

## Spotted Dikkop

### Dikkop

#### *Burhinus capensis*

The Spotted Dikkop is widespread throughout Africa south of the Sahara, except for the forested regions of West Africa and the Zaire basin, and the driest parts of Somalia. Isolated populations occur in the Arabian peninsula. In southern Africa the Spotted Dikkop is widespread throughout the region. It is a common resident in the southwestern and eastern Cape Province, the Free State, much of the Transvaal, Swaziland, Botswana and Etosha in northern Namibia. It occurs more sparsely in the arid west, KwaZulu-Natal, the Zimbabwean plateau, southern Mozambique and in more thickly wooded regions. It is largely absent from the driest parts of the Namib, from the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe and the Drakensberg massif.

Birds in Namibia and western Kalahari in Botswana belong to the subspecies *B. c. damarensis*, while all other populations in the region are of the nominate race (Clancey 1980b).

The Spotted Dikkop might be confused with the Water Dikkop *B. vermiculatus* at a distance, but it lacks the wingbar and is uniformly spotted, not streaked. In flight it has much smaller white flashes on the remiges than does the Water Dikkop. Its drier habitat preferences and more musical voice help to separate it from the Water Dikkop. When breeding it is usually in pairs or family groups, but may gather into flocks of 20–30 birds at other times.

**Habitat:** It was reported most frequently from Fynbos, Valley Bushveld, Grassy Karoo, Central Kalahari and various types of grasslands, including the whole of the South African highveld. It favours open grassland and savanna, edges of woodland, semi-desert with scrub (but not true desert), stony slopes of low hills, cultivated and overgrazed land, large lawns and playing fields (with nearby cover in which to roost by day), parks and cemeteries. It occurs sometimes on marine beaches, especially in the Cape Province (pers. obs). It favours habitats with sparse ground cover, especially where stony, and may often be seen on roads at night.

**Movements:** It has been described as a seasonal visitor to the Mashonaland Plateau of Zimbabwe (dominated by

*Brachystegia* woodland), suggesting local migration (Irwin 1981). The models show subtle fluctuations in reporting rate, particularly in the drier western regions (Zones 1–4). Small apparent drops in winter may reflect reduced vocalization, but this could be expected to affect all Zones. It appears to have partial movements into arid western areas during the rainy season.

**Breeding:** The models give a September–February peak in most Zones. In the Transvaal (Zone 6) Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) recorded egg-laying mainly in September–December, while in Zimbabwe (Zone 5) Irwin (1981) recorded August–November as the peak. In Namibia egg-laying has been recorded September–February, mainly October–January (Brown & Clinning in press). Long ‘tails’ to the models are probably partly the result of records of chicks and juveniles.

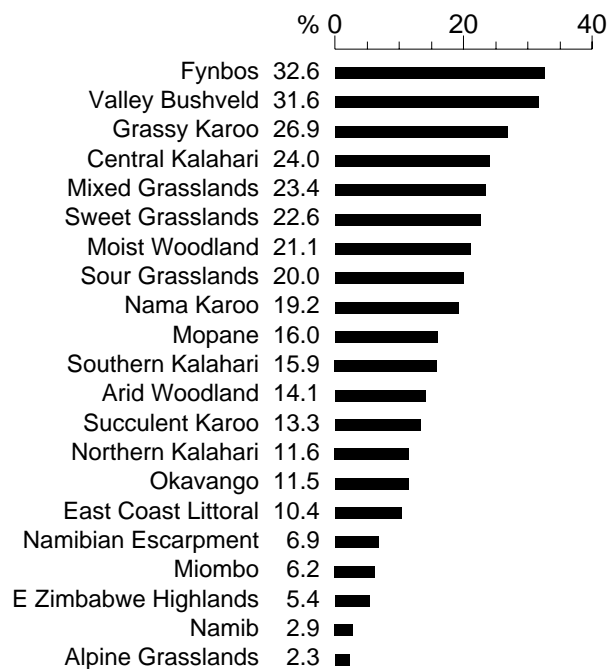
**Interspecific relationships:** It has a loud alarm call which some mammals and birds (e.g. coursers) respond to. Springhares *Pedetes capensis* will scatter on hearing the Spotted Dikkop alarm at the approach of owls (C.J. Brown pers. comm.).

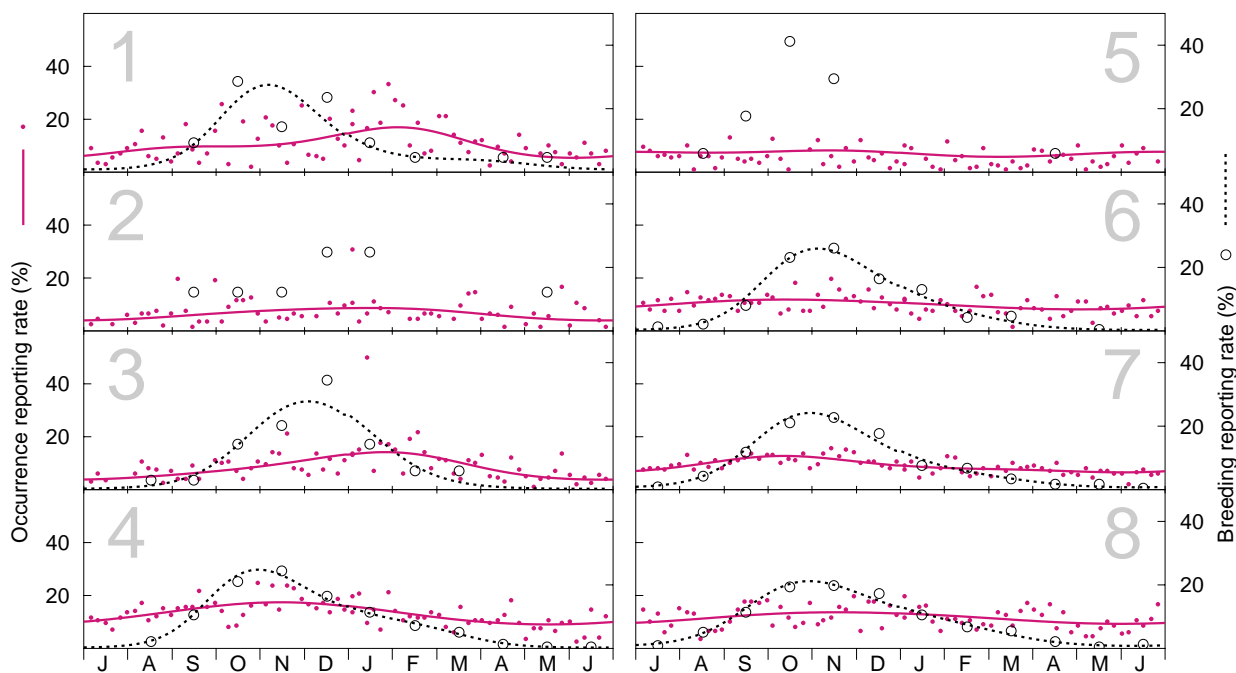
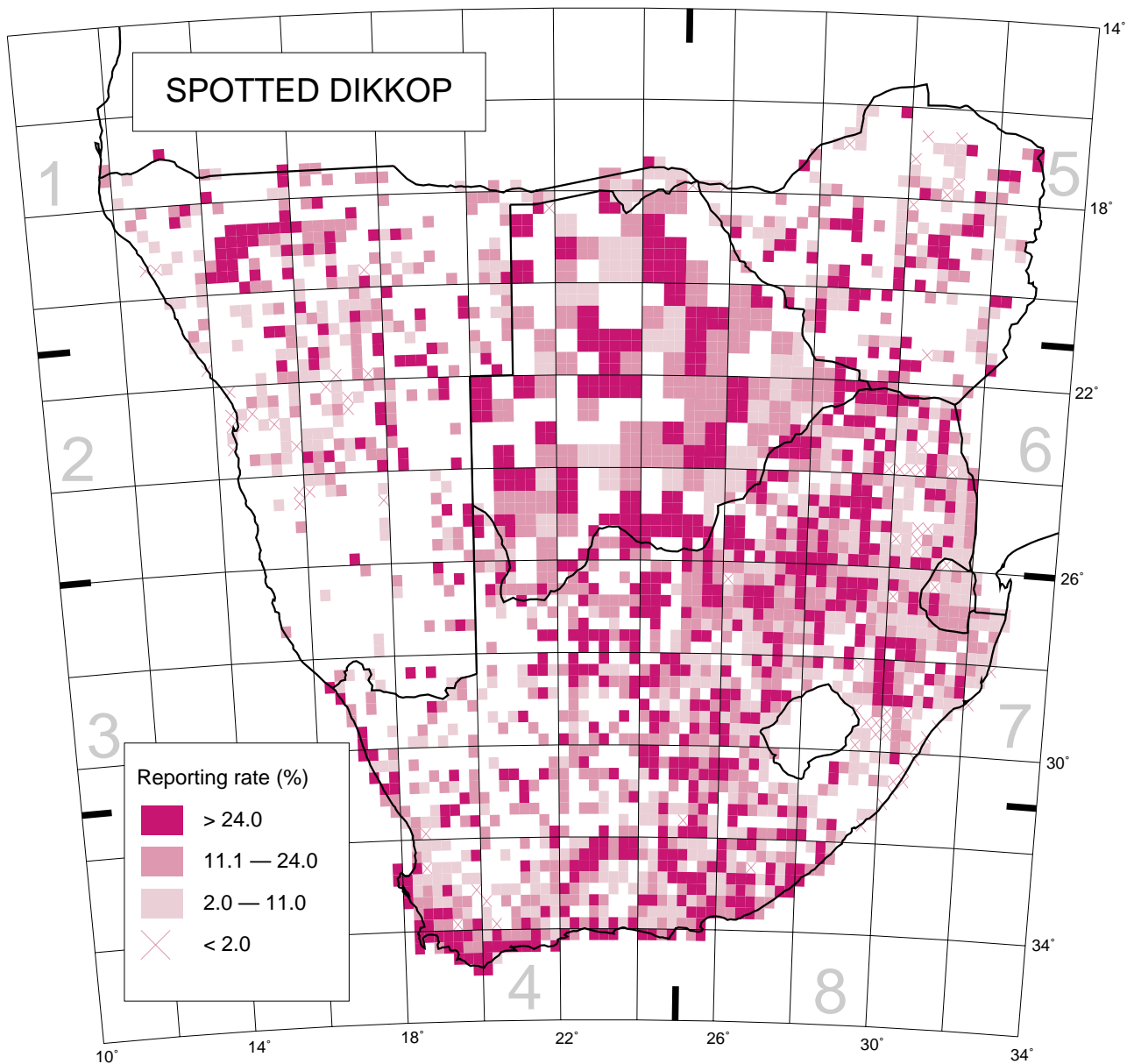
**Historical distribution and conservation:** Probably little changed, though the clearing of bush and forest has undoubtedly helped it to extend its range into formerly unsuitable places. Conversely, it is clear that conditions in Lesotho and the Transkei are inimical to this bird, as they are to a wide range of ground-nesting species. The ubiquitous presence of people and livestock make breeding virtually impossible. Large numbers of free-range domestic pigs are probably a particular threat to eggs and young chicks. Areas of absence in Zimbabwe appear to correlate with tribal trust lands where similar factors may operate. Under less extreme conditions, however, the Spotted Dikkop adapts well to habitats modified by human activity, and because it seems no longer to be regarded as a gamebird, it is unlikely to undergo any general decrease in numbers.

G.L. Maclean

Recorded in 2390 grid cells, 52.7%  
Total number of records: 28 965  
Mean reporting rate for range: 22.5%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 320, 223, 423, 1125, 629, 1139, 1764, 636; Breeding: 21, 8, 35, 463, 17, 146, 258, 241.