

## Jacobin Cuckoo

### Bontnuwejaarsvoël

*Clamator jacobinus*

The Jacobin Cuckoo is widespread in the Afrotropical savannas, both north and south of the equator (Fry *et al.* 1988). The distribution in southern Africa extends from the southern Cape Province eastwards and northwards, through Kwa-Zulu-Natal and Transvaal to Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and westwards across Botswana and northern Namibia. There are strongholds in the Transvaal lowveld and in the hardveld of the western Transvaal and adjacent eastern Botswana; reporting rates drop sharply further west in Kalahari sandveld. It is scarce in the dry southern Kalahari and Karoo. The distribution shows a gap in the Transkei.

Three subspecies occur in the region during the austral summer: *C. j. jacobinus* and *pica* are nonbreeding migrants from northern Africa and India, while *serratus* is a breeding visitor (Rowan 1983).

Although it is similar to the Striped Cuckoo *C. levaillantii*, the Jacobin Cuckoo is relatively conspicuous and easy to detect and identify, even when not calling; the atlas data can be considered reliable and comprehensive.

**Habitat:** It inhabits dry open savannas, particularly *Acacia*, but avoids very arid country and mesic savannas and is entirely absent from forest' (Fry *et al.* 1988). The atlas data show that a wide variety of dry to moist woodlands are preferred, including miombo woodland, which is at variance with Rowan (1983), but confirms that it occurs in any woodland (Irwin 1981).

**Movements:** In the eastern Zones, it arrives slightly earlier in the north (Zones 5 and 6), from late September and early October onwards, than further south (Zones 7 and 8) where most birds start arriving from mid-October.

The staggering of departure times is more marked than that of arrival, being progressively later further north; there is a difference of nearly two months between the south and north. Comparison of Zones at the same latitudes indicates that, although reporting rates are generally lower in the west, the timing of arrival and departure is similar. The exception is the comparison of the arid Zone 2 with Zone 6; overall reporting rates are much lower in Zone 2, and the arrival starts two

months later. In Botswana, departure time was correlated with total rainfall during the summer, birds being recorded two months later at the end of a wet year than during drought years (Herremans 1994d).

Differences between the subspecies in timing of occurrence and different ranges within the region, if any, have not been unravelled.

**Breeding:** It is a brood parasite whose prime hosts are *Pycnonotus* bulbuls, the Sombre Bulbul *Andropadus importunus*, and the Fiscal Shrike *Lanius collaris* (Rowan 1983; Maclean 1993b). Egg-laying has been recorded in the region October–April, with a peak November–January (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Rowan 1983; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1996a; Brown & Clinning in press). The atlas data suggest breeding to be a month later than recorded in the literature, but this results from a bias towards the recording of recently fledged young.

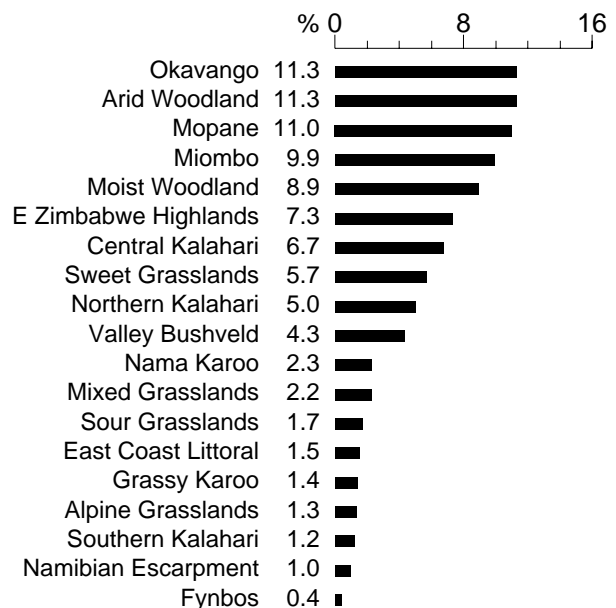
**Interspecific relationships:** Because the distribution map represents both breeding and nonbreeding visitors, it is not straightforward to relate it to the distributions of host species. Breeding was, however, reported from all Zones and it can be deduced that it must use Blackeyed *Pycnonotus barbatus* and Redeyed *P. nigricans* Bulbuls extensively as hosts, but there is no distributional evidence for exclusive use of either the Cape Bulbul *P. capensis* or the Sombre Bulbul. The bulbuls, however, all have parts of their range where the cuckoo does not occur, but least so for the Blackeyed Bulbul. **Historical distribution and conservation:** It was once quite common in the Cape Peninsula (3418A) but is now only a rare visitor to the southwestern Cape Province (Rowan 1983; Hockey *et al.* 1989). A more extensive distribution in the arid interior in the present map (cf. Rowan 1983; Maclean 1993b) is most probably due to better coverage, rather than to a real change in distribution.

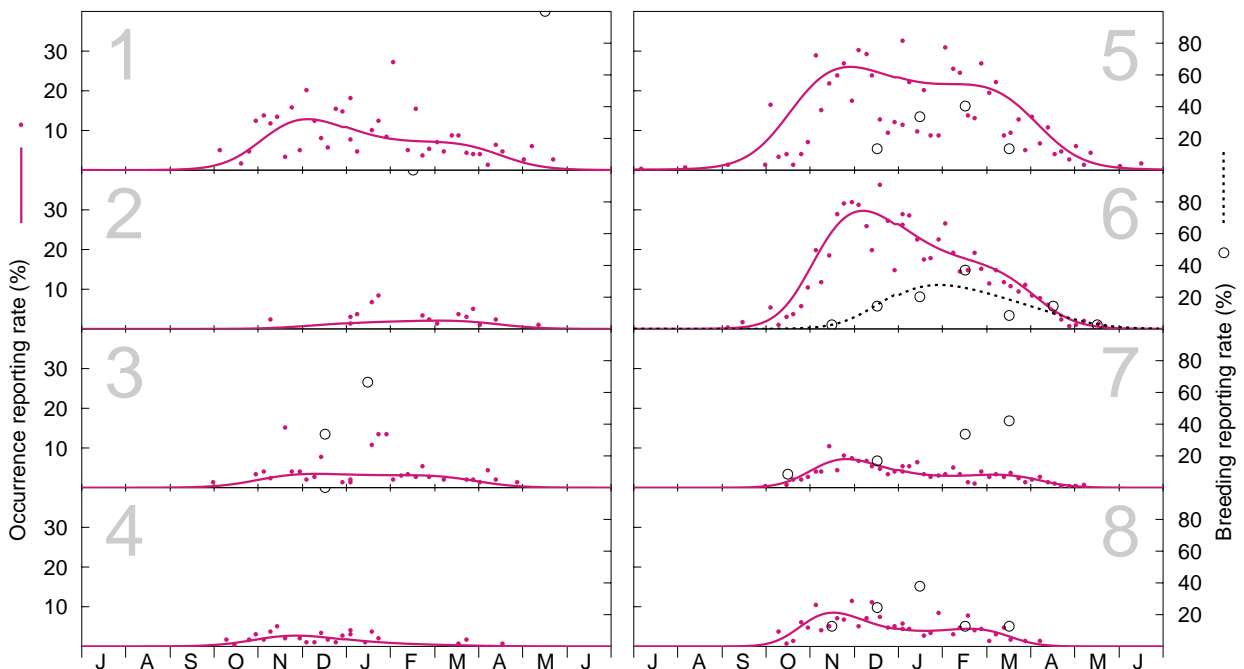
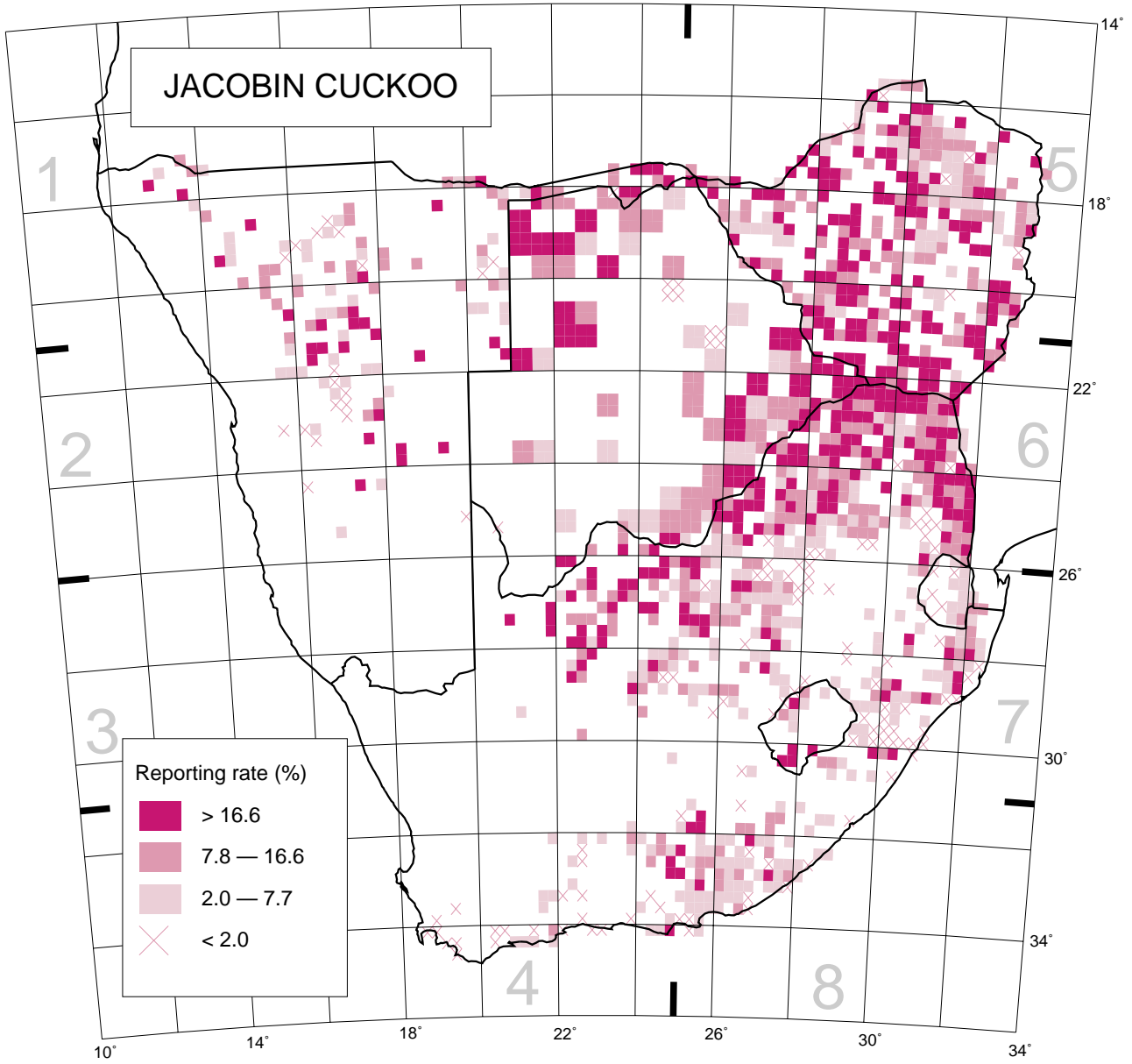
The Jacobin Cuckoo is common and under no threat, but the gap in the distribution in the Transkei probably indicates sensitivity to destruction of woodland habitat.

*M. Herremans and C.J. Vernon*

Recorded in 1341 grid cells, 29.6%  
Total number of records: 6655  
Mean reporting rate for range: 7.8%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 124, 27, 68, 55, 968, 1131, 419, 132; Breeding: 3, 1, 3, 2, 15, 35, 12, 8.