

**Palmnut Vulture**

Witaasvoël

*Gypohierax angolensis*

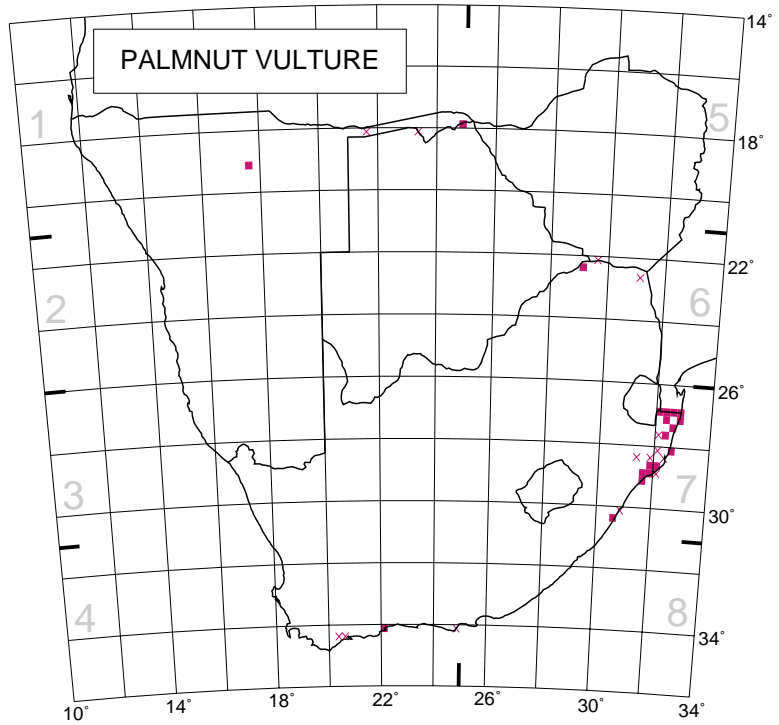
The Palmnut Vulture is fairly widespread in the forested and well-wooded zones of sub-Saharan Africa and is abundant in some regions, especially those associated with equatorial rainforest and commercial palm plantations (Mundy *et al.* 1992). In southern Africa, it is largely restricted to the eastern coastal plain from the Zambezi Delta in Mozambique (Mundy *et al.* 1992) to Mtunzini (2831DD) in KwaZulu-Natal, but vagrants were recorded widely during the atlas period. Distribution along the Mozambique coast is not continuous, and the KwaZulu-Natal population is separated by at least 700 km from any breeding sites to the north (V. Parker pers. comm.).

Breeding in southern Africa is apparently restricted to Kosi Bay (2632DD) and Mtunzini, with an estimated five pairs at the former locality and four at the latter (Chittenden & Myburgh 1996). It is conspicuous and easily identified, although immatures may be overlooked for other similarly sized and brown-plumaged raptors.

In its northern KwaZulu-Natal range, it occurs along the littoral which is hot, low-lying (below 200 m), high in rainfall, and rich in wetlands. It inhabits Kosi Palm *Raphia australis* groves in this region, whereas in the rest of Africa it is closely associated with Oil Palms *Elaeis guineensis* (Mundy *et al.* 1992). Palm fruits form a major part of its diet.

Breeding birds in northern KwaZulu-Natal are resident (Chittenden & Myburgh 1996) and the increased reporting rates for this region June–October are probably due to greater visibility while breeding. The scatter of vagrant records from other parts of southern Africa show that some individuals wander widely, apparently at any time of year and comprising both adults and juveniles (e.g. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b for the Transvaal; Allan 1994c and Allan *et al.* 1995a for the southwestern Cape Province). These vagrants are also frequently associated with isolated stands of palm trees. Other breeding populations are known from Angola, Zambia and Malawi, and possibly vagrants come from the north, over long distances, e.g. the southwestern Cape Province records are over 1300 km from Mtunzini (Mundy *et al.* 1992).

Breeding in KwaZulu-Natal is usually initiated in spring, with egg-laying probably peaking August–September (Mundy



Recorded in 33 grid cells, 0.7%  
 Total number of records: 354  
 Mean reporting rate for range: 6.0%

*et al.* 1992; Chittenden & Myburgh 1996), although Dean (1971) reported single cases of egg-laying in January and June. The atlas breeding records from this region come from September–October and February–March; the latter records may represent fledglings.

The Palmnut Vulture probably used to occur along much of the southern Mozambique coast where it is now absent (V. Parker pers. comm.). The Mtunzini population became established through the artificial introduction of palm trees there in the 20th century (Chittenden & Myburgh 1996). It is considered to be ‘rare’ in South Africa (Brooke 1984b).

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