

Pel's Fishing Owl

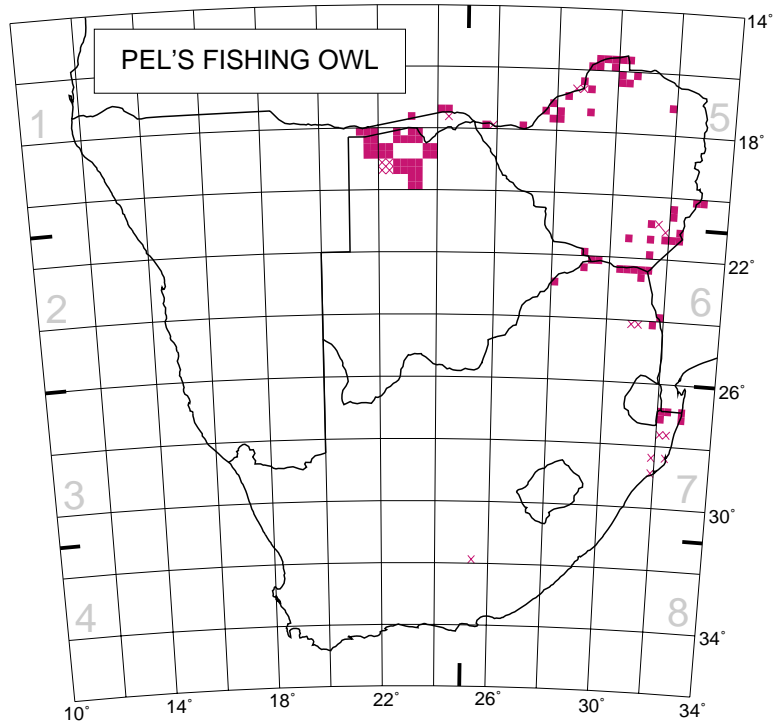
Visuil

Scotopelia peli

Populations of Pel's Fishing Owl are scattered across tropical and semi-tropical Africa south of the Sahara, especially where large, slow-flowing rivers and swamps are overhung by large and shady trees (Fry *et al.* 1988). Such conditions are met in only a few, discrete places in southern Africa: on the Okavango, Kwando, Linyanti and Chobe rivers of northern Botswana, the Zambezi River in northern Zimbabwe, the Limpopo, Levuvhu and Olifants rivers in southeastern Zimbabwe and northern and eastern Transvaal, and in northern KwaZulu-Natal. It was reported more frequently from the Okavango than elsewhere, including the nearby Linyanti River, from which the species is largely absent (R. Crous pers. comm.). It may be relatively common in Mozambique. In Swaziland, it was a breeding resident in the Umbuluzi gorge (2632AA), and possibly in other river gorges in the Lebombo Mountains, but it has not been recorded in that country since February 1984 when most of the riverine forests in these gorges were swept away by floods during Cyclone Demoina (Parker 1994). Two historical records exist for coastal Transkei (Skead 1967b). There was a remarkable record from the Great Fish River (3125CD) near Cradock in the eastern Cape Province during the atlas period (Collett 1987) and there is an unsubstantiated historical record at Cape Point Nature Reserve (3418AD) in the southwestern Cape Province (Winterbottom 1968a; Middlemiss 1969; Hockey *et al.* 1989). There are also post-atlas records from the Chobe River near Kasane (1725C) (R.D. Randall pers. comm.).

As a large, nocturnal raptor it is both numerically uncommon and inconspicuous. Densities may be high in some areas: 23 pairs were found along 60 km of the Okavango River with a minimum home range of 1 km² per pair in some areas of the Okavango (Liversedge 1980). Thirty pairs are estimated to be resident in the Kruger National Park (A.C. Kemp pers. comm.), with eight pairs along 18 km of the Luvuvhu River (2231C) (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The total population in the atlas region is probably < 500 pairs.

Large riparian trees are used as roost and nest sites. Local movements occur as waters rise and fall, itinerant birds some-



Recorded in 112 grid cells, 2.5%
 Total number of records: 436
 Mean reporting rate for range: 8.1%

times appearing on farm dams (Irwin 1981). Thirty-three breeding records from the Okavango span January–June with peak egg-laying February–April (Skinner 1996a). The few atlas breeding records span April–October, but include records of chicks and fledglings.

It may be attacked and injured by African Fish Eagles *Haliaeetus vocifer* (Liversedge 1980). It is particularly sensitive to clearing and disturbance of tall riparian fringes. Although marginal in southern Africa, its populations should be monitored as part of an effort to conserve the rare riverine habitat which it requires. Pel's Fishing Owl is designated 'rare' in South Africa (Brooke 1984b).

J.M. Mendelsohn

