



Pearlspotted Owl Witkoluil

Glaucidium perlatum

The Pearlspotted Owl is the commonest owl in savanna woodlands in southern Africa. Its distribution here is part of a broad range that extends north through eastern Africa into Ethiopia and the Sudan and, south of the Sahara, across into West Africa. Two subspecies are recognized in southern Africa and have continuous ranges: *G. p. licua* in the northern Cape Province and in the southern regions of Namibia, Botswana and the Transvaal, and *diurnum* north of this range (Clancey 1980b).

Reporting rates were highest in Botswana, the northern and western Transvaal, northern Cape Province, and in central and northern Namibia. Populations in these areas can be dense, adjacent pairs nesting as close as 200 m apart (Steyn 1982b; pers. obs. of nest boxes in central Namibia). In the Settlers district (2428DC), however, densities were much lower because it was limited to where nest holes, excavated previously by Crested Barbets *Trachyphonus vaillantii*, were available in alien trees near homesteads (Mendelsohn 1989a). There were no suitable nest sites in the surrounding *Acacia* woodlands in this area.

It is often active during the day, more so than other species, except the Marsh Owl *Asio capensis*. It is also very vocal, producing a characteristic and well-known series of whistling calls; it is thus more frequently reported than most other nocturnal birds.

Habitat: Throughout its range it is associated with relatively open woodlands, avoiding the tallest, densest moist

woodlands, such as some extensive miombo regions in eastern Zimbabwe and tropical forests, grasslands and also extremely arid areas. This is reflected in the vegetation analysis, with the highest reporting rates all occurring in woodlands. Within suitable woodlands, areas of sparse grass cover are preferred (Fry *et al.* 1988), as are tree species in which nest holes are available. Nest boxes are also used readily.

Movements: Regular movements are not known; pairs probably remain resident on their territories all year round when conditions are suitable. Vagrants do appear in unsuitable habitat (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), and the species declined in drought-stricken areas in the Kalahari in 1992–93, most likely through emigration (M. Herremans pers. comm.). The high concentration in the upper Limpopo Valley and the seasonal variation in Zone 6 suggest that there could be altitudinal and drought-related movement into this area in winter. Diurnal activity is most frequent during the winter months and this probably also accounts for higher reporting rates at that time.

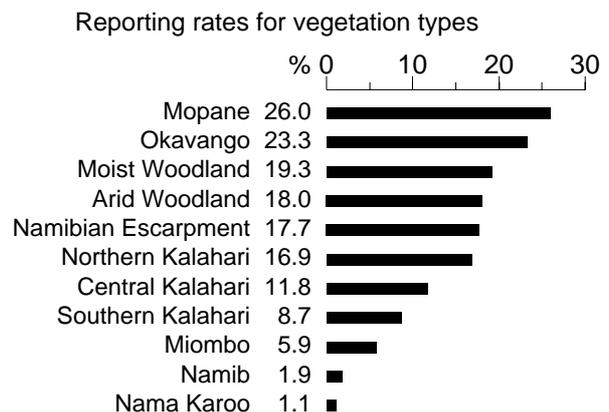
Breeding: Breeding takes place in early summer; most eggs are laid September–November in Zimbabwe, the Transvaal and Namibia (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brown & Clinning in press). Most atlas records span September–February. While many vertebrates are caught, it feeds predominantly on insects and other arthropods; laying in early summer means that young birds are present when prey is most abundant.

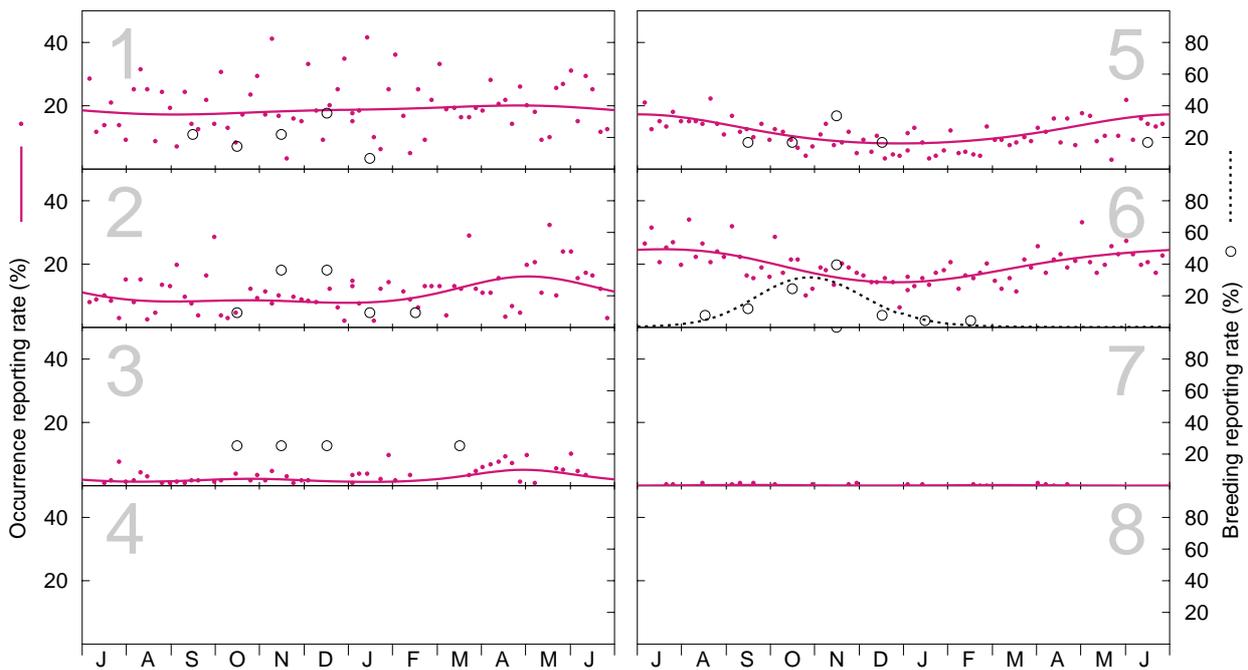
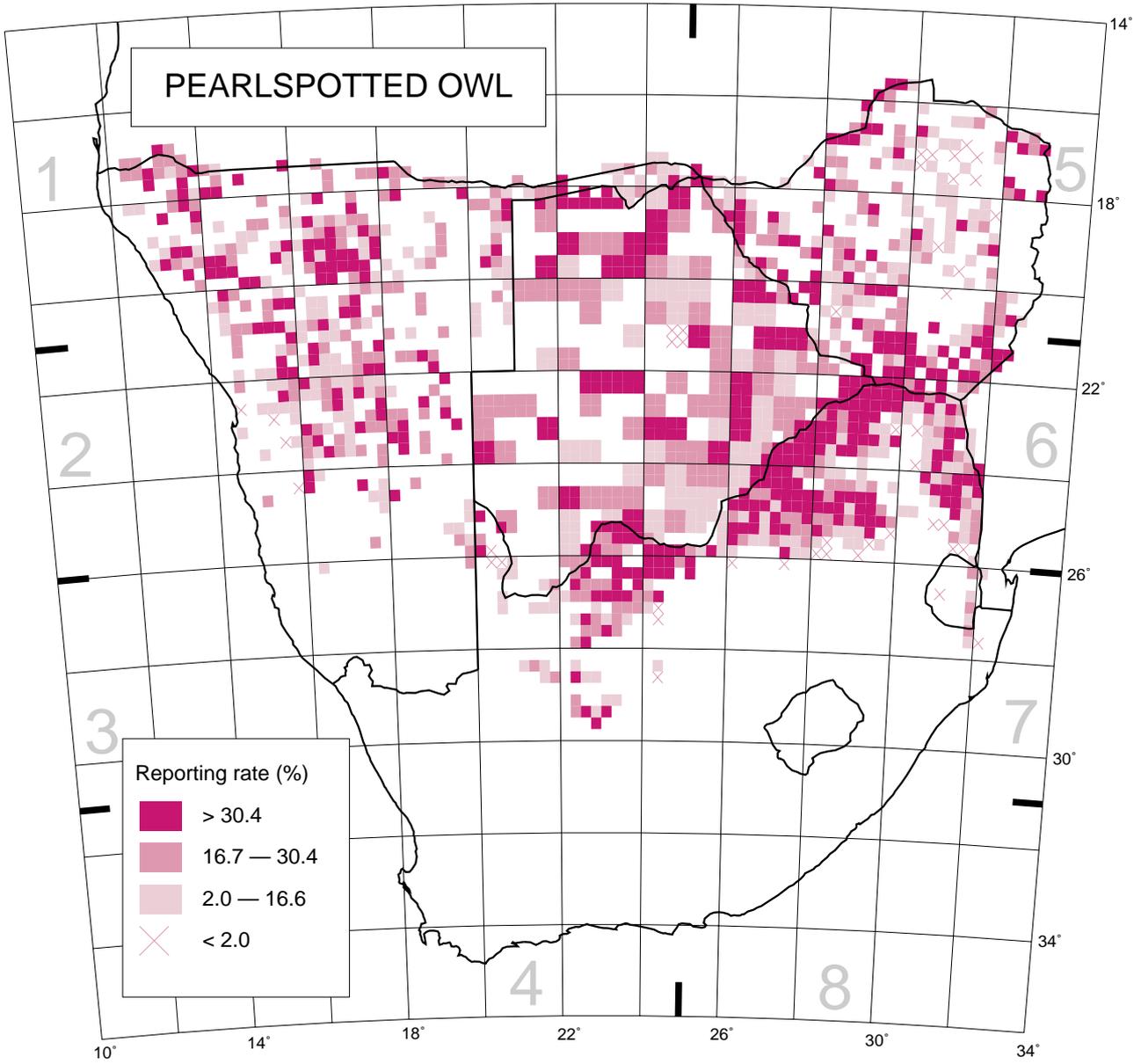
Interspecific relationships: It competes vigorously with other hole-nesting species for cavities in trees, especially woodpeckers, barbets, hoopoes, starlings and hornbills. In Namibia, owls nesting later than usual are often evicted, and probably eaten, by Monteiro's Hornbill *Tockus monteiri* prospecting the use of the same nest boxes (pers. obs.). Although often sympatric with the Barred Owl *G. capense*, the latter tend to prefer more mesic, taller and denser woodlands.

Historical distribution and conservation: No evidence of major changes in distribution in historical times is available. Being common in habitat which is widespread and relatively safe from large-scale degradation makes Pearl-spotted Owl populations relatively secure.

J.M. Mendelsohn

Recorded in 1439 grid cells, 31.7%
Total number of records: 9627
Mean reporting rate for range: 22.2%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 623, 396, 135, 0, 1064, 2255, 26, 0; Breeding: 14, 11, 4, 0, 6, 25, 1, 0.