

Bronzewing Courser

Bronsvlerkdrawwertjie

Rhinoptilus chalcopterus

The Bronzewing Courser occurs widely but sparsely south of the Sahara (Maclean 1993b). In the atlas region it occurs principally north of 26°S. Nocturnal and relatively silent birds such as the Bronzewing Courser are difficult to study, and conflicting reports have appeared in the literature about its status in southern Africa. It is localized wherever it is found, and is secretive when breeding. It can be locally common at times; e.g. eight road kills were found in 42 km in the southern Kalahari (C.J. Brown pers. comm.). Being a nocturnal woodland species it is unlikely to be confused with any other courser, but the Crowned Plover *Vanellus coronatus* is superficially similar and may also occur on dirt roads close to woodland at night.

Habitat: The vegetation analysis shows this species to be most frequent in Mopane woodland. It also frequents woodlands in the Okavango basin, and Arid Woodland and Miombo. While on the move or in nonbreeding quarters it may be found in any suitable open woodland and even occurs on suburban roads or in larger gardens. The majority of records is obtained on dirt roads at night where open terrain enables them to capture their invertebrate prey.

Movements: This courser has been described as a partial intra-African migrant (Benson *et al.* 1971), or as having seasonal movements not properly understood, with part of the population possibly being migratory (Irwin 1981). Alternatively it may be resident in the north of our area and migratory to the southeast September–May (Maclean 1993b). More locally, it is reported to be a nonbreeding summer migrant to the Transvaal, Botswana and KwaZulu-Natal (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Borello 1993; Brewster 1994a; Penry 1994).

The models and seasonal distribution maps further clarify the situation. It appears that a resident population in southern Africa is supplemented by nonbreeding birds from migratory populations to the north during the period November–May. It is likely that the higher rainfall of Tanzania, Zaire and Zambia would force this terrestrial feeder to vacate areas that become thickly vegetated, and to seek areas of lower rainfall with sparser vegetation. Later arrival of birds further west in Namibia and southern Botswana corresponds with a later rainy season in those areas. The models show a peak from January–June in Zones 5 and 6 and, as it is a pre-rains breeder, these late-arriving birds must come from outside the atlas region. Evidence from some lowveld squares in southern Zimbabwe and the northern Transvaal indicates that small numbers may be resident there, but the remainder of the apparently small southern breeding population, as indicated by the sparse distribution on the July–October maps, appears to be nomadic outside the breeding season.

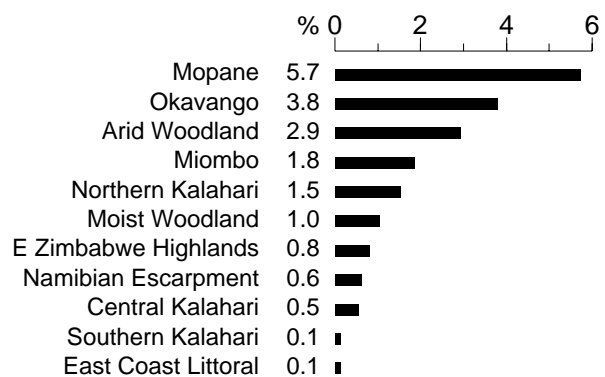
Breeding: It is known to breed in Zimbabwe from July–December with a peak September–November (Irwin 1981).

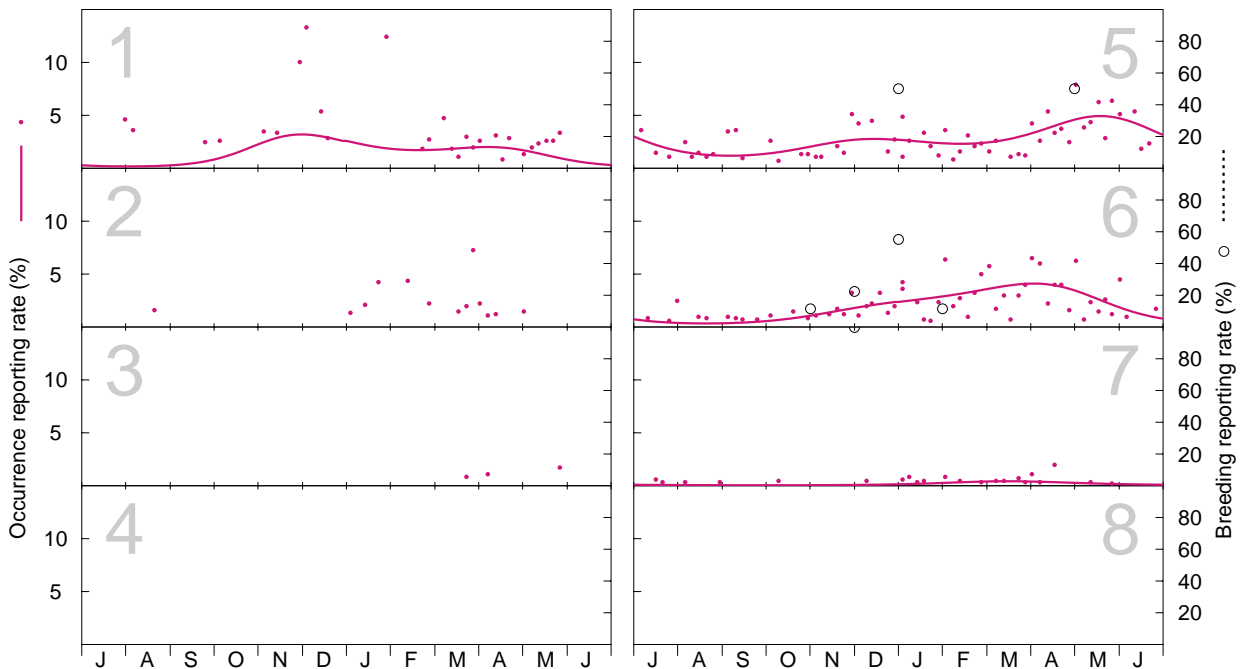
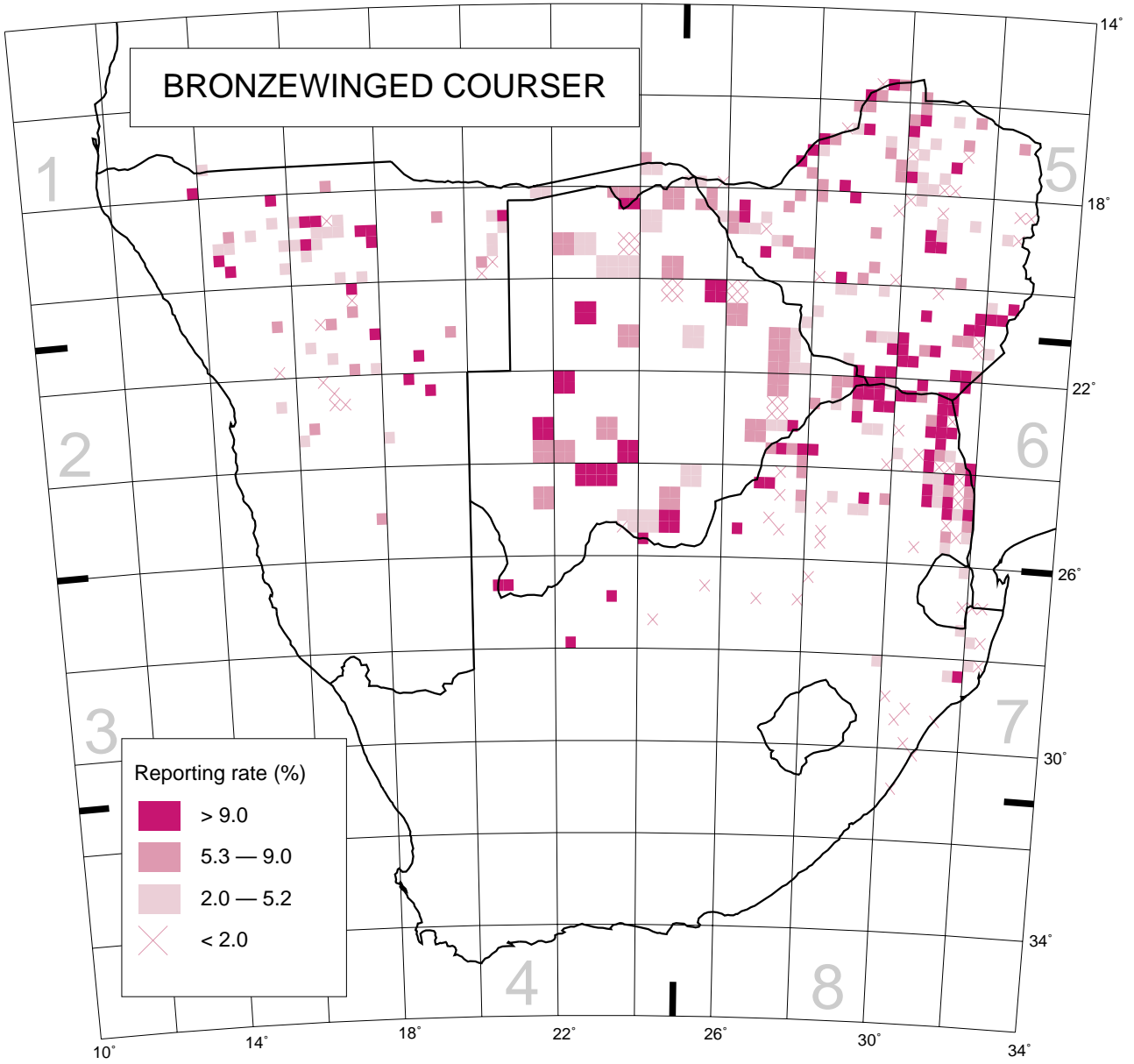
Historical distribution and conservation: There is no information available on its historical distribution, but habitat destruction in the form of woodland clearance in lowveld areas must have reduced breeding numbers. Owing to the Bronzewing Courser's nomadism, and its normally solitary behaviour, there is at present unlikely to be any major threat to the breeding population or to nonbreeding visitors.

A.J. Tree

Recorded in 470 grid cells, 10.4%
Total number of records: 1340
Mean reporting rate for range: 5.0%

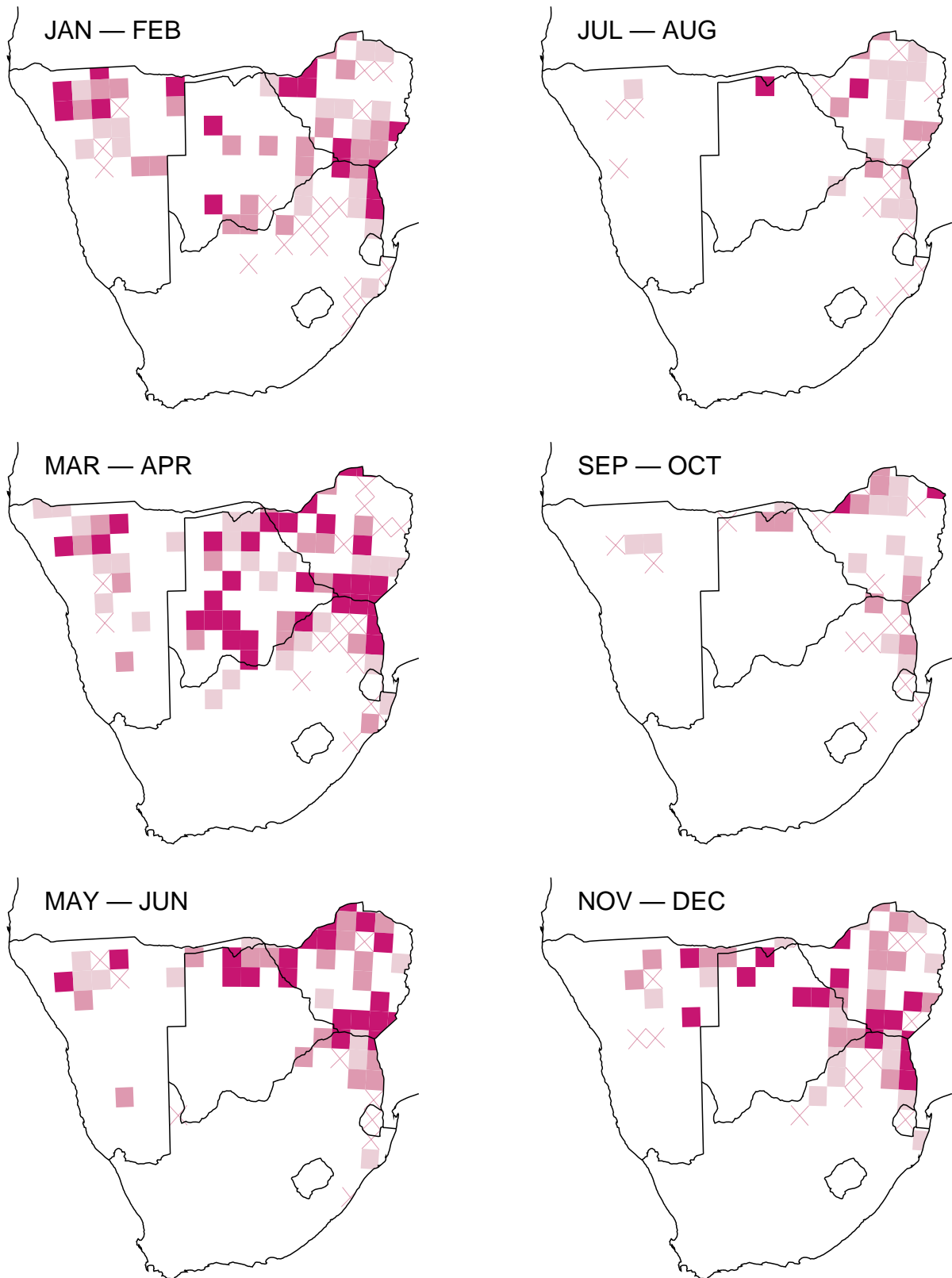
Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 45, 18, 3, 0, 228, 224, 33, 0; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 2, 9, 1, 0.

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Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.