



## Grey Hornbill

### Grysneushoringvoël

*Tockus nasutus*

The Grey Hornbill ranges widely throughout the savannas of sub-Saharan Africa (Fry *et al.* 1988). In southern Africa it occurs in better-wooded savannas, avoiding the wet coastal areas in the southeast. It is fairly common in the northern Cape Province, in most of the Transvaal (except for the open highveld), lowland Swaziland, throughout Botswana and Zimbabwe, and in central and northern Namibia, except the coastal desert. There are strongholds in the taller woodlands in the Limpopo drainage, the Okavango, the Caprivi and northeastern Namibia, the Transvaal lowveld and in the Miombo in Zimbabwe. In the Transvaal, 1 pair/22–63 ha was recorded (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In 14 woodland vegetations on the periphery of the Kalahari in Botswana, an average density of 1 bird/17 ha was recorded (unpubl. data).

Two subspecies are recognized in the region (Clancey 1980b); there is no break between the ranges of *T. n. epi-rhinus*, the race in the arid southwest, and *dorsalis* in the more mesic northeastern savannas.

It is usually in pairs or small flocks, but during winter it may gather in flocks exceeding 100 birds (Maclean 1993b). It is conspicuous and has loud, piping calls; the atlas data are therefore comprehensive and reliable.

**Habitat:** It prefers taller woodland – particularly broad-leaved, but also *Acacia* – in dry to humid savannas, but avoids evergreen forest and high-rainfall conditions. In the dry season, it ranges more widely in less well-wooded habitat, and can occur in any type of savanna or bushveld.

It is particularly common in tall, mixed riverine woodlands (e.g. Linyanti riverine strip, 1 bird/6 ha; Okavango fringing woodland, 1 bird/12 ha), Miombo, Mopane (woodland, 1 bird/11 ha; scrub, 1 bird/23 ha), and mixed woodlands in the Northern Kalahari and Arid and Moist Woodland biomes (1 bird/32 ha) (unpubl. data). It is less common in more open areas such as the Central and Southern Kalahari and the Namibian Escarpment; it extends marginally into the South African highveld.

**Movements:** It is mobile and becomes gregarious and nomadic in the dry season (Irwin 1981). There is field evidence for regular migratory movements, with visible migration in autumn (Benson 1982b). Such migration can become concentrated in well-defined ecotones such as found along the Chobe River (1724D, 1725C) and the edges of the Makgadikgadi Pans in Botswana (pers. obs). Considerable influxes occur in Zimbabwe in the dry season, particularly during drought years (Tree 1991c). During drought, irruptive movements also occur to the south of the range into the grasslands (Nuttall 1992a).

The atlas data do not, however, indicate large-scale movement of the majority of the population. The increase in reporting rates in the dry season in Zone 6 might indicate an influx into the Limpopo drainage, possibly from the drier southwest or from the higher ground to the east, and the pattern in the northern Zones might indicate a shift by some birds from the drier west to the more humid east in winter.

**Breeding:** Breeding starts shortly after the first rains (Kemp 1973, 1976b; Riekert 1988) and the atlas records confirm breeding throughout the wet season, peaking in spring and early summer, October–December in the east (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b), but later in summer (January–March) in the dry west (see also Maclean 1993b; Kemp 1995). Females seal themselves in the nest hole from shortly before egg-laying and break out before the chicks fledge (Kemp 1995).

**Interspecific relationships:** See also species accounts for the Redbilled *T. erythrorhynchus* and Yellowbilled *T. leucomelas* Hornbills. There are six ‘small’ hornbills in the region and the Grey Hornbill overlaps extensively with the other five. In the northern part of the range, it can be seen outside the breeding season in mixed groups, sometimes with up to five hornbill species, but it flocks most regularly with Bradfield’s *T. bradfieldi* and Crowned *T. alboterminatus* Hornbills, two other species with piping vocalizations and high mobility (pers. obs).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** Although it breeds locally in rock-faces (Kemp & Kemp 1972), old trees with fairly large holes are essential for breeding in most places; felling of trees in otherwise more open country reduces nesting opportunities. The Grey Hornbill does, however, readily occupy nestboxes (Riekert 1988) and could be assisted if necessary.

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Recorded in 2097 grid cells, 46.2%  
Total number of records: 22 192  
Mean reporting rate for range: 36.7%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



