

Pygmy Kingfisher

Dwergvisvanger

Ispidina picta

The Pygmy Kingfisher is a widely distributed diminutive kingfisher confined to the Afrotropics. It is distributed both to the north and south of the equator in woodland biomes, with a separate race present within the equatorial rainforests. In the atlas area it is an intra-African migrant occurring in Zimbabwe, the Caprivi Strip, marginally in Botswana, the Transvaal, Swaziland and along the east coast and adjacent interior. It is relatively abundant along the east coast littoral and the Transvaal escarpment.

The genus *Ispidina* is confined to the Afrotropics and the island of Madagascar, and comprises two species, both polytypic. Three subspecies of the Pygmy Kingfisher are recognized, though a fourth has been proposed, and may yet be shown to be valid (Wood 1989). Only *I. p. natalensis* occurs in southern Africa.

It is slightly smaller than the comparable Malachite Kingfisher *Alcedo cristata*, differing in lacking a crest, having the rufous on the face extending above the eye and the crown blackish and finely transversely banded with ultramarine. Both species have wholly red bills, but that of the Pygmy Kingfisher is stubbier.

It occurs singly or in pairs. It is rather secretive in habits, but the atlas data are considered to be reasonably comprehensive.

Habitat: The vegetation analysis shows a preference for woodland habitats; it normally occupies dry land and is not necessarily found near water, though near the edge of its range it frequents riverine woodland (e.g. the middle Limpopo Valley along the Botswana–Transvaal border). On the southern breeding grounds it is most frequent in coastal woodland and more open evergreen forest below 1000 m. In Zimbabwe, where it is present in *Brachystegia* woodland, it is not recorded above 1350 m (Irwin 1981). In Mozambique it also occurs in *Brachystegia* as well as in plantations and gardens. Southern migrants are found in forest-edge habitats in central African rainforest regions, where they may occur alongside other races. During migration it can occur in almost any habitat.

Movements: The southern savanna subspecies *natalensis* migrates north after breeding to sojourn in the eastcentral tropics. Migration takes it as far as 2–3°N in Zaire and Uganda and to the Tana River to the east, and perhaps also southern Somalia (Prigogine 1973; Clancey 1992b). It is present on its breeding grounds from late September/October through to April, with some birds present in the breeding range as late as May (particularly in Mozambique). Sometimes birds are recorded in winter, but to what extent this represents confusion with the Malachite Kingfisher is unknown. There is some passage through Botswana October–November and February–March (Herremans 1994d), accounting for scattered records in the arid areas, and indicating that some birds move in a north-westerly direction.

Breeding: Southern African populations nest September–February, peaking October–January (Irwin 1981; Maclean 1993b). This agrees

well with atlas data which show breeding October–March. The equatorial rainforest race breeds more or less throughout the year and is probably sedentary.

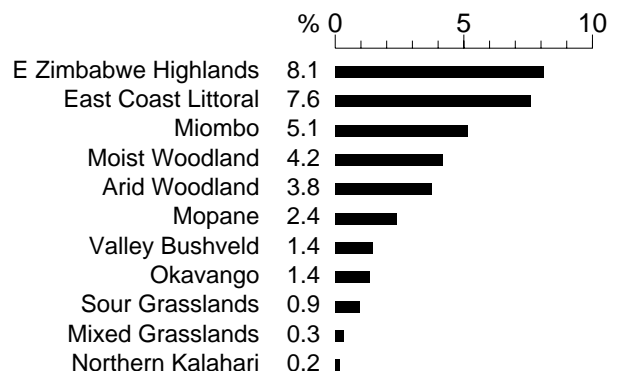
Interspecific relationships: Despite its being a bird of dry habitat, the distribution pattern in southern Africa bears more resemblance to that of the aquatic Halfcollared Kingfisher *Alcedo semitorquata* than to the four woodland kingfishers of the genus *Halcyon*.

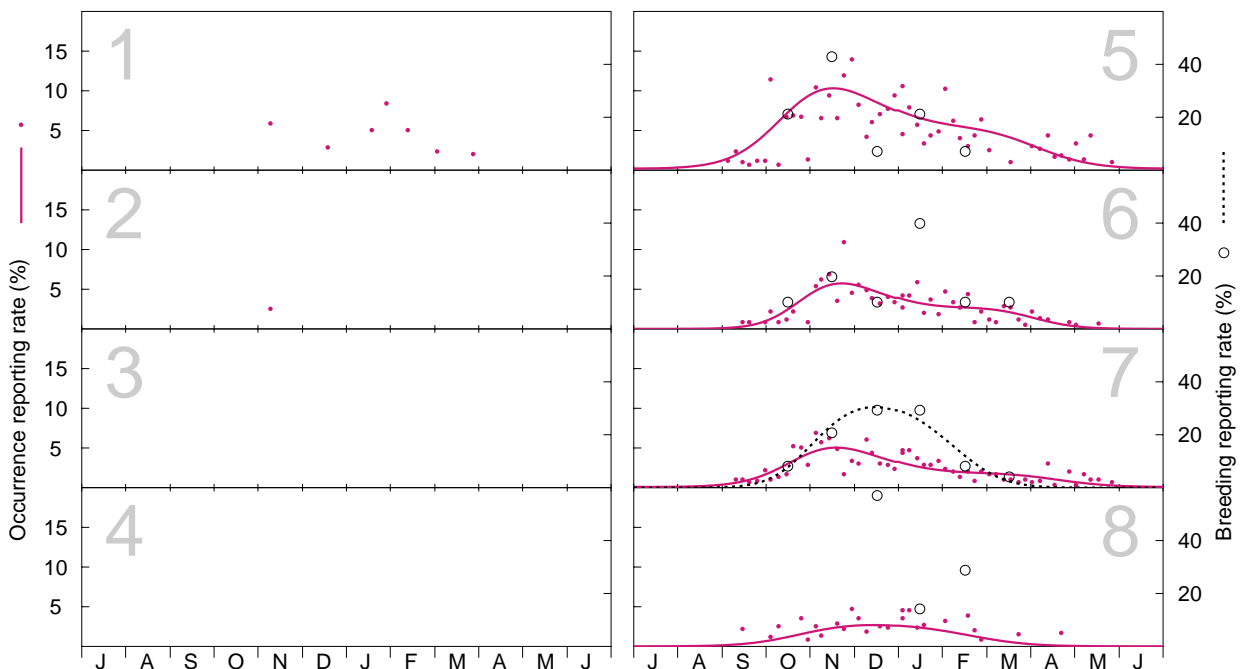
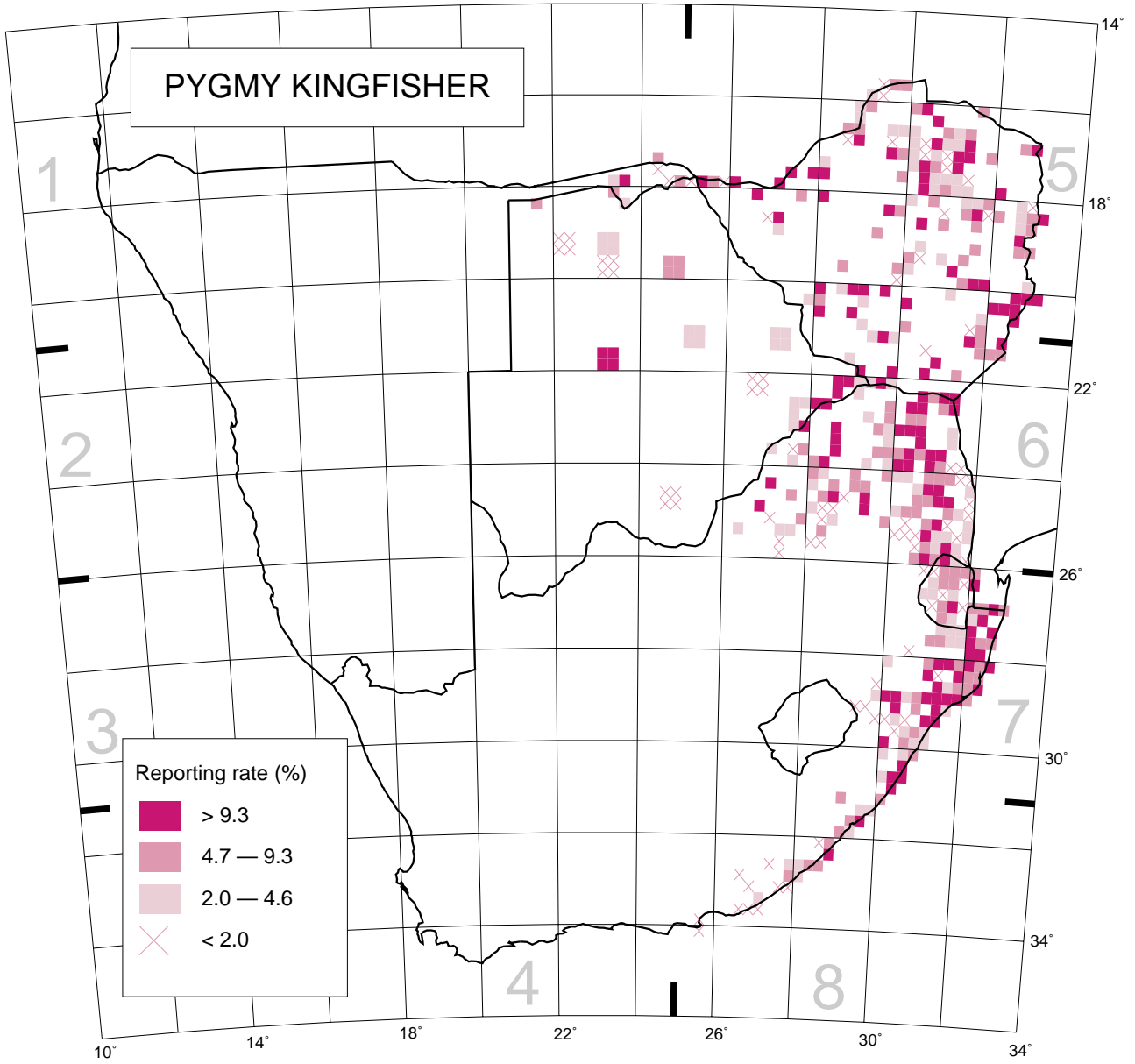
Historical distribution and conservation: Migratory movements are seemingly achieved at night when numbers are killed by colliding with buildings (Fry *et al.* 1988); this may be exacting a heavy annual toll on far southern populations. The Pygmy Kingfisher is not considered to be a threatened species at present.

P.A. Clancey

Recorded in 464 grid cells, 10.2%
Total number of records: 2665
Mean reporting rate for range: 6.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 8, 1, 0, 0, 345, 209, 348, 51; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 14, 10, 24, 7.