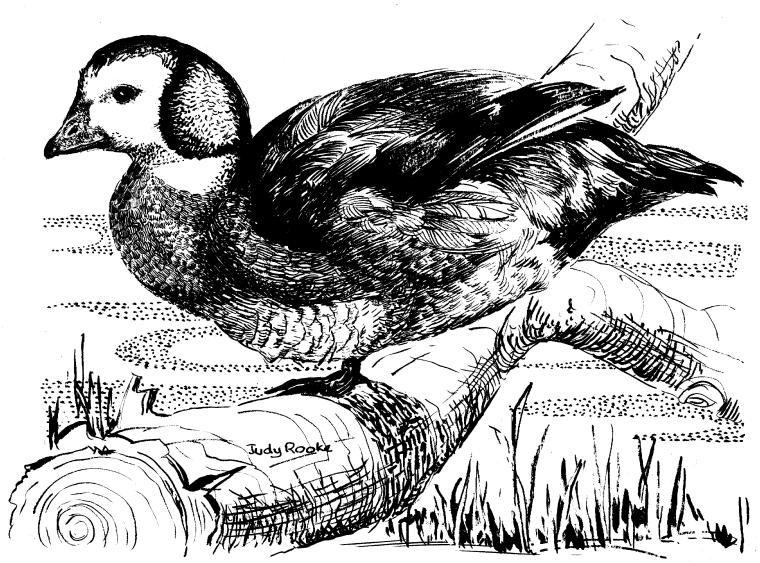


Pygmy Goose

Dwerggans

Nettapus auritus

The Pygmy Goose is a tropical duck of the subfamily Anatinae, the dabbling ducks. The southernmost extent of its range ends in the subtropical KwaZulu-Natal littoral. It occurs throughout tropical Africa and Madagascar, except for temperate and arid regions.

The Pygmy Goose has been regarded as the commonest anatid in the Okavango Delta of Botswana, far outnumbering even the Whitefaced Duck *Dendrocygna viduata* (Brown & Seely 1973). During 525 km of boat surveys in the Okavango and Linyanti Swamps in the 1990s, Pygmy Geese were found at a density of 1 bird/0.9 km or about 1 bird/9 ha (M. Herremans unpubl. data).

In Zimbabwe it is local, being found mainly on larger pan systems, but is scarce in the Zambezi Valley and absent from the eastern highlands (Irwin 1981). It is likewise local but widespread in southern Mozambique (Clancey 1971a). It is an uncommon visitor to eastern Swaziland (Parker 1994). It is generally rare in the Transvaal, being largely confined to the Nyl floodplain (2428DA) (up to 30 birds in a wet year) and the Limpopo floodplain in the northern Kruger National Park; elsewhere it is a vagrant (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Its distribution in KwaZulu-Natal is almost entirely littoral, except in the north where it occurs in the lowlands and on the Pongolo floodplain (Cyrus & Robson 1980) and may be abundant: individual flocks may number 1000 birds or more in the dry season (Brown *et al.* 1982), though stated by Brown & Seely (1973) to be 'not normally a very abundant species anywhere in Africa'. In Namibia it is common in the Caprivi but a vagrant elsewhere.

The Pygmy Goose is a highly distinctive duck and is unlikely to be confused with any other species; in flight its white wing patches are diagnostic.

Habitat: It prefers clear, still inland waters, whether permanent or seasonal, with surface vegetation, especially waterlilies *Nymphaea* sp. and *Potamogeton* sp., fringing small areas of deeper open water, as well as some emergent vegetation, e.g. grasses, reeds, bulrushes. It occurs less often on completely open waters and coastal lagoons.

Movements: Although the models do not indicate regional movements, all detailed studies in southern Africa found seasonal changes in local abundance, typically in response to waterlily growth and thus food supply (Campbell & Miles 1956; Douthwaite 1978, 1980). It also readily disperses to temporarily flooded grasslands and vleis.

Breeding: It breeds mainly in January in Zimbabwe, but breeding records extend October–May (Irwin 1981). Atlas records show breeding in most months with a March–April peak in Zones 1 and 5. This skewing towards later dates was probably caused – as with all the ducks – by a bias towards records of chicks, as opposed to eggs. The few Transvaal breeding records are from December–February on the Nyl floodplain (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). A similar breeding season appears to hold for KwaZulu-Natal and southern Mozambique (Clancey 1971a; Cyrus & Robson 1980). Egglaying in Botswana takes place September–March (N.J. Skinner *in litt.*).

Interspecific relationships: It may be found together with the Whitebacked Duck *Thalassornis leuconotus* which shares the same habitat (Irwin 1981), but the association is probably incidental.

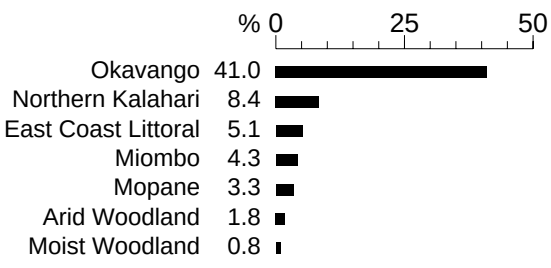
Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution has changed little, if at all, in historical times. Records from the Cape Province and the western Transvaal (Stark & Sclater 1906) were almost certainly of vagrants.

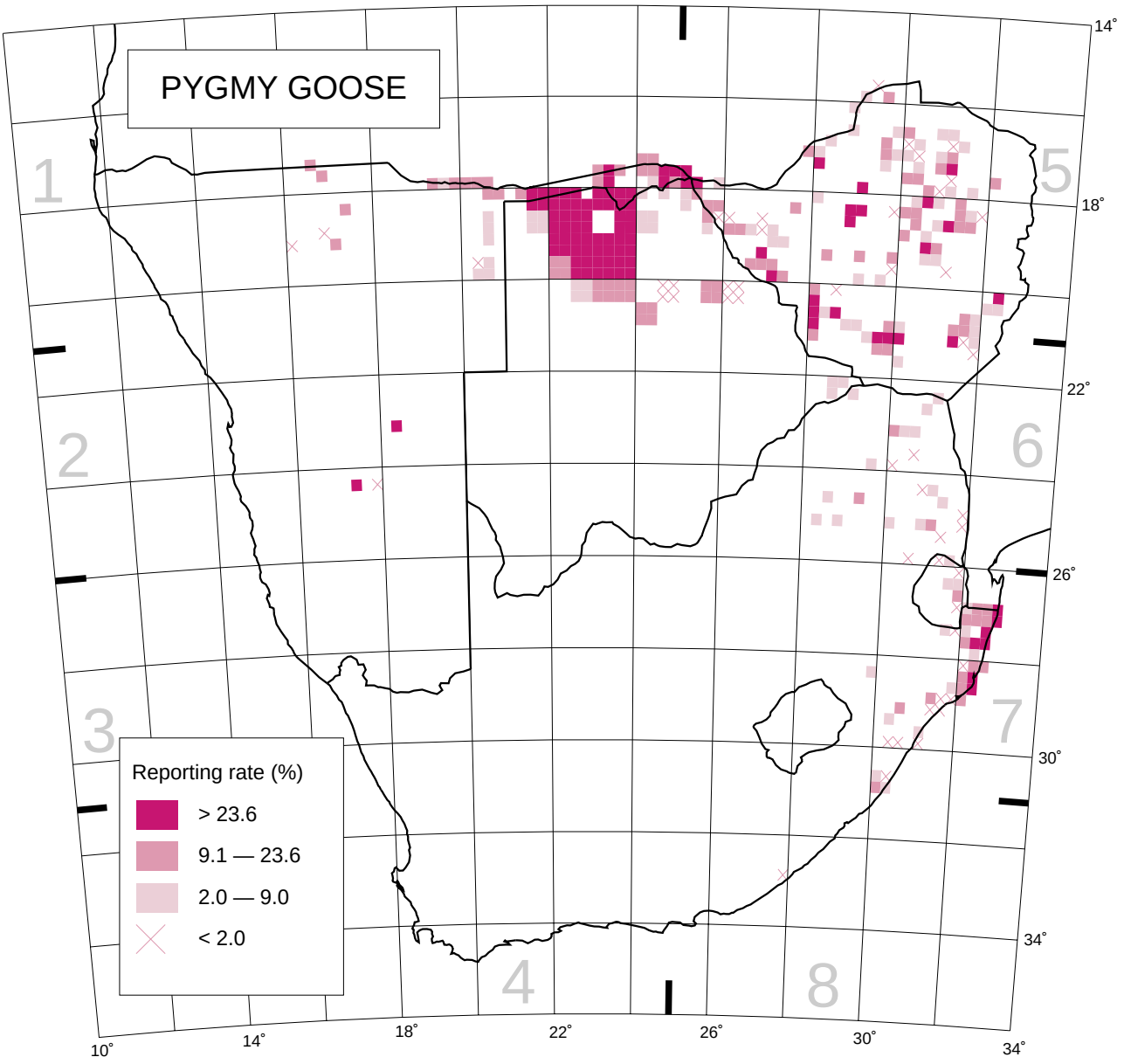
The major stronghold of this species in southern Africa is the Okavango and associated swamps, and the conservation of this unique wetland ecosystem is critically important for this and numerous other waterbird species. It was classified as 'rare' by Brooke (1984b), but this is at least partly because it is at the very edge of its range in South Africa. It has also suffered from habitat destruction in South Africa, particularly by the loss of wetlands and nesting trees with suitable holes (Brooke 1984b). In Zimbabwe it has taken to farm dams, but its continued survival is threatened by the disturbance of clear waters by cattle, and by the destruction of aquatic vegetation by introduced cichlid fishes (Irwin 1981). An area of major conservation concern in South Africa is the Pongolo floodplain, an important winter-foraging area for the Pygmy Goose (Brooke 1984b).

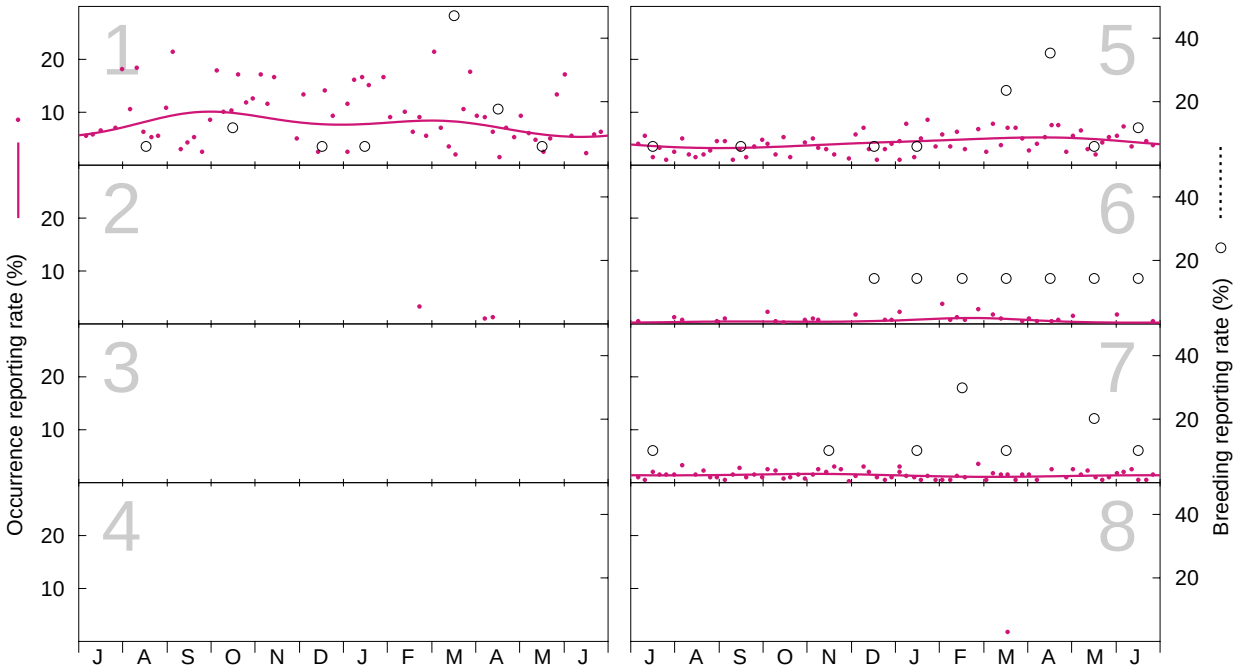
G.L. Maclean

Recorded in 344 grid cells, 7.6%
Total number of records: 1878
Mean reporting rate for range: 9.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 254, 3, 0, 0, 367, 62, 269, 1; Breeding: 17, 0, 0, 0, 17, 7, 10, 0.