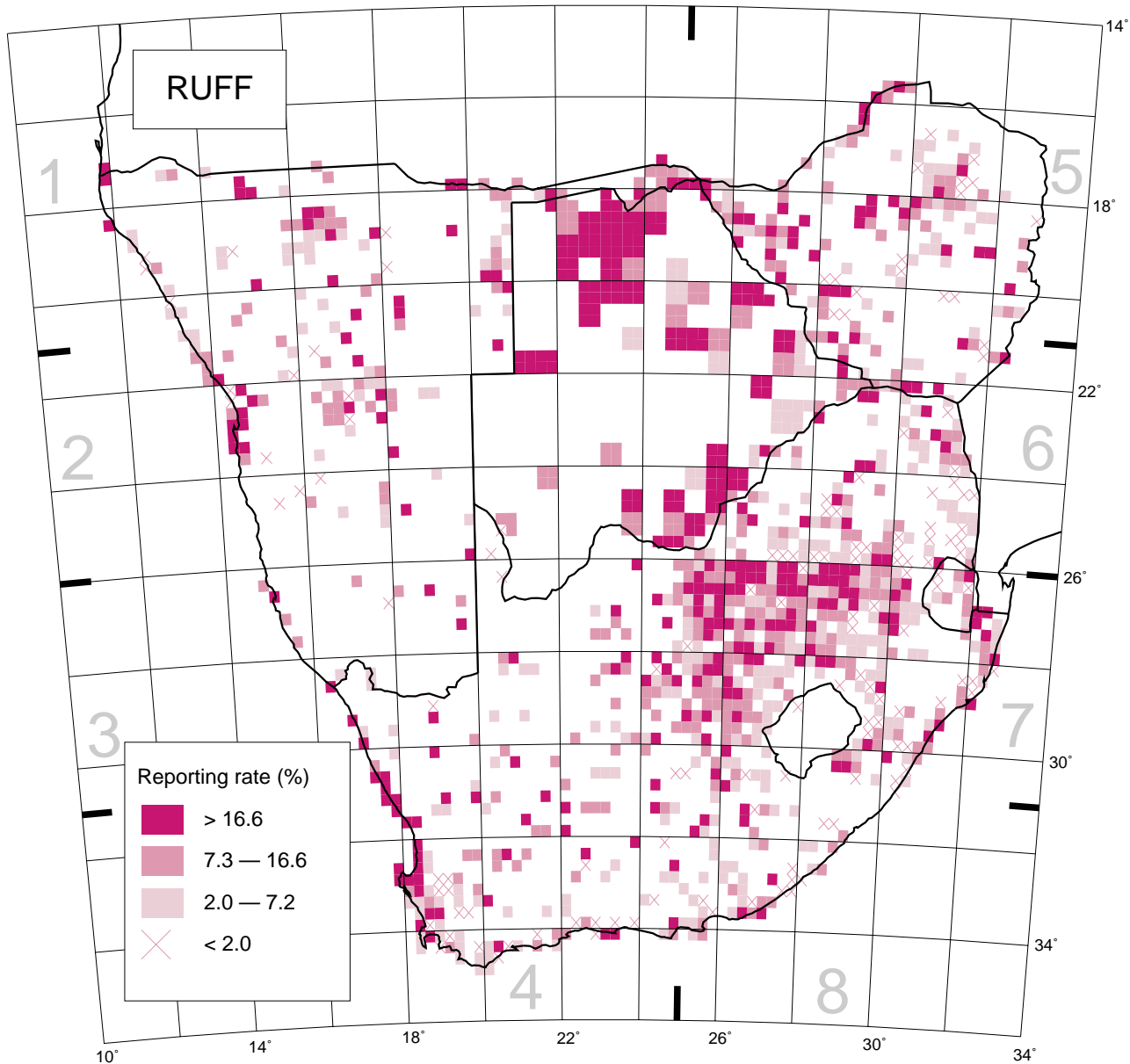
**Historical distribution and conservation:** Hockey *et al.* (1989) considered it to have increased in the southwestern Cape Province during the 20th century, benefiting from artificial wetlands, irrigation schemes and agriculture. This applies to much of the rest of southern Africa, although drainage of wetlands, particularly in the grassland biome, has reduced suitable habitat. The Ruff appears to be under no specific conservation threat during its stay in southern Africa.

L.G. Underhill

Recorded in 1260 grid cells, 27.8%  
Total number of records: 10 814  
Mean reporting rate for range: 10.9%

### Reporting rates for vegetation types





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

Occurrence: 225, 165, 168, 532, 636, 509, 2310, 189.