

Lesser Blackwinged Plover

Kleinswartvlerkkiewiet

Vanellus lugubris

The Lesser Blackwinged Plover occurs in Africa south of the Sahara, breeding from Senegal to Kenya and south to the Congo River in the west (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The southeastern boundary of its range falls along the eastern limit of the atlas region: Gonarezhou National Park in southeastern Zimbabwe, Kruger National Park, eastern Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal, with further records along the Limpopo River drainage.

It is quiet, tending to stand motionless, and is cryptic in woodlands. It is easily confused with the Blackwinged Plover *V. melanopterus* and was therefore probably under-reported. The eye-ring is completely or partially yellow on a black background (Ward 1987), and not brown or black (e.g. Sinclair 1984; Maclean 1985c). Some of the wing coverts of the Lesser Blackwinged Plover are iridescent green, a feature not seen in the Blackwinged Plover (see text for the latter species). It is not likely to constitute a superspecies with the Blackwinged Plover, as suggested by Johnsgard (1981), and its phylogenetic relationships are obscure (Ward 1992).

It occurs in short and burnt grassland and open woodland with short grass, in tropical and subtropical areas above the 18°C isotherm (Ward & Maclean 1989). It is occasionally found in mixed-species flocks with Crowned *V. coronatus* and Blackwinged Plovers (Ward 1989a).

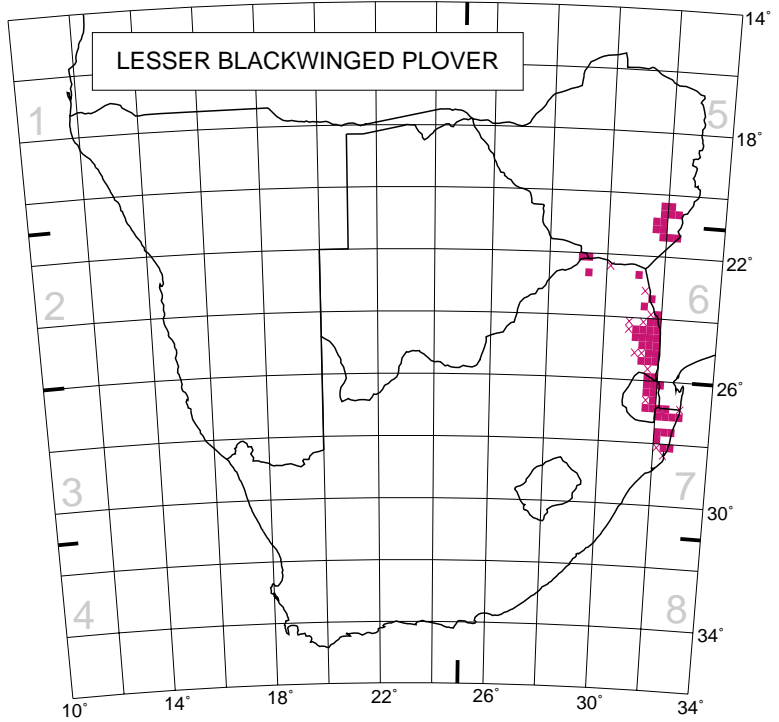
In low-lying areas of northern KwaZulu-Natal it usually breeds in open areas within *Acacia* woodlands, June–November (mostly September) (Dean 1971). Egg-laying in the Transvaal lowveld was recorded in January, June and October (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

It leaves areas when the grass grows too tall (Ward 1989a), and may move into Mozambique. Benson (1982) considered it to be sedentary, but the model for Zone 7 reliably shows seasonality, with peak occurrence in the late dry season, when it also breeds.

The Lesser Blackwinged Plover is classified as ‘rare’ in South Africa (Brooke 1984b) and may have decreased in numbers in the Hluhluwe–Umfolozu Game Reserve, and in other areas of northern KwaZulu-Natal, as a result of a change in veld-burning prac-

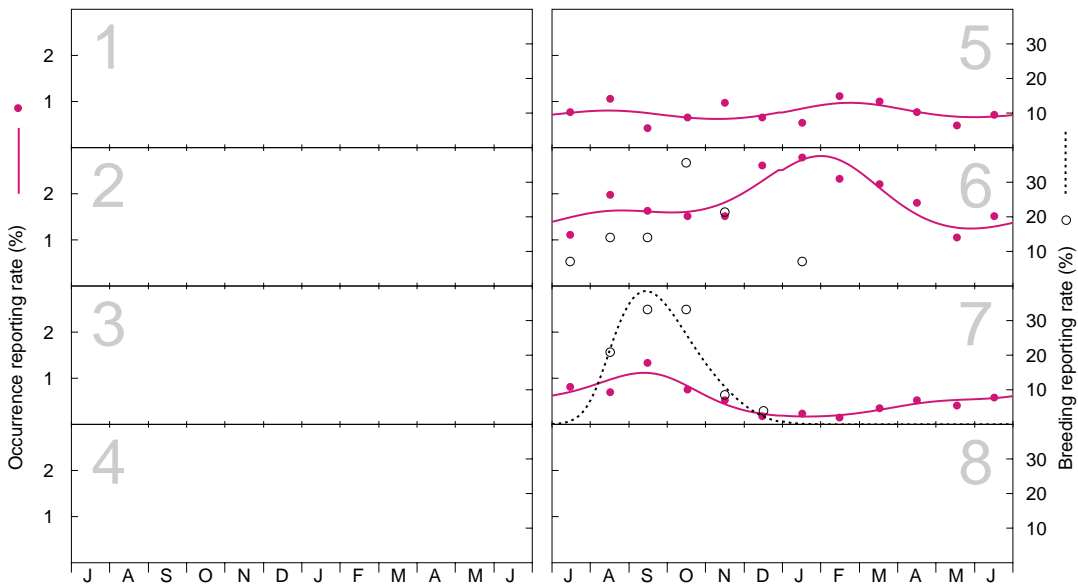
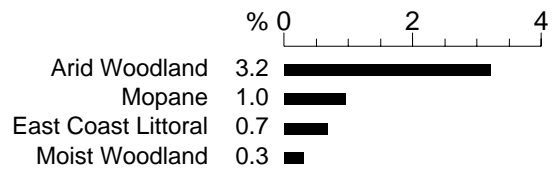
tices; not as much burnt ground or short grass is available as previously. It is largely extralimital in southern Africa and is not a conservation priority in this region because it is widespread in tropical Africa.

D. Ward

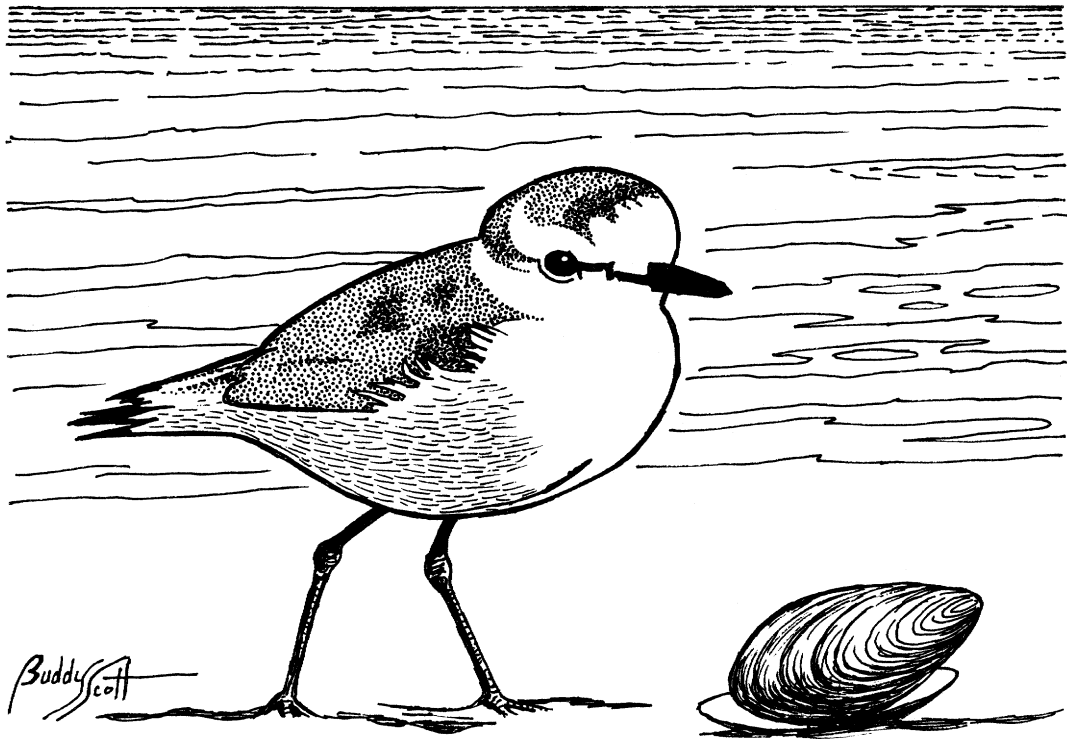


Recorded in 72 grid cells, 1.6%
 Total number of records: 782
 Mean reporting rate for range: 9.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 0, 88, 448, 246, 0; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 14, 24, 0.



Whitefronted Plover