



Scimitar-billed Woodhoopoe

Swartbekkakelaar

Rhinopomastus cyanomelas

The Scimitar-billed Woodhoopoe occurs mainly in the eastern half of Africa as far north as Kenya. It is widely distributed throughout most of Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Swaziland. In South Africa it occurs north of 29°S, apart from a gap in the southeastern Transvaal, with an extension along the middle Orange River towards Lesotho. Two vagrants were recorded in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve (3418AD) in October 1984, one was seen in riverine bush in the southern Karoo near Matjiesfontein (3320BC) in October 1987, and there is an undated record from Calvinia (3119BD) (Jones & Ayre 1987; Hockey *et al.* 1989). The ranges of the three subspecies recognized by Clancey (1980b) appear continuous.

It is usually seen either solitarily or in pairs as it moves between the canopies in arid woodland. It is territorial during the breeding season, but only weakly so during the nonbreeding season. It is also during the latter period that there seems to be no definite association between members of the sexes and birds are usually seen solitarily. It can only be confused with immature Redbilled *Phoeniculus purpureus* or Violet *P. damarensis* Woodhoopoes, but the bills of those species are not as sharply decurved and slender as in the Scimitar-billed Woodhoopoe.

Habitat: It is commonly found in tropical and subtropical arid woodland, with high reporting rates from the Kalahari, Arid Woodland, Okavango, Miombo and Mopane vegetation types. It is absent only from woodlands with a completely closed canopy. It is peculiarly absent from the arid woodlands of the interior of the eastern Cape Province which appear to provide suitable habitat.

Movements: The models do not show any evidence of seasonal movements in any part of the range. On a daily basis, it moves considerable distances and is usually seen flying frequently between trees, sometimes undertaking flights in excess of 100 m.

Breeding: There is an extended breeding season in the west of the range, September–June. In the east, breeding

is more synchronized, and peaks October–January. Small groups consisting of adults with their recently fledged young may remain together for up to six months, whereafter youngsters move off independently (C. Boix-Hinzen pers. comm).

Interspecific relationships: In areas where natural cavities are scarce, it is reliant on the presence of cavity excavators such as woodpeckers and barbets for providing nest cavities. Unlike Redbilled and Violet Woodhoopoes, it is apparently not dependent on cavities for roosting, but instead frequently sleeps out in the open by clinging to the bark of trees.

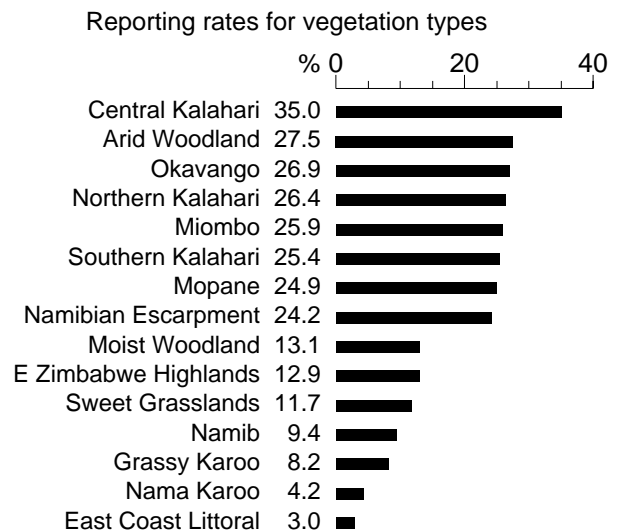
It is reportedly found in 18–24% of mixed bird parties in open woodland (Winterbottom 1949). It is an occasional host of the Greater Honeyguide *Indicator indicator* (Friedmann 1955).

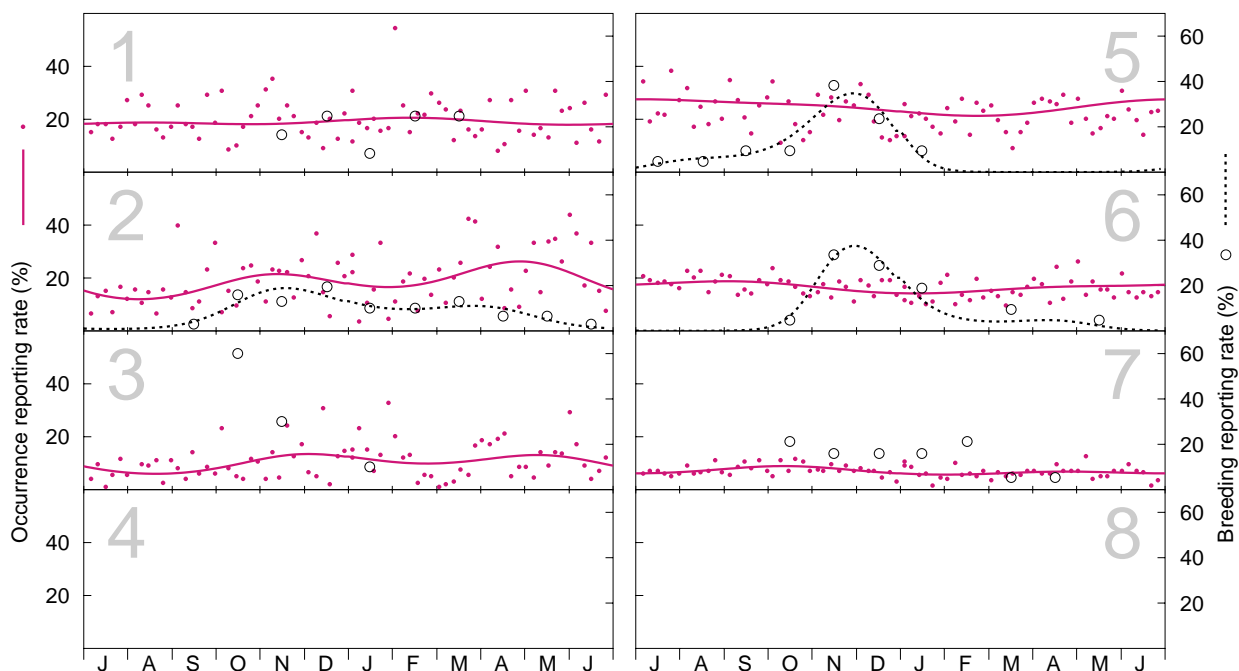
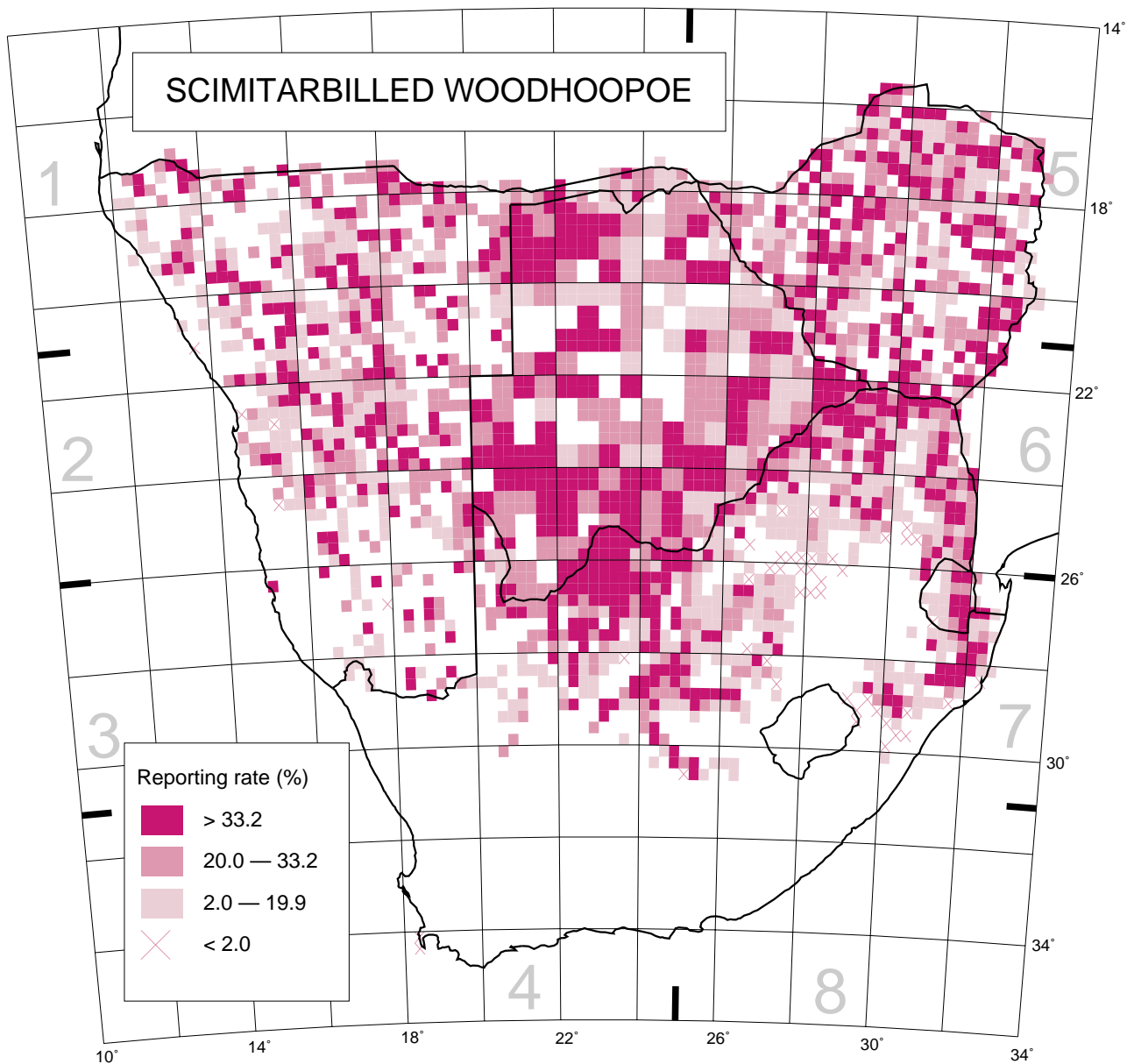
Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution has not changed substantially from that given by McLachlan & Liversidge (1957), and there is no evidence of local extinctions.

The Scimitar-billed Woodhoopoe is not threatened in any part of its range in southern Africa, except in regions that are densely populated by humans who rely on firewood as an energy source. Elsewhere in Africa the production of charcoal may have an impact through the blanket removal of trees in relatively arid areas. Although the production of charcoal has until now not affected much of southern Africa, it may be regarded as a potential threat to this and other species that are reliant on savanna woodland.

M.A. du Plessis

Recorded in 2341 grid cells, 51.6%
Total number of records: 16 212
Mean reporting rate for range: 21.2%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 625, 685, 562, 0, 2167, 1889, 1353, 0; Breeding: 12, 31, 10, 0, 21, 21, 19, 0.