

Brown Snake Eagle

Bruinslangarend

Circaetus cinereus

The Brown Snake Eagle is widespread in the woodlands of sub-Saharan Africa. In southern Africa it inhabits woodlands in the north, but is relatively uncommon in northern Namibia and the Kalahari. Reporting rates were particularly high in the eastern Transvaal lowveld and the Okavango in Botswana. There were scattered records in the southern parts of the atlas region.

It inhabits open country in which it perches conspicuously and is not easily overlooked. It can be confused with other plain brown eagles.

Habitat: It breeds and roosts in trees and usually hunts for snakes, its principal prey, from a prominent tree-perch (Steyn 1982b). The vegetation analysis shows that it is less frequent in moister woodlands and forests, and prefers the more moderately arid woodland types.

Movements: It has been noted as a vagrant to the eastern Cape Province (Skead 1967b) and as a summer visitor to the southwestern Cape Province (Lamont 1987; Hockey *et al.* 1989). Tarboton & Allan (1984) classed it as a common, breeding nomad in the Transvaal with numbers fluctuating

annually; a bird ringed in the Transvaal was recovered over 2000 km away in Zaire. Hence there is evidence for nomadism or seasonal movements. The models show a pattern of increased reporting rates in the western Zones, particularly Zone 1, during the summer, with the opposite pattern in the northeast (Zone 5), suggesting the possibility of an east-west pattern of movement. There appears to be little evidence of seasonality in Zones 6 and 7 and no seasonality was apparent in Swaziland (Parker 1994).

Breeding: Eggs are laid in midsummer (mainly December–March) in Zimbabwe and the Transvaal (Irwin 1981; Tarboton & Allan 1984) and the long breeding cycle continues into the winter. Most of the atlas records were from winter, perhaps because the small cryptic nests are most easily found when they contain large young. The September–November records from Zones 6 and 7 require confirmation and may represent misidentifications, perhaps for Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi*.

Interspecific relationships: The Brown Snake Eagle prefers more wooded regions than its open-country counterpart, the Blackbreasted Snake Eagle *Circaetus pectoralis*, but their ranges overlap widely (Steyn 1982b; Tarboton & Allan 1984).

Historical distribution and conservation: Tarboton & Allan (1984) noted that it appeared markedly more common inside the conservation areas of the Transvaal lowveld than outside. Roadside counts found it to be four times more abundant in protected than in unprotected areas in Botswana (Herremans 1993d). This pattern is visible in the distribution map. The Brown Snake Eagle appears, therefore, to be vulnerable to habitat destruction and/or reduction in the availability of prey, but there is no immediate threat to the species.

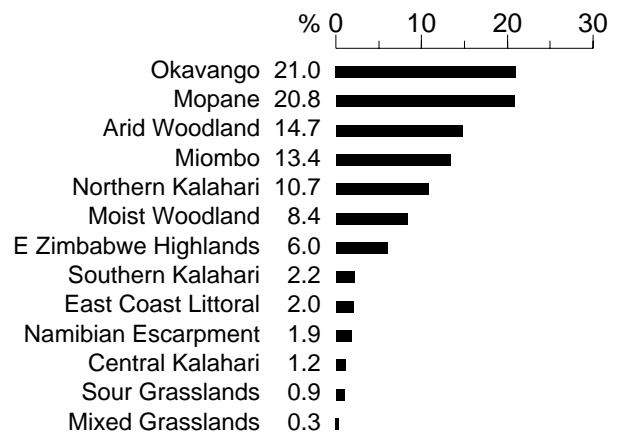
A.R. Jenkins

Recorded in 1240 grid cells, 27.3%

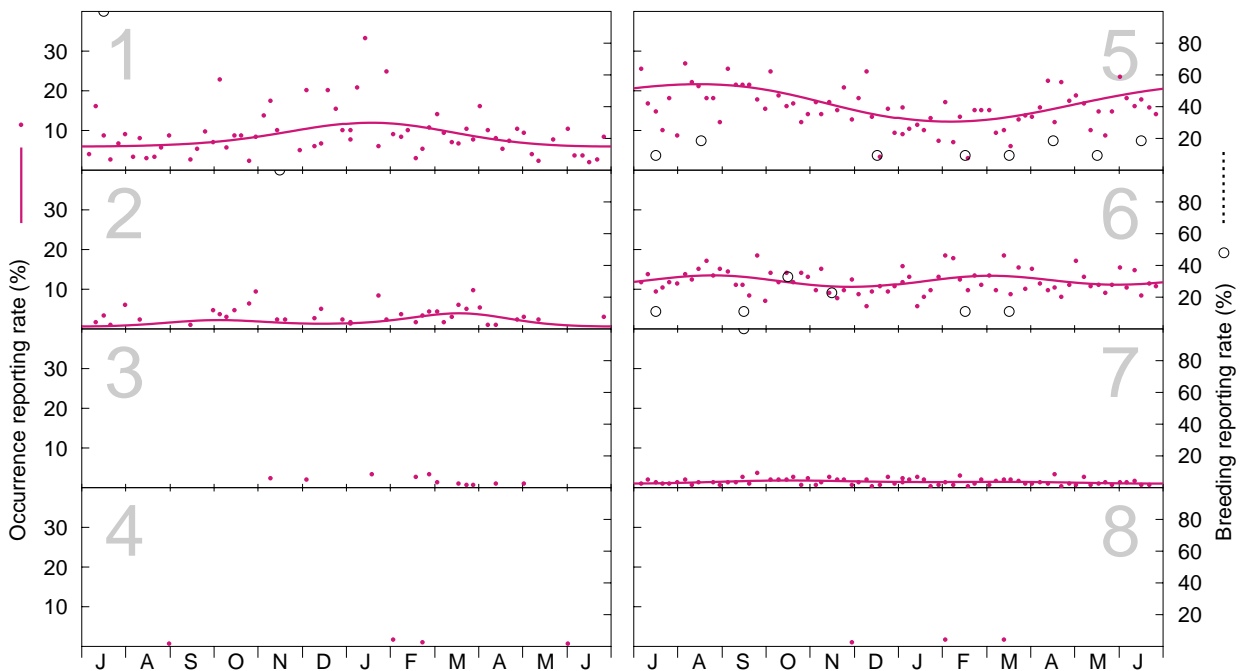
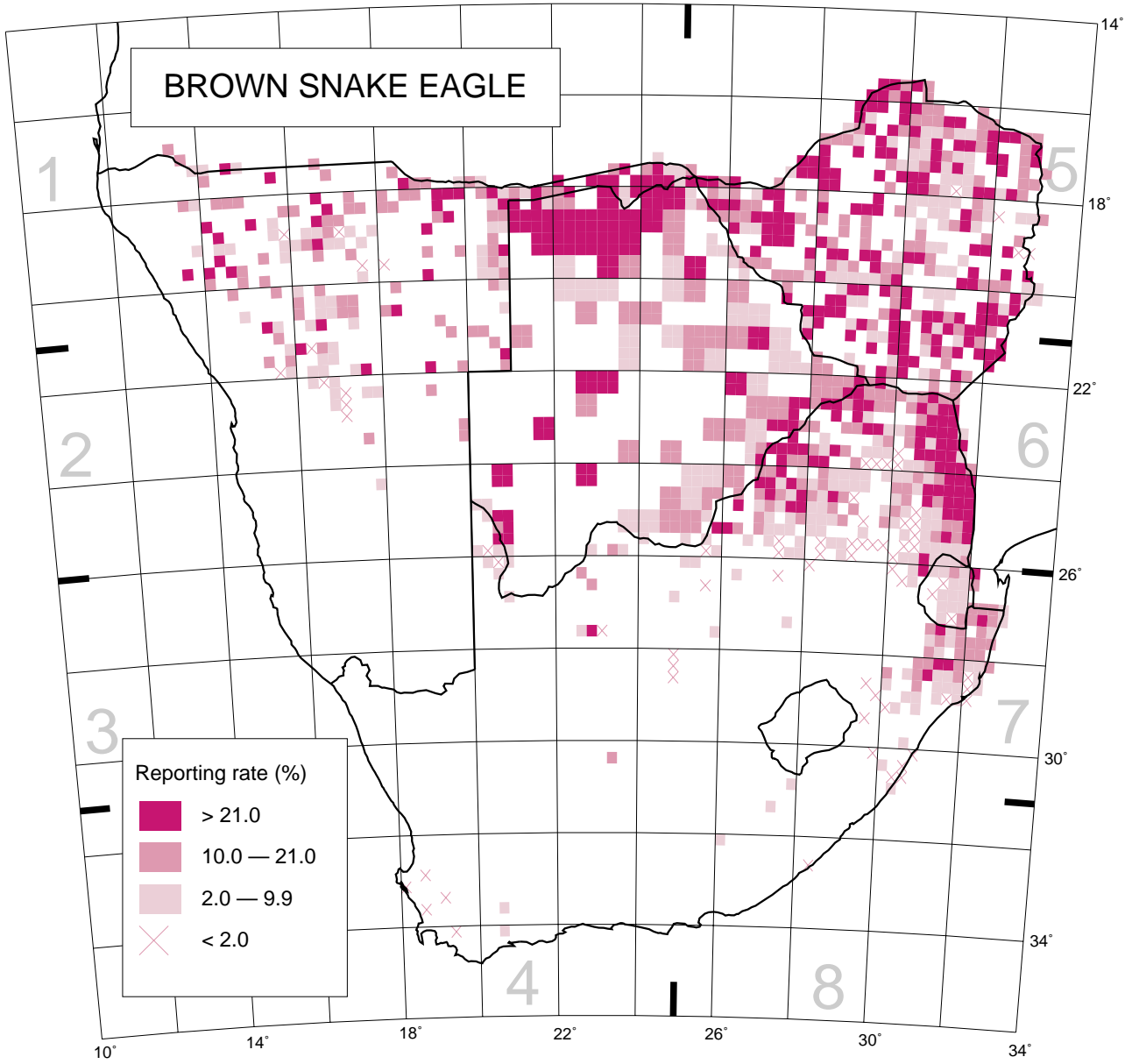
Total number of records: 6940

Mean reporting rate for range: 12.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in Valley Bushveld.



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 261, 70, 17, 4, 1511, 1382, 277, 3; Breeding: 1, 1, 0, 0, 11, 9, 1, 0.