

# Hoopoe

## Hoepoep

*Upupa epops*

The Hoopoe is widely distributed in southern Africa, absent only from the most arid parts of the Karoo and desert biomes. Elsewhere, gaps in the distribution are likely to be the result of inadequate coverage, except in Lesotho and the Transkei where anthropogenic factors are probably responsible, given that comparable areas to the northeast and southwest are occupied. Elsewhere in Africa and Madagascar it occurs widely in savanna regions. Its distribution extends through most of Europe, the Middle East, and into India, Indo-China and China. Breeding Afrotropical birds are considered to constitute a separate species, *U. africana*, by Sibley & Monroe (1990) but Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire (1993) disagree. The ranges of the two subspecies recognized by Clancy (1980b) are continuous on the present map.

It occurs singly, in pairs, or in small family groups. It is conspicuous by virtue of its plumage and vocalizations, and therefore had one of the highest mean reporting rates.

**Habitat:** The vegetation analysis shows a catholic use of habitats, but this is partly the result of the species' colonization of parks, gardens, orchards and plantations of alien trees in otherwise unsuitable biomes. The map shows areas of high reporting rates which appear to correspond well with patches of tall savanna thornveld. It is essentially a woodland bird which is found in all natural and secondary types of woodland, provided that they are not too dense. Its use of riparian woodlands can be seen in its linear distribution along the Orange River, but it does not drink (Fry *et al.* 1988). It is not found in the interior of indigenous forests.

It forages on bare ground or short grass, and favours lawns which it probes with its bill. It also probes and scatters leaves and dry dung in search of insects. The Hoopoe appears to avoid conditions which are either very wet or very dry; this can be expected in a species which forages for insects on the ground and it is presumably an important factor in determining its local and longer distance movements.

**Movements:** Most Palearctic Hoopoes migrate to Africa and southern Asia in the nonbreeding season, but these birds do not reach southern Africa (Fry *et al.* 1988). African populations are known to be either migratory within Africa, nomadic or resident; this also applies to southern African populations, although their patterns of movement have never been described in detail (cf. Irwin 1981; Fry *et al.* 1988; Maclean 1993b). The atlas data confirm the combination of resident, migratory and possibly nomadic behaviour, and the models and seasonal maps also provide some new insights.

In winter–spring it is most abundant in the mesic eastern parts of the subcontinent, as well as the southern and southwestern Cape Province (models peak September–November; see map for July–August). The reverse is true in summer when relative abundance is high in the Kalahari, central and northern Namibia, and a marked decrease in reporting rates is apparent in the western and southern Cape Province, KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland and eastern Zimbabwe (see map for March–April). The transitions between these two extremes are less



clear but it appears that westward movement, a partial migration, takes place after breeding, probably to take advantage of the later rainy season in the west.

The seasonal distribution maps suggest that the axis of movement may be primarily southeast–northwest, and that areas north of southern Africa, including Angola and Zambia, are an integral part of the migration system.

**Breeding:** The models show a spring–summer breeding season, peaking October–December in all Zones except Zone 5, which has a September–November peak. Atlas data were biased towards fledglings, however; egg-laying peaks September–November (Winterbottom 1968a; Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1996a).

**Interspecific relationships:** To a degree, it has become a commensal of humans. It has been observed engaging in passive anting (Vandepitte 1991).

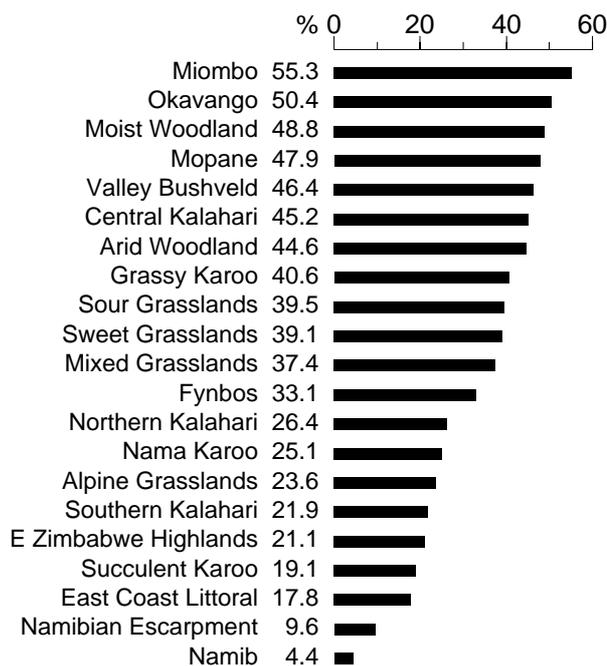
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The Hoopoe appears to have benefited from several human

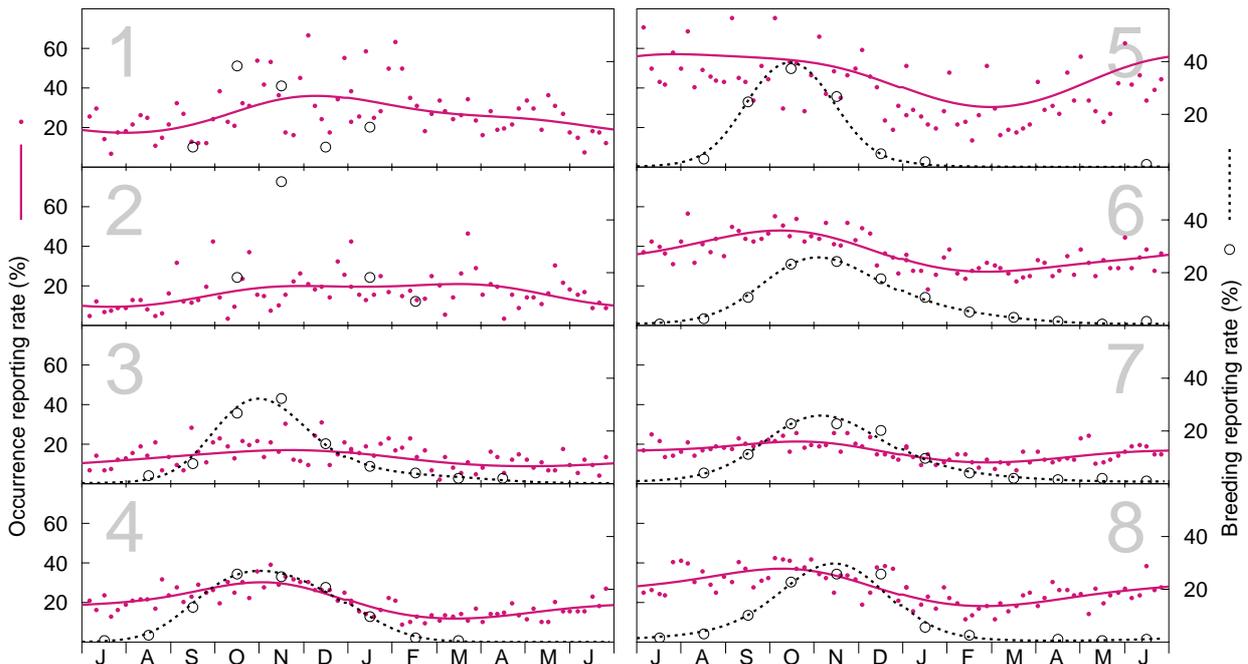
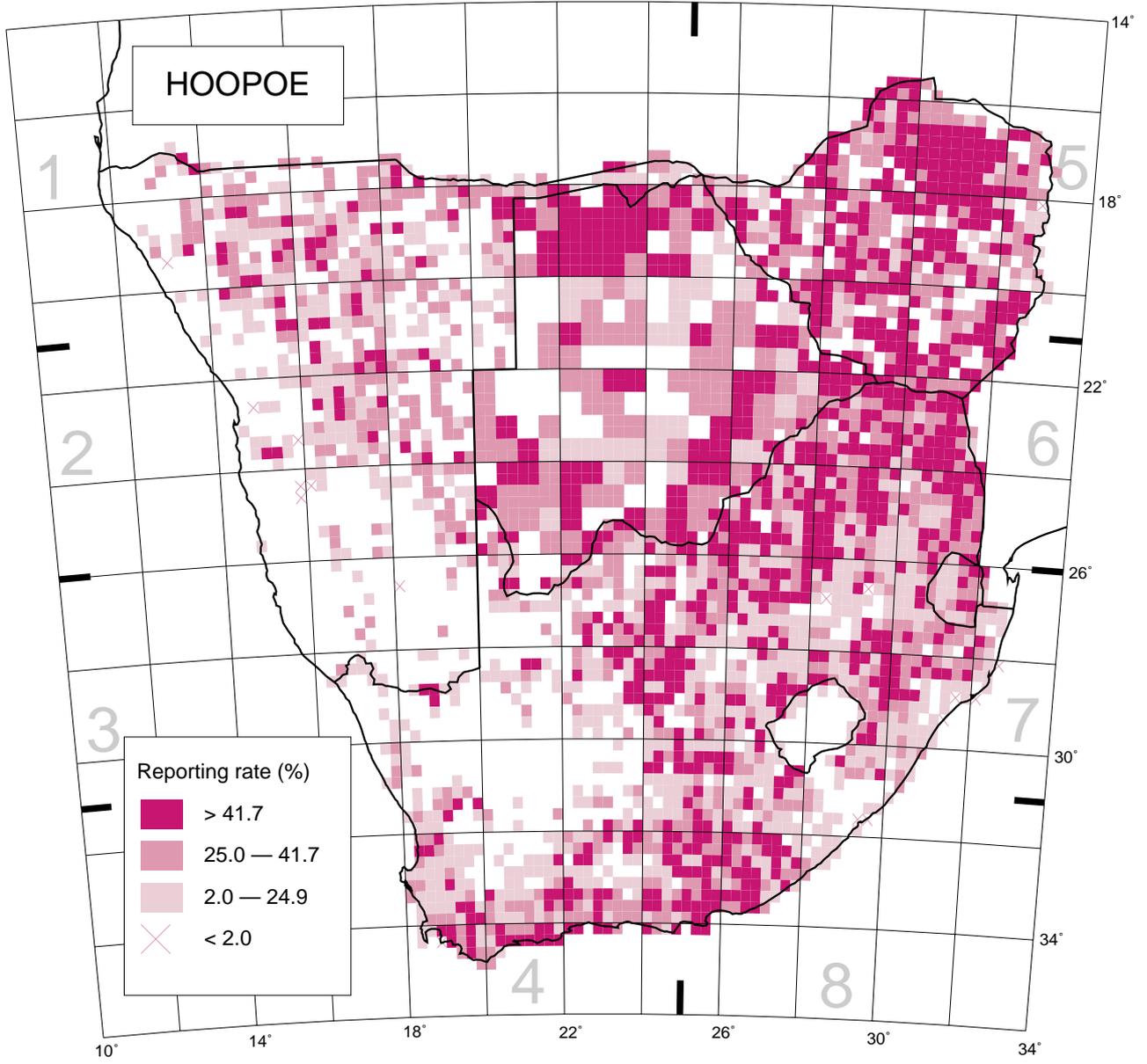
activities and has therefore probably extended its range and increased in numbers in formerly marginal areas. It is not threatened.

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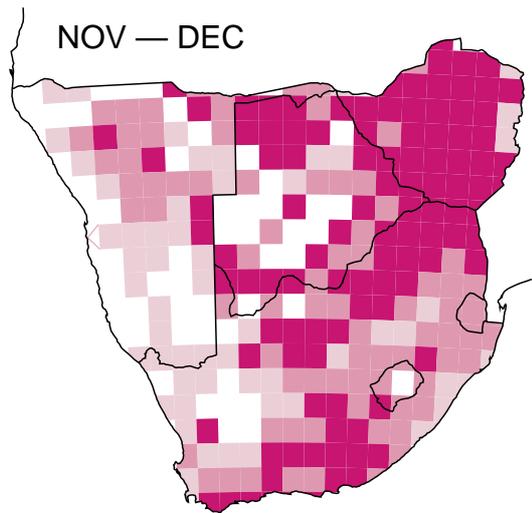
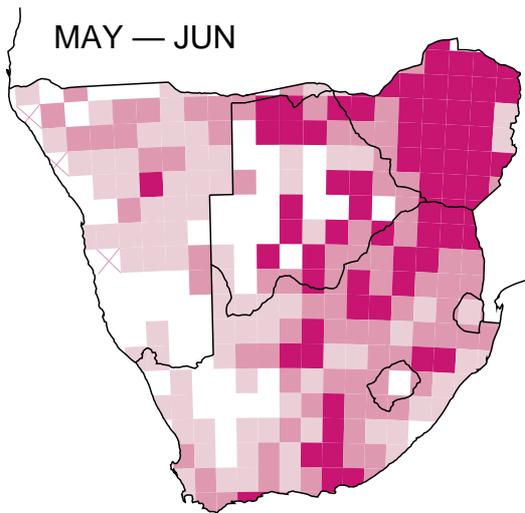
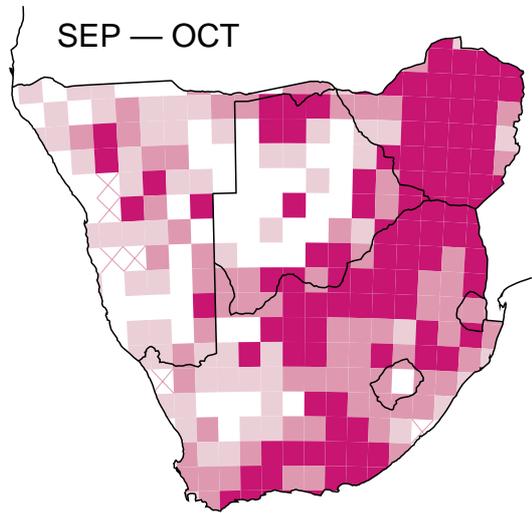
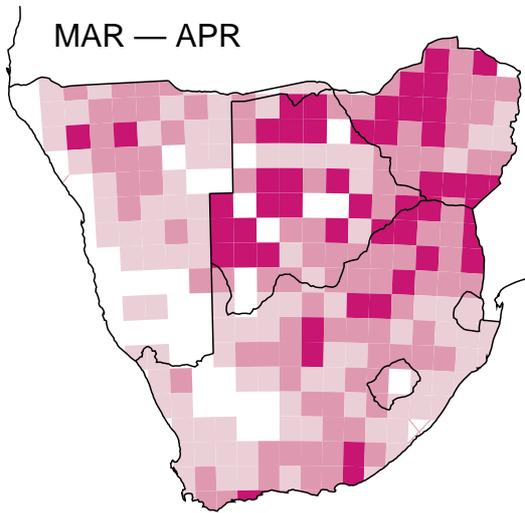
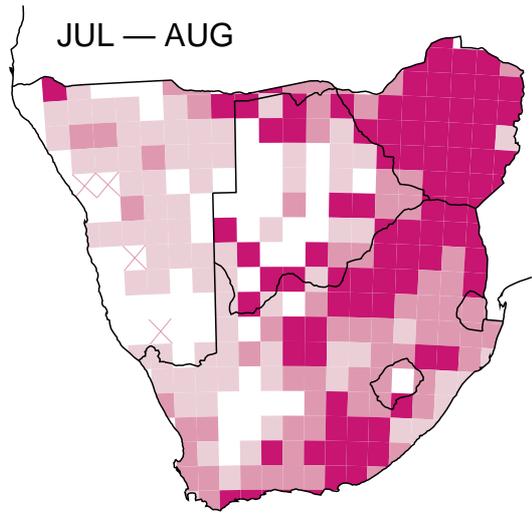
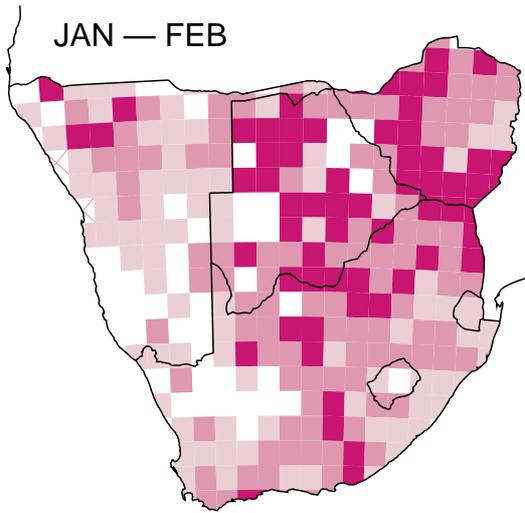
Recorded in 3017 grid cells, 66.5%  
Total number of records: 53 884  
Mean reporting rate for range: 39.5%

### Reporting rates for vegetation types





HOOPOE



Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.