



Ethiopian Snipe

Afrikaanse Snip

Gallinago nigripennis

The only African-breeding scolopacid, the Ethiopian (or African) Snipe is fairly common, with a patchy distribution south of the Sahara from Ethiopia to the Cape. Because of its aquatic habitat, it is absent from large areas of arid and semi-arid country in southern Africa, but it is widely distributed and largely resident in the wetter parts. The distribution map indicates concentrations in the southwestern Cape Province, KwaZulu-Natal interior, the highveld of the southern Transvaal and eastern Free State, the central plateau of Zimbabwe and the Okavango floodplain. In the eastern Free State it often occurs in groups of 20 or more in flooded grasslands and vleis. It is mainly a highveld species in the Transvaal, but is abundant on the Nyl River floodplain (2428DA) after good rains (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It is widespread but local in KwaZulu-Natal, confined mainly to the uplands (Clancey 1964; Cyrus & Robson 1980). It is a scarce breeder in southern Mozambique (Clancey 1971a).

The three subspecies in southern Africa (Clancey 1980b; Urban *et al.* 1986) are shown to have disjunct ranges: *G. n. aequatorialis* on the high plateau of Mashonaland (and northwards to Ethiopia); *angolensis* in extreme western Zimbabwe and westwards into northern Botswana, Namibia and Angola; and the nominate race *nigripennis* in South Africa, southeastern Botswana and southern Mozambique.

It is easily overlooked unless drumming during the breeding season. It can be distinguished from the Great Snipe *G. media*, which occurs in similar habitat in summer, by its white belly, longer bill, barred breast and flanks, rounded (not pointed) wings and faster, more twisting (not direct) flight and tendency to call when flushed (Maclean 1993b).

Habitat: The favoured habitat is temporary and permanent wetlands with short emergent vegetation, tussocks of grass or reeds, and exposed soft mud. The vegetation types in

which this habitat mostly occurs are Okavango, Mixed and Sour Grasslands and Fynbos.

Movements: It is largely resident, but moves about extensively in search of suitable waters, and as vleis and grasslands become flooded during the rains. It is thought to be mainly a winter migrant to Zimbabwe (Ginn *et al.* 1989), but this is not supported by the model for Zone 6, where there were few records for May and June, and peak reporting rates were in midsummer.

Breeding: It breeds July–September in the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989); in most months in the Transvaal with a winter peak, July–September (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b); July–August in KwaZulu-Natal, but is opportunistic and may also breed as late as November; March–August in Zimbabwe. It has been found breeding in every month of the year in southern Africa, but has a winter peak throughout (Maclean 1993b).

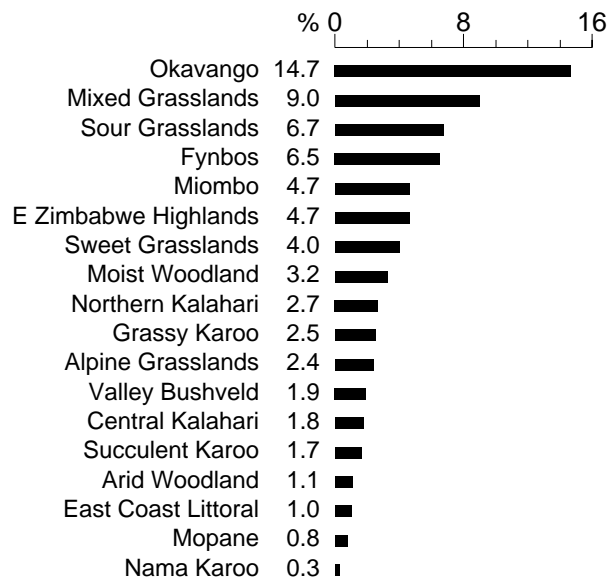
Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution appears not to have changed since the beginning of the 20th century. Although fairly common in the southwestern Cape Province, it is decreasing in numbers (Hockey *et al.* 1989). This is probably attributable to the

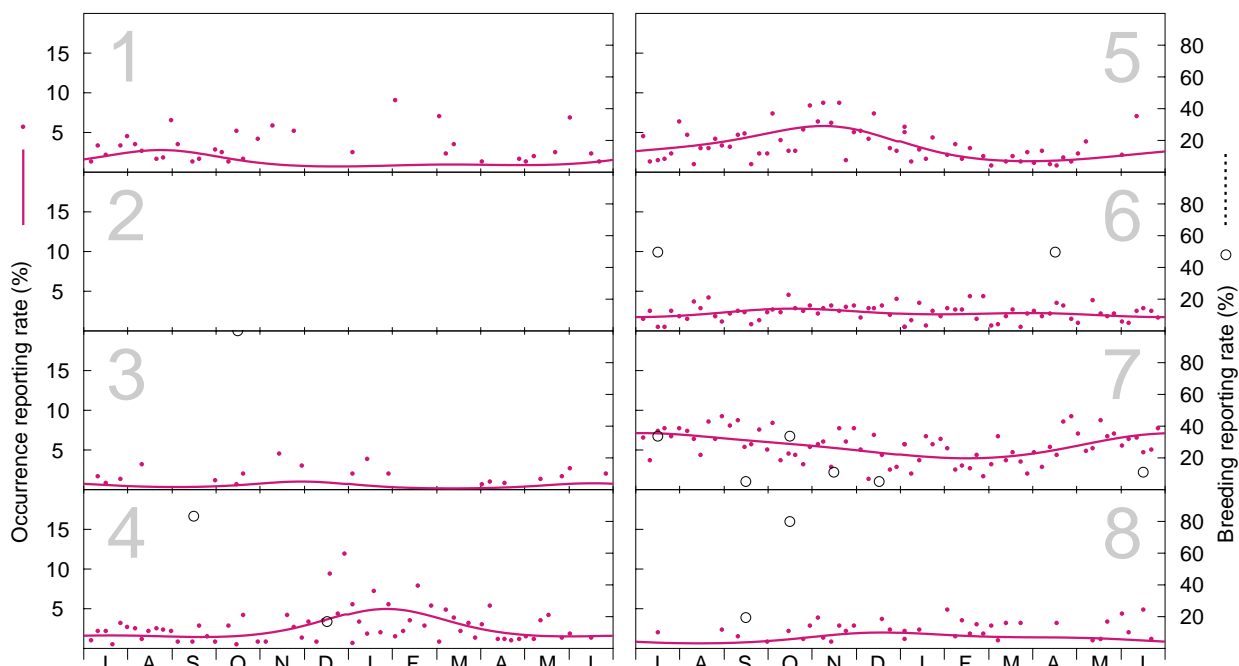
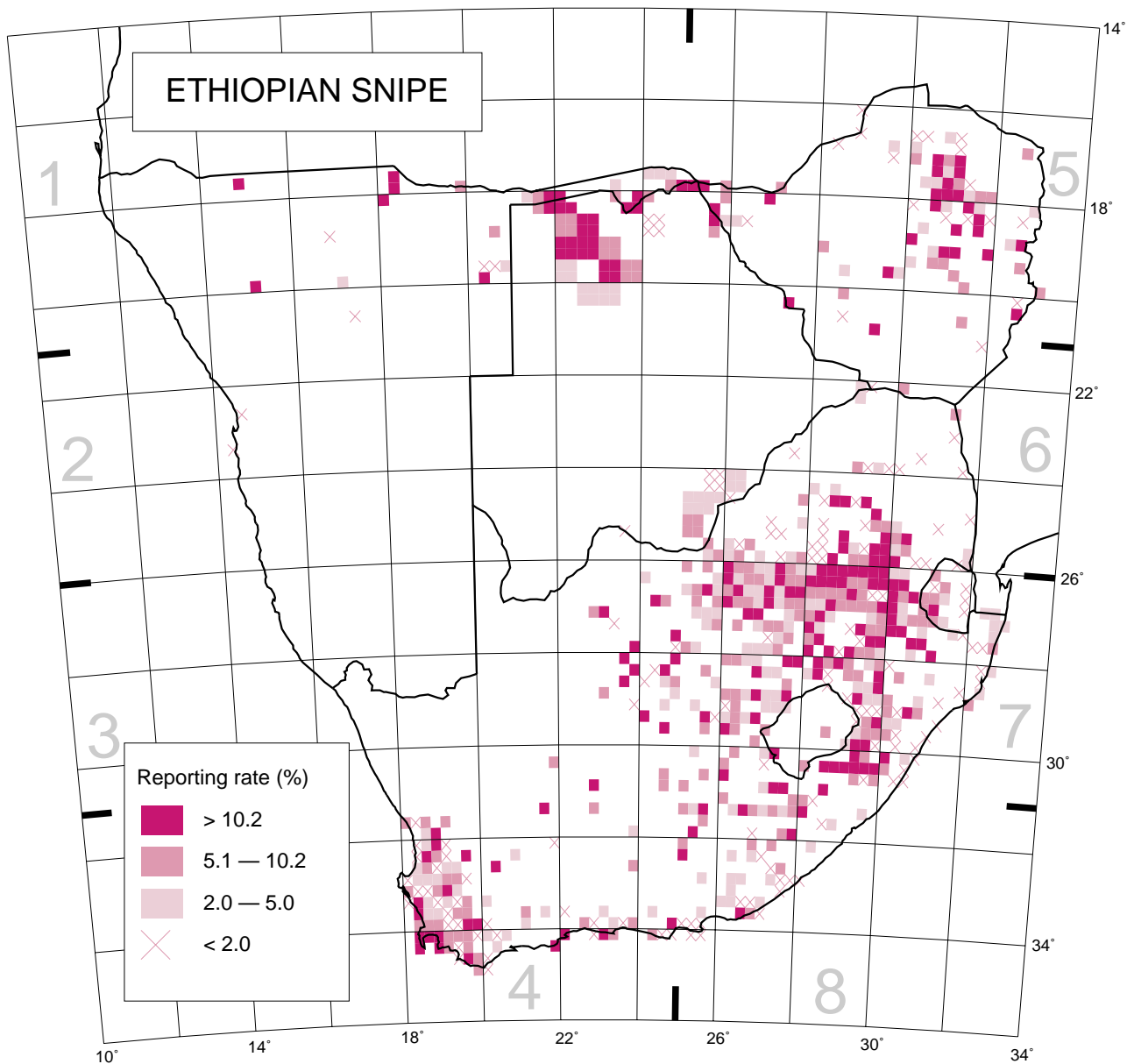
draining of natural wetlands for development; it has not adapted well to artificial wetlands, except for sewage works (Hockey *et al.* 1989). It used to be hunted for sport, but this no longer happens. The Ethiopian Snipe is not currently threatened, but its specialized feeding habits and requirement for natural wetlands make it vulnerable to the ongoing destruction of its wetland habitat.

G.L. Maclean

Recorded in 726 grid cells, 16.0%
Total number of records: 5740
Mean reporting rate for range: 7.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 46, 0, 28, 207, 283, 253, 1074, 71; Breeding: 0, 0, 1, 6, 0, 2, 18, 5.