

Greyhooded Kingfisher

Gryskopvisvanger

Halcyon leucocephala

The Greyhooded Kingfisher is both a breeding and a nonbreeding summer visitor to southern Africa. It is uncommon in South Africa but locally common in Zimbabwe and northern Botswana. It extends from northern Namibia, eastward to northern and eastern Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Transvaal north of the highveld, and northern Swaziland to about 26°S.

Despite the scientific name, the species does not have a white head; the pallor of the head is simply due to the bleaching effect of the sun. It is not overtly linked to other African *Halcyon* kingfishers. It is polytypic with five races being recognized (Clancey 1992b; Fry *et al.* 1992).

It differs from other southern African *Halcyon* spp. in its relatively small size, greyish head and breast, unstreaked underside with chestnut or pale orange-brown belly and flanks.

On its breeding grounds the Greyhooded Kingfisher occurs solitarily or in pairs, often perching inconspicuously in leafy cover. Nonbreeding visitors are silent and rather easily overlooked if not flushed.

Habitat: It is found in almost any type of well-developed woodland, including *Acacia* and Mopane. It seemingly prefers a relatively mesic woodland habitat for breeding. Nonbreeding migrants occur also in relatively degraded areas in bushveld and even at sewage farms. Occurrence and numbers are dependent on rainfall; more birds arrive in wet years and occur further south in relatively arid areas (Herremans 1994d; Penry 1994). It breeds in a tunnel excavated by a pair in a sand or clay bank in woodland.

Movements: *H. l. pallidiventris*, the southern breeding subspecies, arrives in September and leaves in April. A three-stage migration, as known from the northern savanna belt (Fry *et al.* 1992), also occurs in southern Africa: birds

breed in the more tropical regions (e.g. northern Zambia) in the hot dry season and move south into the relatively arid parts of the subcontinent, including northern Botswana and Namibia, during the peak of the rainy season, before moving north at the end of the rains to equatorial nonbreeding grounds (Aspinwall 1984a, 1995; Herremans 1994d).

Significant numbers arrive in Zone 1 only after mid-December and the majority of these birds are nonbreeding visitors which undergo a complete moult in the area (Herremans 1994d). Photographs of migrants occurring well south of the breeding grounds of *pallidiventris* indicate that one of the northern migratory subspecies – either nominate *leucocephala* or *semicaerulea* – also reaches southern Africa during the course of its southbound movements (Clancey 1992b). Specimens are needed to determine which of these subspecies is involved. One bird was recorded as far south as Cape Town (3318CD) in May 1988 (Hockey *et al.* 1989). The species is a nocturnal migrant.

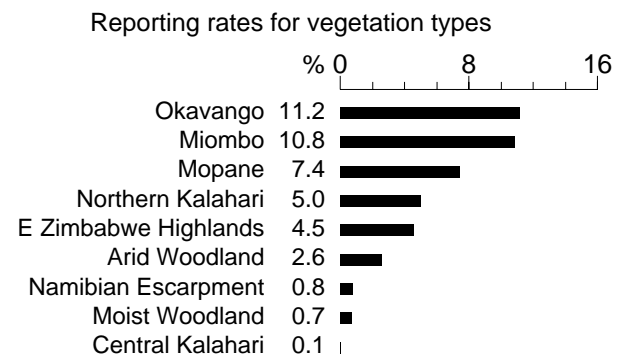
Breeding: Transvaal nesting records are from November–December (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Irwin (1981) and Maclean (1993b) gave a more extended breeding season: September–December, peaking October–November. The few atlas records confirm this.

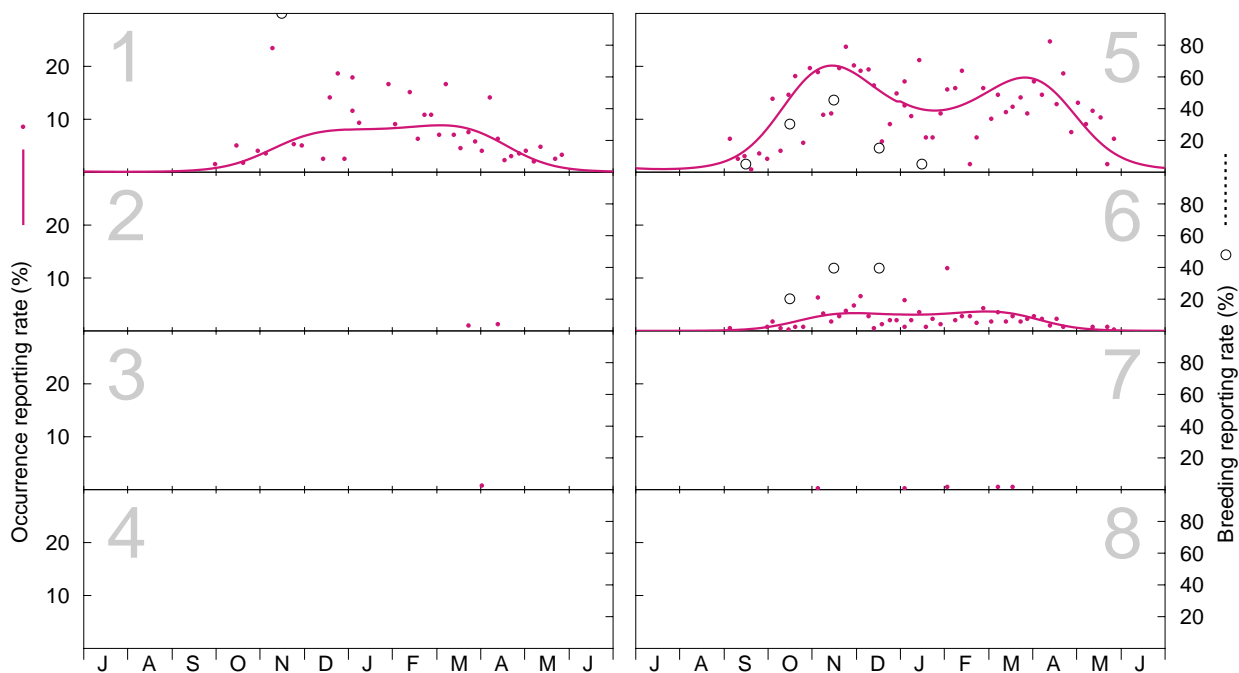
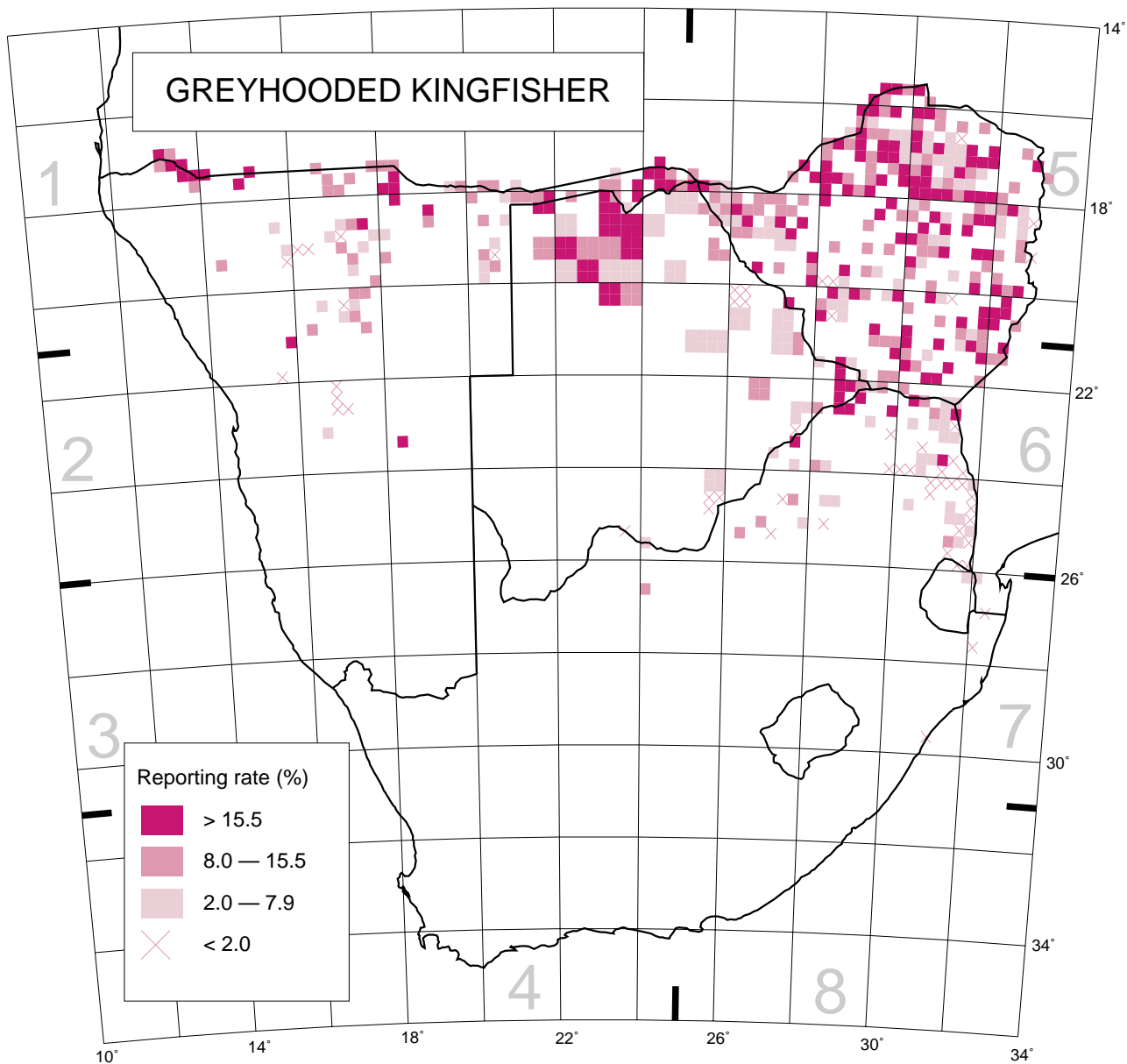
Interspecific relationships: Irwin (1981) suggested that Greyhooded and Brownhooded *H. albiventris* Kingfishers are in ecological competition, as both are bank-nesting species. The Greyhooded Kingfisher overlaps widely with the Woodland Kingfisher *H. senegalensis*, but there appears to be some complementarity in the centres of distribution and abundance of breeding birds in Zimbabwe and the Transvaal, while there is some complementarity between Greyhooded and Brownhooded Kingfishers from western Zimbabwe westward. It is known sometimes to use the walls of Aardvark *Orycteropus afer* burrows as sites for their nest tunnels.

Historical distribution and conservation: It is apparently not threatened in southern Africa as a whole, but was included in the South African Red Data book (Brooke 1984b) as 'indeterminate'. Accidents during nocturnal movement through built-up areas claim a number of victims (Irwin 1981).

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Recorded in 557 grid cells, 12.3%
Total number of records: 2010
Mean reporting rate for range: 7.8%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 120, 2, 1, 0, 857, 189, 5, 0; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 0, 20, 5, 0, 0.