Rameron Pigeon

Geelbekbosduif

Columba arquatrix

The Rameron Pigeon is an Afrotropical endemic, extending from Ethiopia and southern Sudan southward through the montane regions of the eastern half of Africa to the southern subcontinent, with an isolated population in the Angolan highlands (Urban *et al.* 1986). In southern Africa it is especially associated with Afromontane forests of the east and south. It extends westwards along the Magaliesberg range (2527C,D) and the Vaal River. It ranges through the southern coastal region to the southwestern Cape Province, reaching the Cedarberg Mountains (3219A).

It normally occurs in flocks of 5–70 or more birds, with aggregations at feeding areas numbering in excess of 1000 birds (Oatley 1984). Although the yellow legs, feet, bill and orbital skin make this a distinctive bird, the similar-sized Rock Pigeon *C. guinea* can be confused with this species when silhouetted in flight; some atlas records, especially those in the drier parts of the region, may be based on such misidentifications.

Habitat: Characteristically a species of Afromontane forest, it may also be found in lowland and coastal forests, and in riverine forest in adjacent areas. It is a powerful flier and habitually undertakes daily flights from forest roosts to favoured feeding areas where berries and other small fruits are abundant. These flights may take it into a variety of habitats, including bushveld in winter when large flowering aloes, such as *Aloe marlothii*, provide copious nectar. Large numbers inhabit plantations of wattle, gum and pine in KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland and the Transvaal (Oatley 1984).

Movements: The atlas data reveal seasonal variations in reporting rates, mostly minor, but there is no consistent trend. It is not known to be migratory, and Rowan (1983) described its wanderings as verging on nomadic. Seasonal abundance in certain areas coincides with the availability of ripe fruit of a size that the Rameron can pluck and swallow whole. Introduced trees such as the Mulberry *Morus nigra* have regular annual fruit crops, whereas many indigenous trees do not set fruit every year. Where populations rely on indigenous fruiting trees their movements are unpredictable (Phillips 1927), but they seem increasingly to feed instead on the fruits of alien plants such as *Solanum* and *Octandra* spp. (Oatley 1984).

Breeding: Atlas data indicate that breeding activity may occur throughout the year, especially along the southern coastal areas, although the majority of records fall in the warmer months September–April. Rowan (1983) also found indications of year-round breeding, but 13 of the 38 records tabulated were in May, and 11 of these were from KwaZulu-Natal.

Interspecific relationships: It is not known to breed, feed or flock with other species (Rowan 1983). It occurs alongside Delegorgue's Pigeon *C. delegorguei* in some KwaZulu-Natal forests.

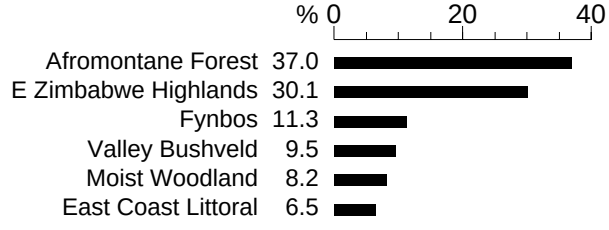
Historical distribution and conservation: It was locally more abundant in the 19th century, but the widespread exploitation of hardwoods in the indigenous forests must have seriously depleted its food resources (Oatley 1984). Numbers appear to have increased in recent decades following the extensive artificial afforestation of many areas that were formerly open grassveld.

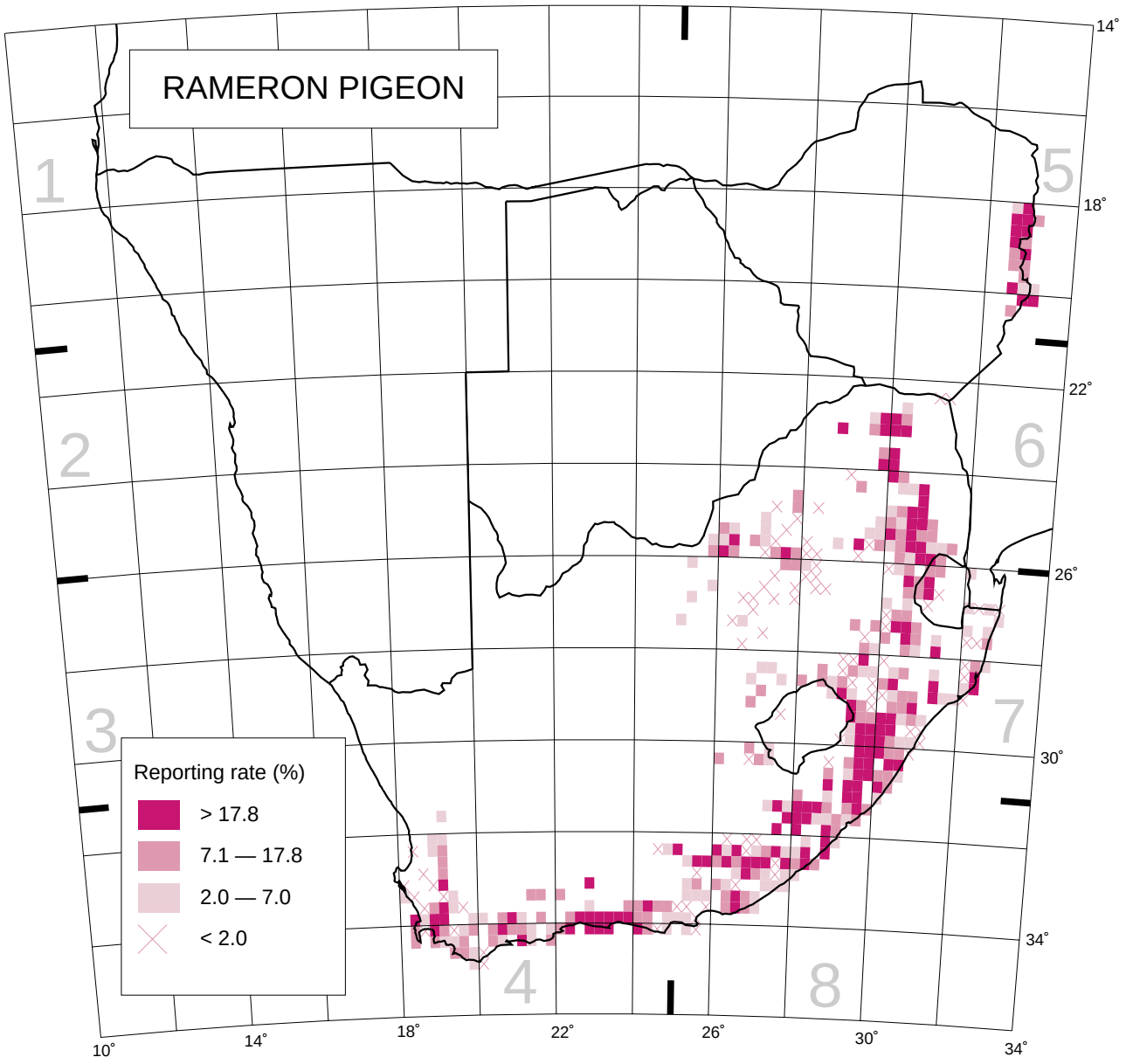
The Rameron Pigeon is not considered threatened, although its fast and powerful flight has long made it a popular quarry for sport hunters. In parts of KwaZulu-Natal it is illegally shot because of its role in spreading Bugweed *Solanum mauritianum* (Oatley 1984), but the populations there seem to be increasing, notwithstanding its unofficial 'pest' status.

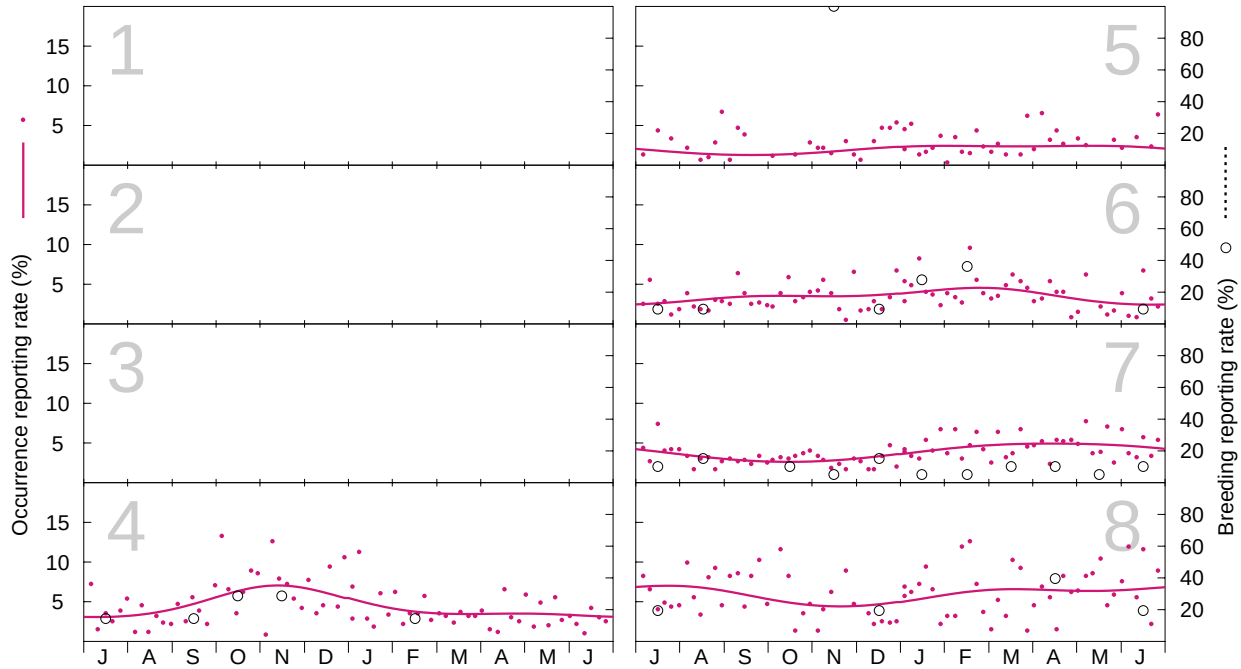
T.B. Oatley

Extent of range: 460 grid cells, 10.1%
Total number of records: 7791
Mean reporting rate for range: 11.9%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 382, 173, 395, 753, 325; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 7, 1, 11, 20, 5.