

Southern Yellowbilled Hornbill Suidelike Geelbekneushoringvoël

Tockus leucomelas

The Southern Yellowbilled Hornbill is a near-endemic of the dry savannas of southern Africa (Kemp 1995). It is common in the thornbelt of the northern Cape Province, the northern Transvaal, lowland Swaziland and northeastern KwaZulu-Natal, southern Zimbabwe, Botswana, and central and northern Namibia, except the coastal deserts. The distribution is fragmented in northern Zimbabwe and the species is absent from most of the Zambezi Valley. There are major strongholds in the Kalahari, the upper-middle Limpopo drainage, and the Transvaal lowveld where the subspecies *T. l. parvior* occurs (Clancey 1980b). In the Transvaal, densities of c. 1 pair/20 ha (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and territory sizes of 14–27 ha per pair (Fry *et al.* 1988) have been recorded.

It is a conspicuous species; the data are comprehensive and reliable.

Habitat: It occurs in a variety of dry, open savanna woodlands, both *Acacia* and broadleaved. Highest reporting rates were in the Mopane biome; in northern Botswana peak densities were found in open Mopane scrub (1 bird/8 ha), but strikingly less so in tall Mopane woodland (1 bird/70 ha). It is also common in mixed Northern Kalahari woodlands, the Okavango, and the Arid and Moist Woodland biomes, and frequent in the Central and Southern Kalahari thornbelt and on the Namibian Escarpment. It was present in 11 of 14 transect-counts in non-Mopane woodlands in Botswana with an average density of 1 bird/35 ha (unpubl. data). It is marginal in Miombo woodland (Ginn *et al.* 1989) and the Namib.

Movements: All Zones show increased reporting rates in the dry season; it could be that flocking, dispersal into more diverse habitats, and congregation closer to human habitation during winter, all make it more conspicuous. The striking 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 higher ground to the east. In the Transvaal there are seasonal movements from the lowveld to the escarpment (Fry *et al.* 1988).

Reduced reporting rates in summer might also relate to the fact that females remain 'sealed' into the nest hole for several weeks during breeding, which occurs mainly October–December (Kemp 1976a).

Breeding: Breeding spans September–March with an egg-laying peak October–December in Zimbabwe and the Transvaal (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The breeding records in the atlas confirm that breeding activity is during the wet season, with a peak November–February in the east (Zones 5–6), but later (December–April) in the northwest (Zones 1 and 2), confirming literature records (Fry *et al.* 1988; Rieker 1988; Maclean 1993b). The limited number of records from the northern Cape Province (Zone 3) are more synchronous with eastern populations. Timing of breeding in hornbills shows a strong response to rainfall (Kemp 1973) and regional differences closely follow the normative timing of peak rainfall (see Taljaard 1986).

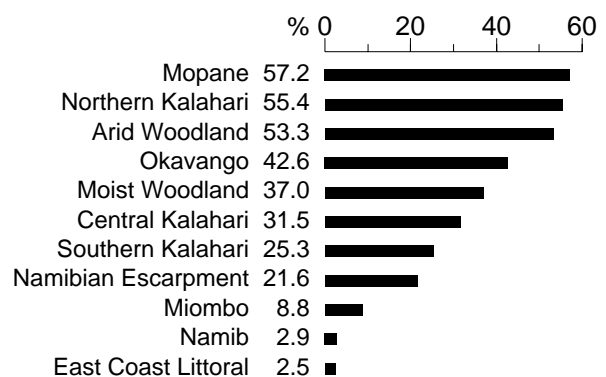
Interspecific relationships: See also the species accounts for Redbilled *T. erythrorhynchus* and Grey *T. nasutus* Hornbills. Six species of small hornbills overlap widely in southern Africa. Redbilled Hornbill is more common in Mopane and tall *Acacia* woodland, while the Grey Hornbill is mainly a canopy feeder of mixed-gallery riparian woodland and Miombo. The Southern Yellowbilled Hornbill frequents the drier *Acacia* savannas and bushveld (Irwin 1981) and Monteiro's Hornbill *T. monteiroi* occupies the most arid habitat and prefers to breed on cliffs (Kemp & Kemp 1972; Rieker 1988). The Redbilled Hornbill is absent from the open Kalahari, but is common in the Zambezi Valley, while the reverse is true for the Southern Yellowbilled Hornbill with which it might compete (Irwin 1981). Both are less well represented in the Miombo, a stronghold of the Grey Hornbill (Irwin 1981). The distributions of Southern Yellowbilled and Grey Hornbills are similar, but the former is more uniformly distributed in the dry southwest, but scattered in northern Zimbabwe. For these two species, eight of the nine vegetation types in which they had the highest reporting rates are the same, but the ordering of these vegetation types is very different. In 33 transect-counts in 17 woodlands and savannas in northern and eastern Botswana, both species were found at 11 localities, but the densities were uncorrelated (unpubl. data). In a study in central Namibia where Yellowbilled, Monteiro's and Grey Hornbills co-occurred in arid country, they were separated by habitat preferences, Yellowbilled being a ground forager in wooded drainage lines (Kemp & Kemp 1972).

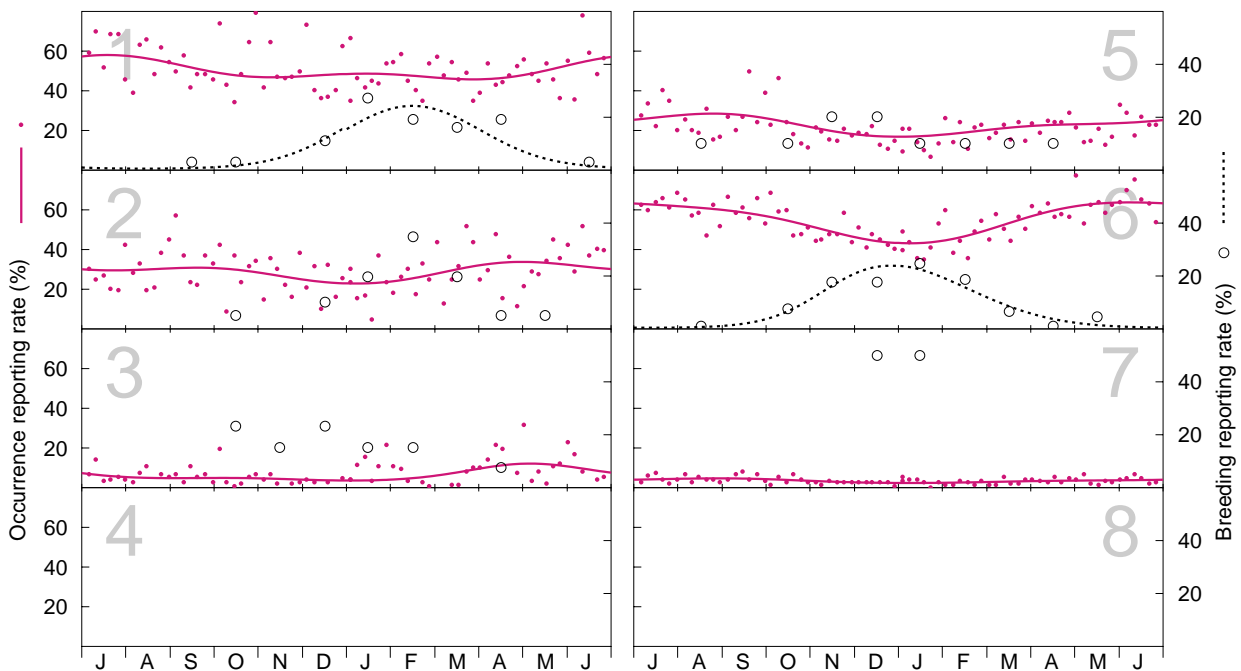
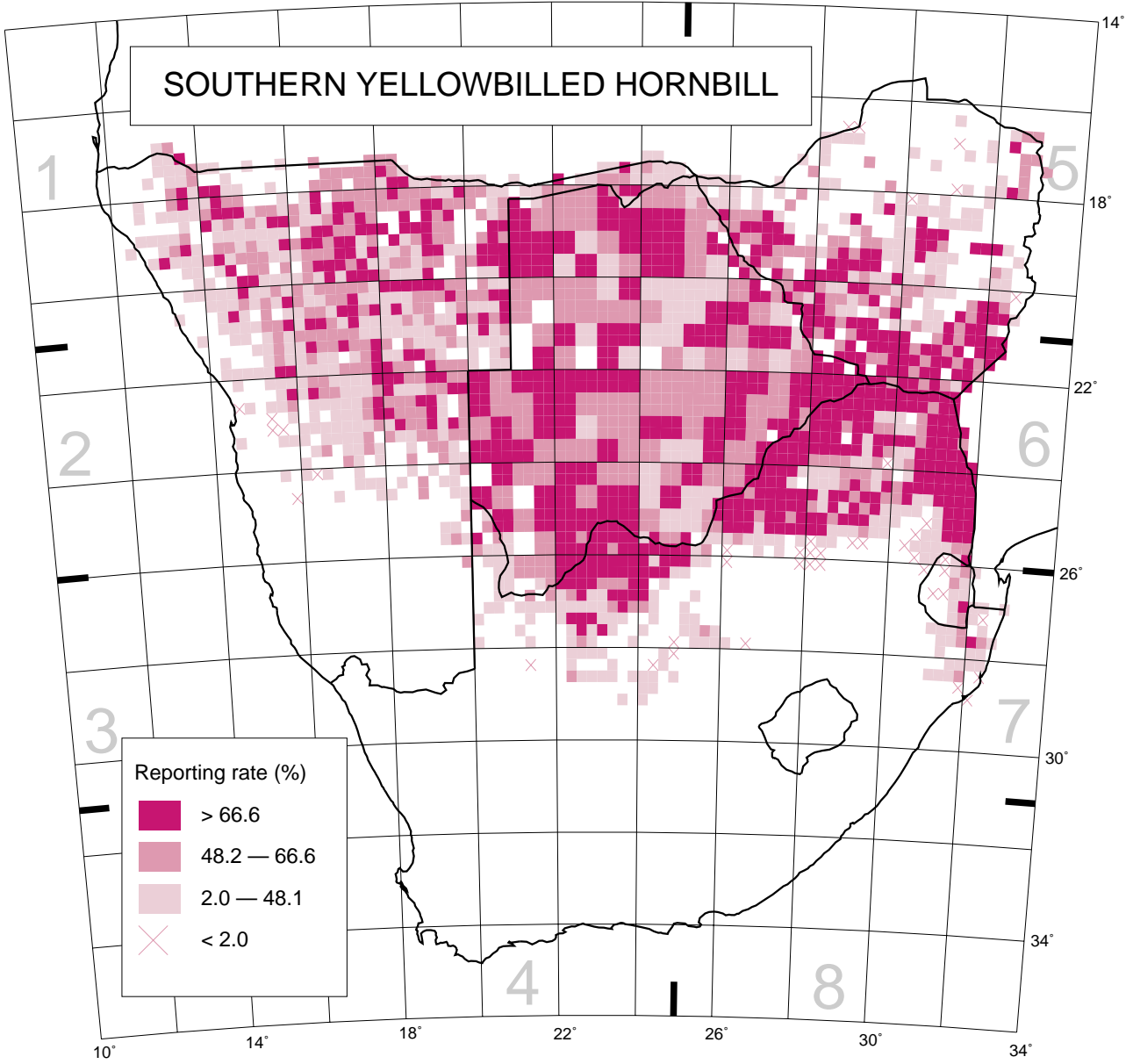
Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence for change in the range. The Southern Yellowbilled Hornbill is widespread and common to abundant, and of no conservation concern.

M. Herremans

Recorded in 2212 grid cells, 48.8%
Total number of records: 23 204
Mean reporting rate for range: 40.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 1673, 1064, 376, 0, 2006, 6277, 679, 0;
 Breeding: 37, 20, 13, 0, 10, 102, 4, 0.