

Giant Kingfisher

Reuse Visvanger

Ceryle maxima

The Giant Kingfisher is confined to Africa south of the Sahara. In southern Africa it is restricted to the moister eastern and southwestern parts, except where suitable bodies of water are present in more arid westerly areas, e.g. the Okavango Delta and the Orange and Kunene rivers.

It is solitary as a rule, pairs maintaining territories of about 4 km in length on suitable rivers (Fry *et al.* 1988). It is generally sparsely distributed and rather shy, but because of its size, distinctive appearance and loud vocalizations, it is conspicuous.

Habitat: It frequents large rivers and their major tributaries, particularly with well-wooded steep banks, but may also be found on small streams. In the Drakensberg in open montane habitat, it hunts from boulders in streams, feeding largely on crabs (C.J. Brown pers. comm.). It occurs in estuaries and the intertidal zone along the coast where it is often to be seen perching on rocks and mooring posts. It is also found along the shores of lakes and reservoirs, and it visits ornamental ponds in parks if they carry stocks of fish. It is a regular visitor to fisheries in order to feed on fry. It mostly keeps to the more leafy parts of riparian cover whilst still-hunting, perching relatively high on branches (Monadjem *et al.* 1994a).

Movements: It is largely sedentary as far as has been determined, but the models show clear seasonal variation in reporting rates in Zones 1, 6 and, to a lesser extent, 7. By contrast, there is little evidence for seasonal changes in reporting rates in Zones 3–5 and 8. The reasons for these differences are unknown. Irwin (1981) recorded instances of Giant Kingfishers feeding at ephemeral pools in flooded Mopane woodland, suggesting that the species is prepared to move into and exploit temporarily available wetland habitat.

Breeding: The atlas data mainly span August–January. Published breeding information from the southwestern Cape Province (Winterbottom 1968a), KwaZulu-Natal (Dean 1971), the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981) shows that egg-laying largely occurs August–October throughout southern Africa, but also well out of the usual season, e.g. March–July in Zimbabwe.

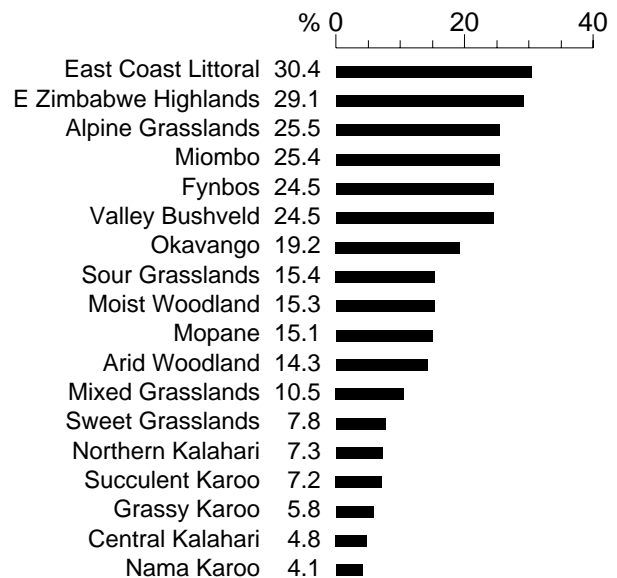
Interspecific relationships: See the text for the Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*.

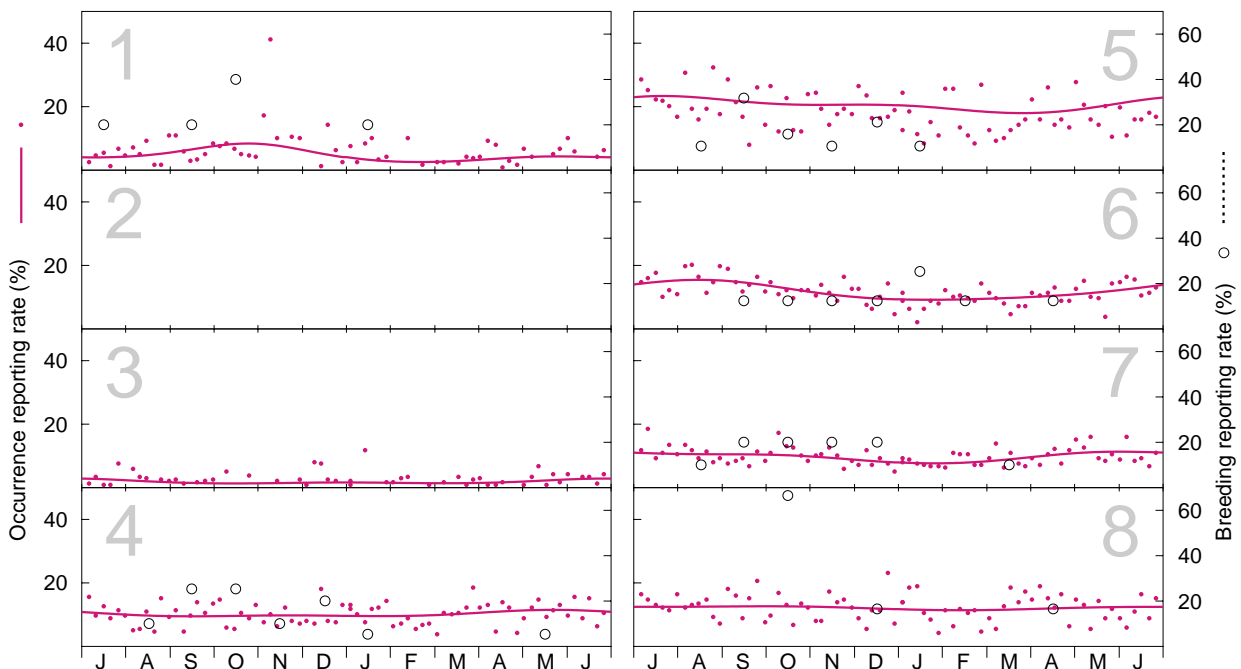
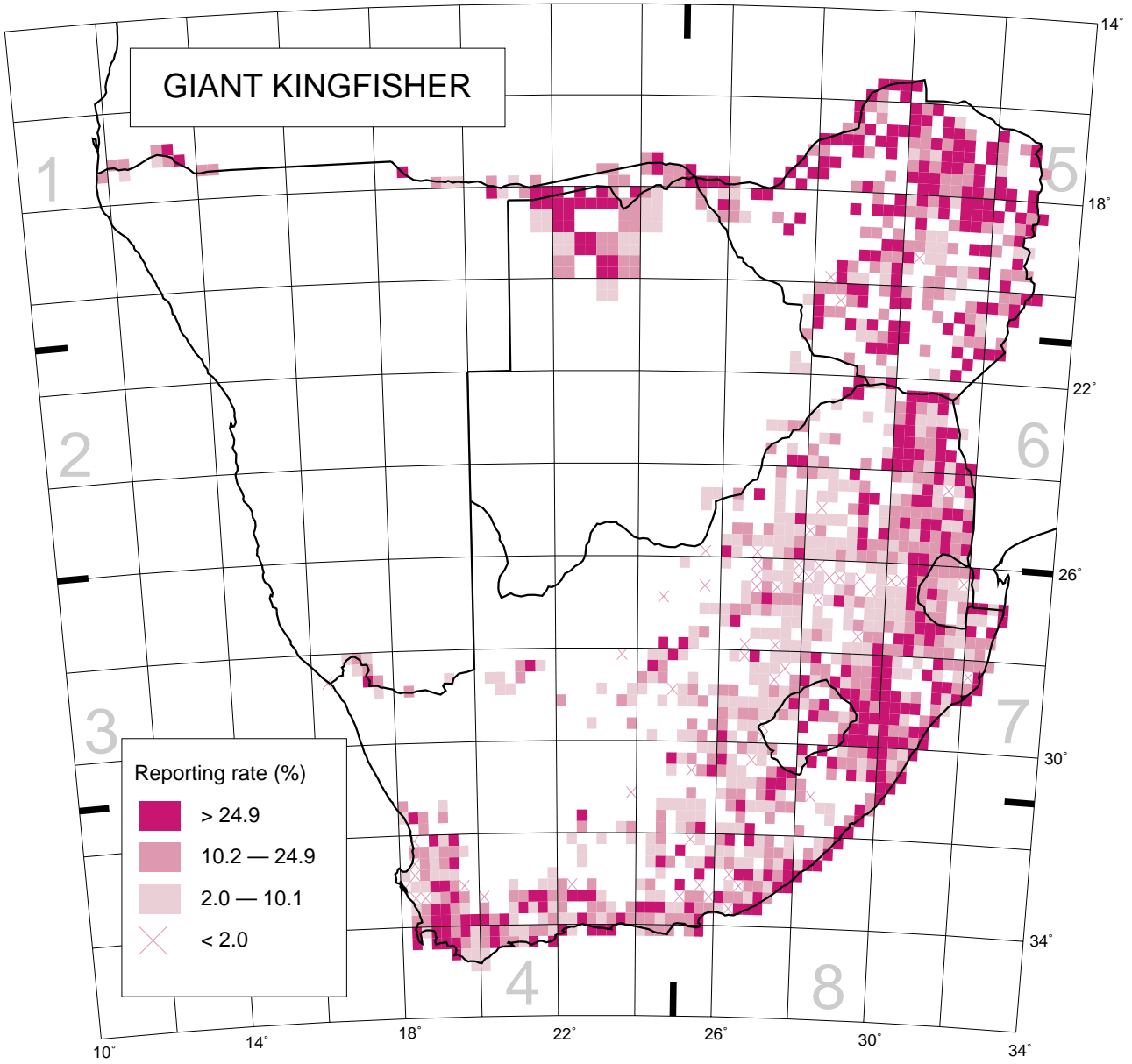
Historical distribution and conservation: Destruction of Giant Kingfishers at trout hatcheries does occur, but is unlikely to affect the conservation status of the species. It is not threatened in southern Africa at present but, as with other piscivorous kingfishers, industrial and agricultural pollution of rivers may be affecting it locally (e.g. O'Sharkey 1975). Afforestation with alien trees around headwaters can cause perennial streams to become seasonal, affecting not only the quality of the habitat but also the survival of prey organisms.

P.A. Clancey

Recorded in 1319 grid cells, 29.1%
Total number of records: 22 835
Mean reporting rate for range: 20.9%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 155, 0, 103, 889, 1804, 1338, 1903, 668; Breeding: 5, 0, 0, 20, 19, 8, 10, 6.