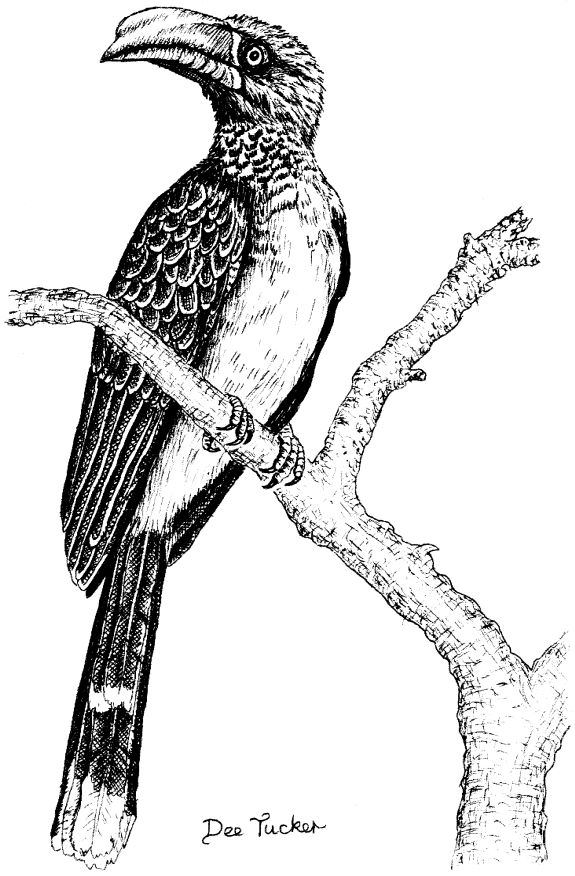


Crowned Hornbill

Gekroonde Neushoringvoël

Tockus alboterminatus

This arboreal hornbill has an extensive range northwards to East Africa and southwestern Ethiopia, and through southern Zaire into Angola (Kemp 1995). It is widespread in the southeast of the continent, extending southwards to the forests of the eastern Cape Province. It occurs in the lowlands and midlands of both KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland, and sparsely in the Transvaal lowveld and southeastern and eastern Zimbabwe. It occurs along the principal drainage lines of the Zambezi River in northwestern Zimbabwe and the eastern Caprivi Strip. Records from northeastern Namibia refer to the subspecies *T. a. alboterminatus* which extends northwards into Angola; all other birds in the region belong to the race *australis* (Clancey 1980b). Despite records from the Caprivi Strip and western Zimbabwe, this species has not yet reliably been recorded from Botswana (Borello 1992b; Penry 1994).

It is conspicuous with loud, rather plover-like whistled calls (Maclean 1993b), occurring in pairs or family parties of up to seven birds, though 3–6 is more usual (Ranger 1950). It often perches on the tops of forest trees and readily enters well-wooded suburbs of towns and cities within its range. Within southern Africa, it can be confused with Bradfield's Hornbill *T. bradfieldi* which has an adjacent range in Botswana and Namibia; the two species may co-occur in the Caprivi Strip and western Zimbabwe. Both species have similar plumage patterns, but Bradfield's Hornbill is lighter-coloured, grey-brown rather than sooty brown, lacks the white (but sometimes indistinct) eyebrow and has narrower white tips to the tail feathers. There are also bill colour and casque differences. Some records in the Caprivi and western Zimbabwe may have resulted from confusion with Bradfield's Hornbill.

Habitat: It is primarily a forest-edge species occurring in lowland forest, both coastal and riverine, and lower montane communities. It also inhabits moist woodlands and is common in Valley Bushveld, especially in areas supporting forest in sheltered kloofs and ravines. The vegetation analysis demonstrates where its favoured habitats occur.

It is omnivorous, though fruit is important in its diet, especially in the dry winter months (Kemp 1995). It is known to cause superficial damage to maize crops (Ranger 1950) and also to raid pecan nut plantations in KwaZulu-Natal (pers. obs). It roosts on unsheltered slender perches extending out over stream beds in valley bottoms. Suitable roost and nest sites are regularly re-used and are important, and possibly limited, amenities of territories which are about 3–5 km^2 in South Africa (Kemp 1995).

Movements: It is not known to undertake regular seasonal movements. Populations in marginal areas may be affected by droughts and small flocks of up to 80 hornbills may wander far from their normal habitat under such conditions (Kemp 1995). The higher reporting rates during winter probably result from increased conspicuousness at this time of the year when seen in family groups at fruiting trees, in contrast to the covert behaviour of these hornbills during the breeding season.

Breeding: The models are based on comparatively small numbers of records but confirm that breeding activity is restricted to the wet season (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Maclean 1993b). Fry *et al.* (1988) stated that it breeds at the beginning of the rains in the south of its range; recorded laying dates in the atlas region are October–January.

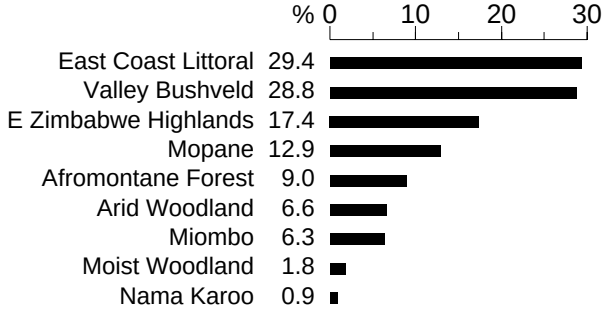
Interspecific relationships: It is the only member of its genus inhabiting the forest biome and so has no extensive range overlap with closely related species. Within the region, its distribution is similar to that of the Trumpeter Hornbill *Bycanistes bucinator*. The ranges of Crowned and Bradfield's Hornbills are largely complementary, possibly as a result of competition.

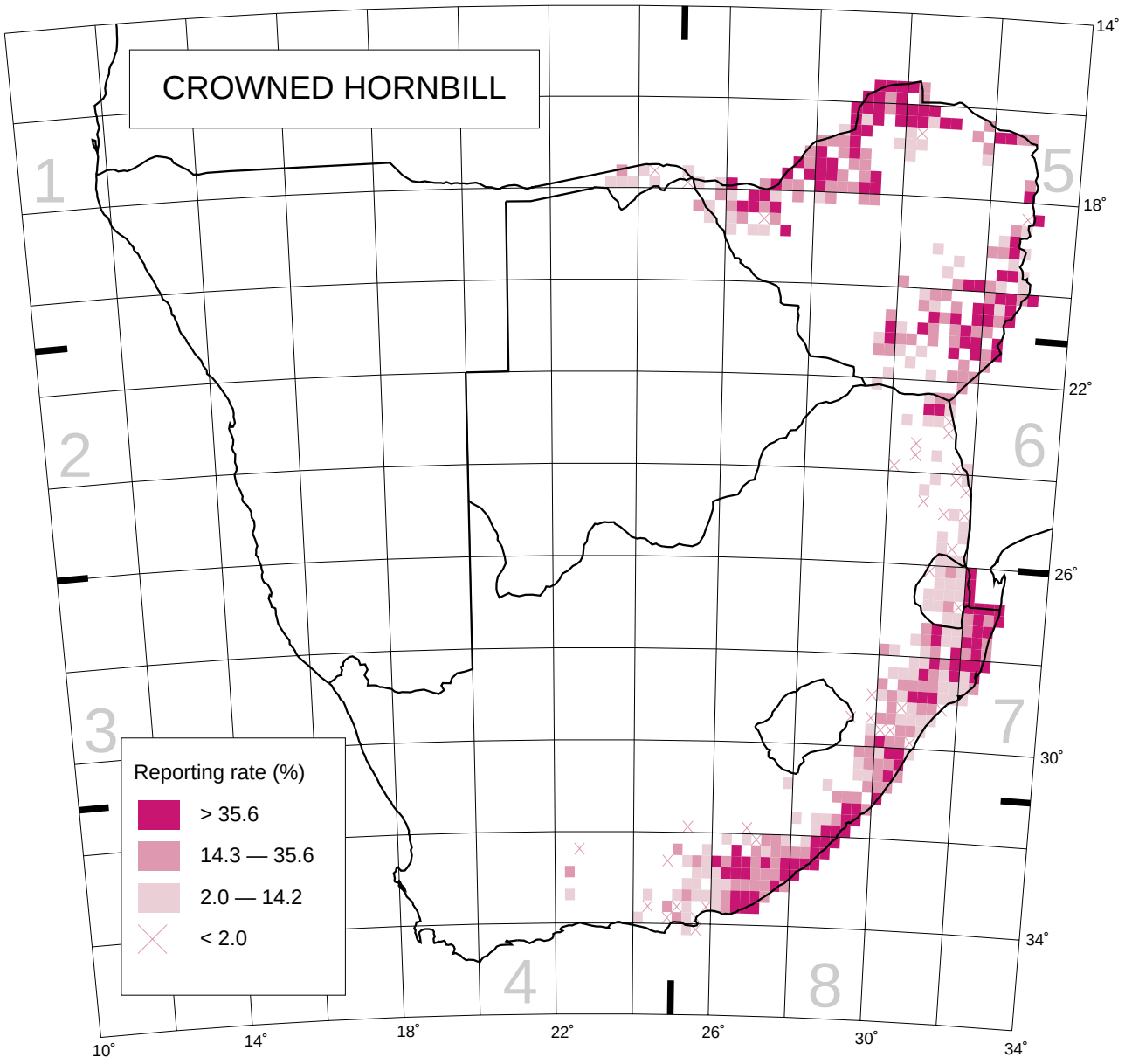
Historical distribution and conservation: The Crowned Hornbill is not considered to be threatened owing to its wide range. Like all forest-associated birds, however, it is locally susceptible to loss of habitat and especially to loss of nesting trees which are used year after year (Ranger 1951) and may be a limited resource.

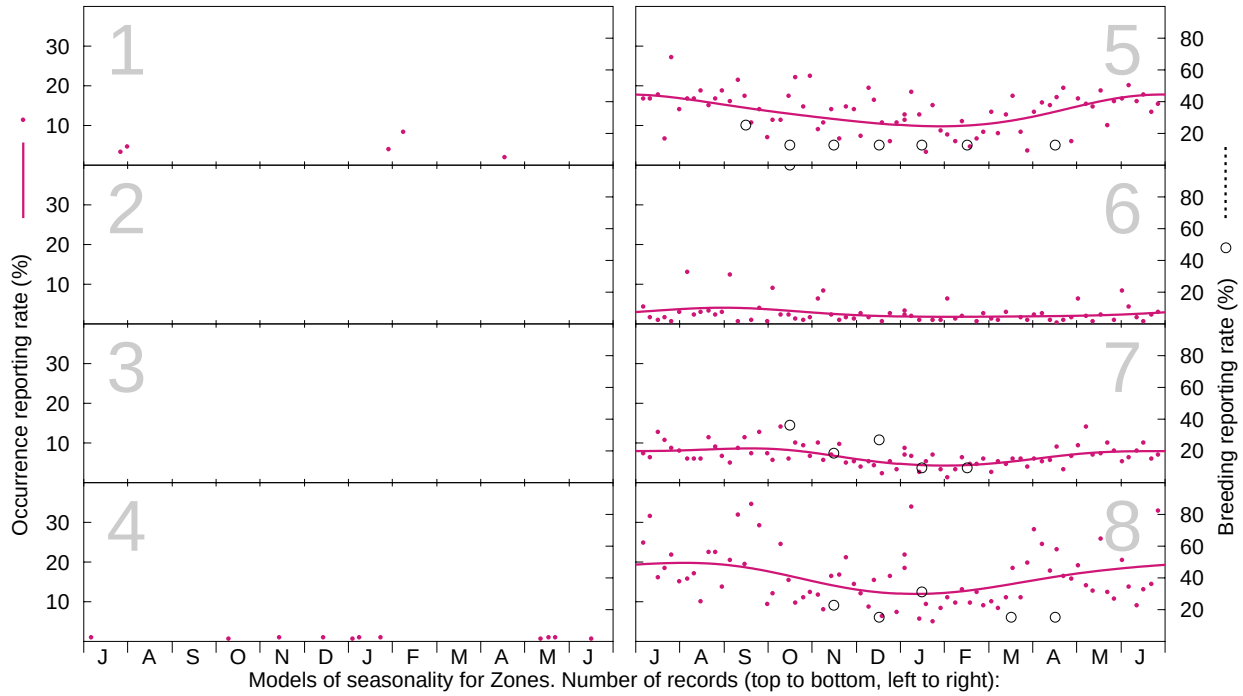
T.B. Oatley

Recorded in 471 grid cells, 10.4%
Total number of records: 8269
Mean reporting rate for range: 23.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 7, 0, 0, 11, 1183, 297, 1324, 884; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 8, 1, 11, 13.