



Longcrested Eagle

Langkuifarend

Lophaetus occipitalis

The Longcrested Eagle is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, except in the arid west. In southern Africa it is concentrated in the north and east of Zimbabwe, especially in the eastern highlands, and on the major river floodplains of northern Botswana, along the Transvaal escarpment, eastern Swaziland, throughout the midlands of KwaZulu-Natal and along the east coast as far south as the Alexandria district (3326C). It is fairly common in some areas, otherwise quite sparsely distributed and irregular. Four pairs occupied 175 km² in a Transvaal study area and the total Transvaal population has been estimated at 200 pairs (Tarboton & Allan 1984). It often perches conspicuously when hunting in open areas and is unmistakable in the field; it is unlikely to have been overlooked or misidentified.

Habitat: It is found in or close to moist woodland and forest, especially where these occur in association with marshes, wetlands and rivers, and often in fairly high-lying areas. It nests and roosts in medium to large trees, and uses them as vantage points from which to hunt. It usually preys on rodents and typically hunts along the fringes of woodland and forest adjoining more open habitats (Steyn 1982b). The vegetation analysis reflects the association with forest and well-developed woodland, and reporting rates were markedly higher in the Eastern Zimbabwe Highlands compared with the remainder of the range. In the Transvaal, breeding pairs are almost exclusively associated

with modified habitats where dense woodland has been opened up for agriculture or forestry (Tarboton & Allan 1984).

Movements: Local fluctuations in numbers and seasonal vagrancy to some areas have been reported (Irwin 1981; Tarboton & Allan 1984). Individuals may wander as far as the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989) and into northern Namibia. The models do not suggest any pattern of regular migration in the atlas region. It is likely that nonbreeding birds disperse widely and Hall (1992) noted that females in the eastern Transvaal are absent from their territories during the nonbreeding season.

Breeding: Breeding seasonality and success are typically erratic, perhaps in response to fluctuations in rodent populations (Hall 1992). In Zimbabwe (Zone 5), the atlas data show breeding throughout the year, peaking August–November, and Irwin (1981) showed egg-laying to occur virtually throughout the year, with a September–October peak. Further south (Zones 6 and 7), breeding was restricted to the summer months August–March. Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) recorded egg-laying in the Transvaal during July–January, mainly August–September.

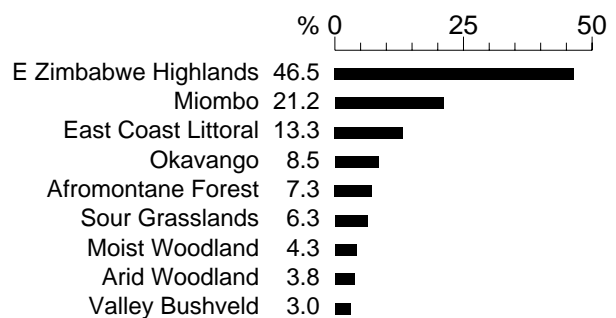
Interspecific relationships: It lives in denser, wetter habitats and specializes in smaller prey (mostly rodents) than does the similarly sized Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi* (Steyn 1982b). Breeding may be hampered by territorial disputes and direct competition for nest sites with Black Sparrowhawks *Accipiter melanoleucus* (Steyn 1982b; Hall 1992).

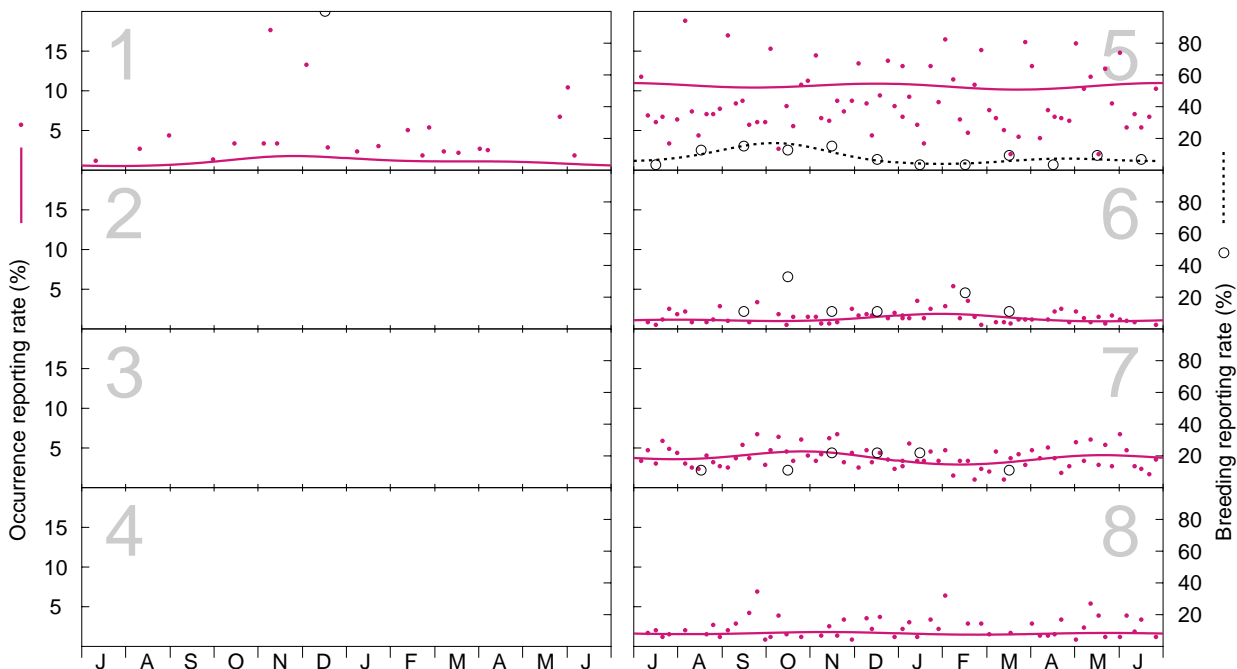
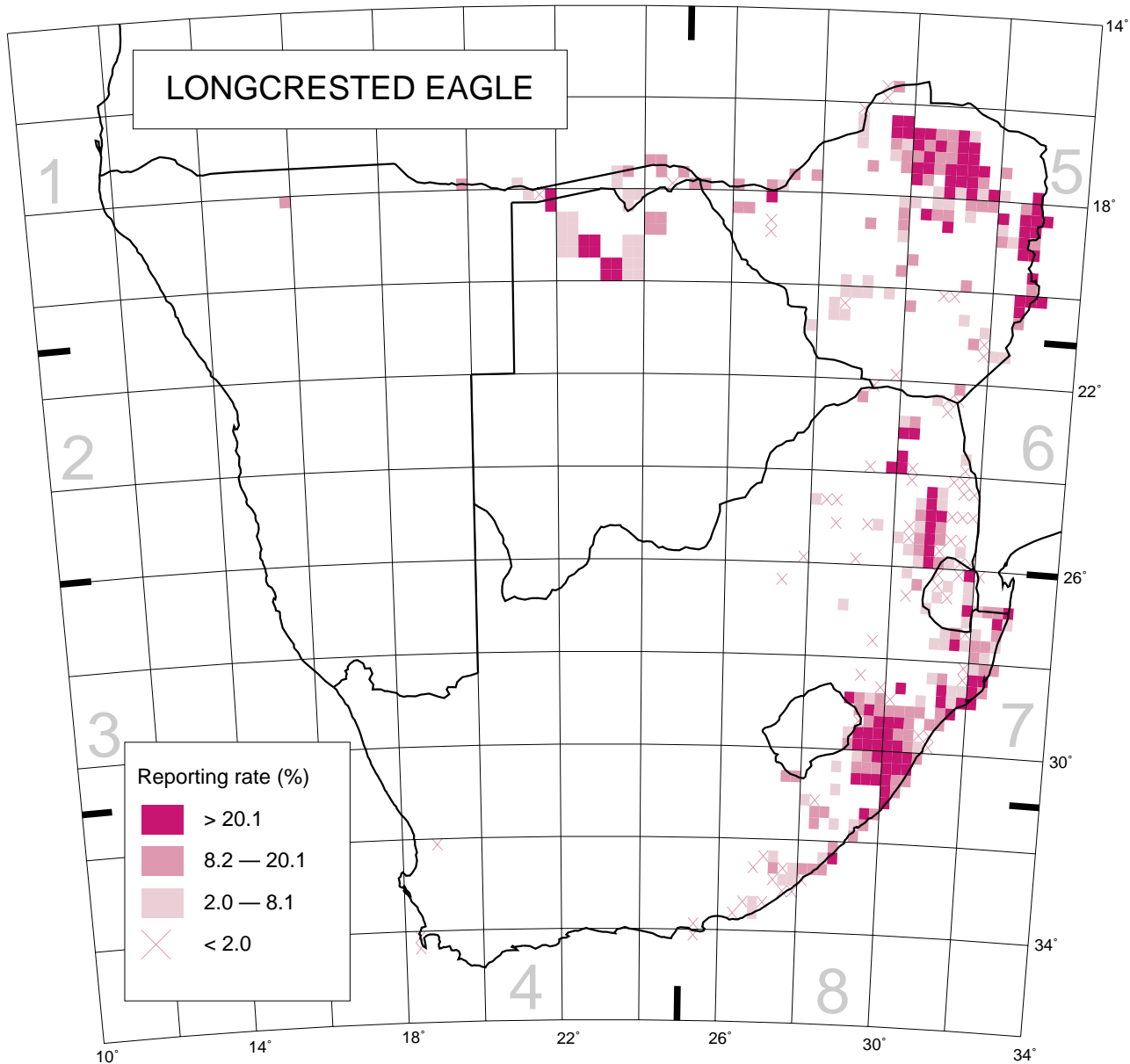
Historical distribution and conservation: Boshoff *et al.* (1983) suspected a contraction of its range as a result of habitat destruction in the Cape Province, but its limits in the eastern Cape Province appear to fluctuate for unknown reasons (A.J. Tree pers. comm.). No recent changes in its status have been noted in other parts of the atlas region, although it appears to be extending its range into previously treeless grassland regions in KwaZulu-Natal with the spread of commercial afforestation. Bush clearance and the establishment of alien plantations have probably been to the advantage of the Longcrested Eagle in many areas, although commercial forestry activities may disturb breeding.

A.R. Jenkins

Recorded in 407 grid cells, 9.0%
Total number of records: 5838
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 34, 0, 0, 0, 926, 144, 735, 90; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 0, 32, 9, 9, 0.