

Grey Lourie

Kwêvoël

Corythaixoides concolor

The Grey Lourie is widely distributed in the northern half of southern Africa. It extends along isolated watercourses through the Namib Desert in the west, through central and northern Namibia, the moister parts of northern and eastern Botswana, Zimbabwe, the Transvaal, except the extreme south, to lowland Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal in the east. It is common throughout most of this range, but not so in northern KwaZulu-Natal (Cyrus & Robson 1980). The range extends to Angola, Zambia, Malawi and western Mozambique, reaching its limits in southern Zaire and Tanzania (Fry *et al.* 1988). Three subspecies have been recognized in the region (Clancey 1980b); the map suggests a zone of lower reporting rates west of the Okavango, separating *C. c. pallidiceps* in the west from *bechuanae* to the east, and similarly along the Transvaal escarpment and through south-eastern Zimbabwe, separating *bechuanae* from nominate *concolor* to the east.

It is a particularly distinctive bird, both in appearance and call, and the atlas data can be considered reliable.

Habitat: It occurs in open woodland. Although often considered to prefer *Acacia* woodlands (Rowan 1983), this is scarcely borne out by the atlas data. The distribution coincides closely with that of Moist Woodland, Mopane and Miombo. It is also typical of *Acacia*-dominated Arid Woodland in central Namibia, Botswana and the southeastern lowlands, but is absent from the rest of KwaZulu-Natal where there is plenty of apparently suitable habitat. Local gaps in distribution may be attributed to a lack of suitable fruiting trees (Harwin 1959). In striking contrast to the absence from the central Kalahari, the Okavango region has the highest reporting rate. This is easily explained if the species is dependent upon free water, and there is evidence that this is the case. Both Prozesky (1963) and Winterbottom (1969b) noted it to be common near water and absent elsewhere, and Maclean (1960) recorded it spreading along the tributaries of the Fish River in southern Namibia after rain. Its presence on the Witwatersrand (2628A) is an anomaly; the original grassland habitat is unsuitable, and the species lives in gardens, along drainage lines and servi-

tudes, mainly in alien vegetation. In this situation it probably relies upon the fruits of *Seringa Melia azedarach*, and it is an important agent in the dispersal of this alien tree (Winterbottom 1971a).

Movements: There is no evidence of regular seasonal movements. Irregular wandering in response to fluctuations in food and water is well known (Rowan 1983).

Breeding: Breeding was recorded in all months. The breeding model for Zone 5 is flatter than suggested by nest records, which show that peak egg-laying occurs September–October, as in Zone 6 (Irwin 1981; Rowan 1983). In Zone 2, breeding is both later and more sharply seasonal, peaking December–January. This difference between the pattern of breeding phenology in the east and west could be attributed to the earlier onset of the summer rains in the east, and to the generally greater rainfall in the east. The bimodal pattern of breeding in Zone 7, which includes the birds on the Witwatersrand, Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal, is probably an artefact of small sample size.

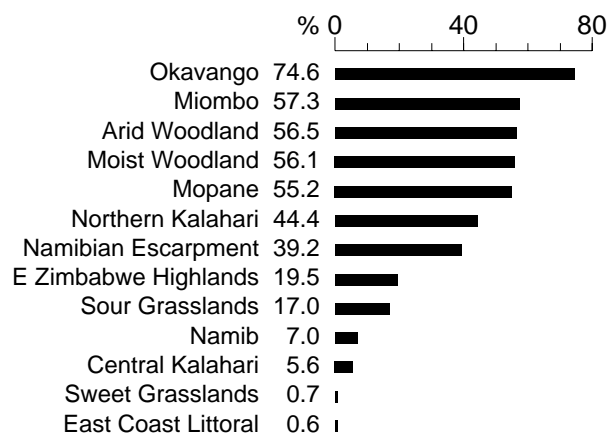
Interspecific relationships: It has no close relatives in southern Africa. The other southern African louries are forest and dense woodland dwellers and have little if any contact with this species.

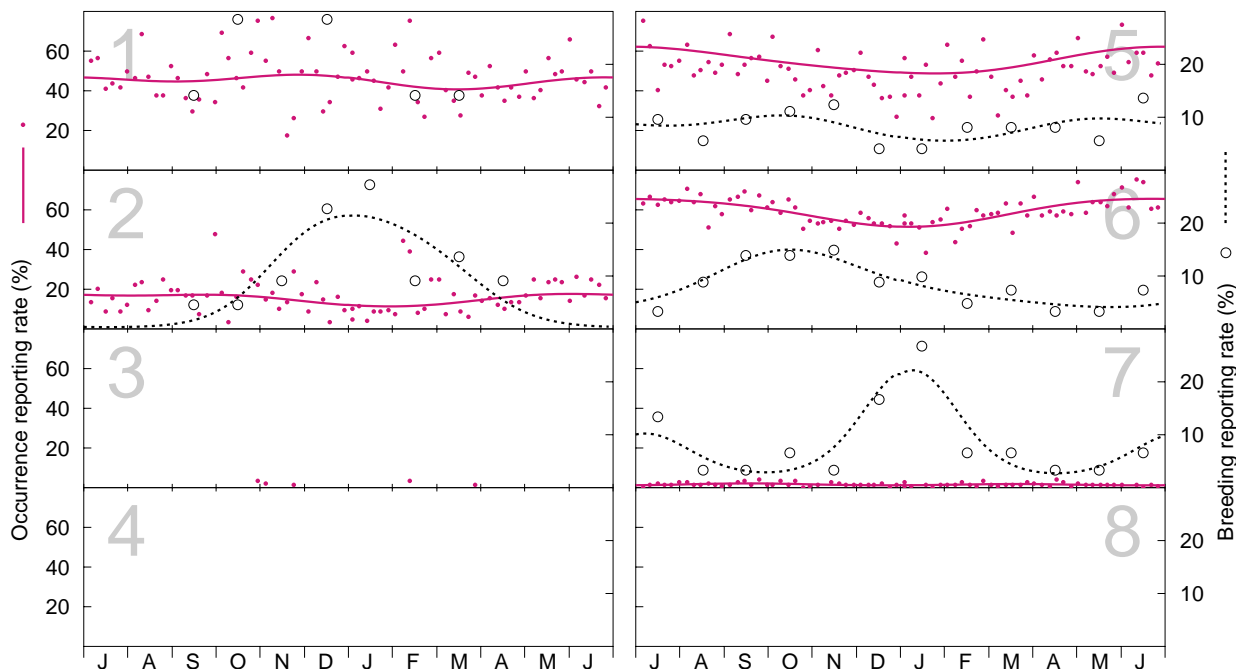
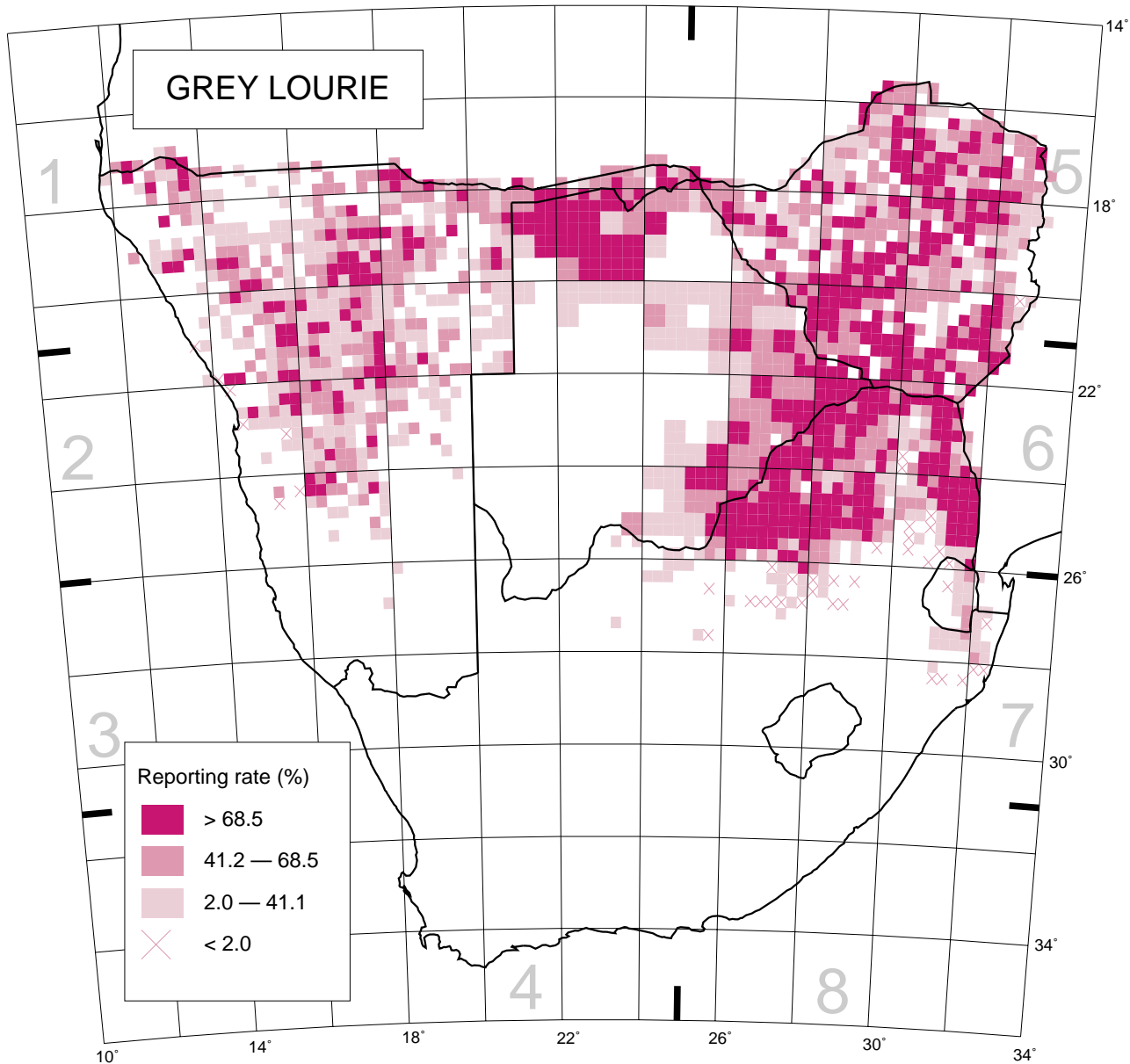
Historical distribution and conservation: The main range has altered little within historic times, but two interesting developments have taken place on the range margins. The Grey Lourie was unknown on the Witwatersrand (Bunning 1977), but invaded in 1978 (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and is now common in Johannesburg. Such a radical change in habitat acceptance could hardly have been predicted. In KwaZulu-Natal it formerly occurred in Mfolozi (2831B) (Stark & Sclater 1903), south of its present range. It was 'common' in 1963, but last recorded in 1971 (Macdonald & Birkenstock 1980). Since then it has retreated northwards, probably in response to an interlude of higher rainfall and the culling of large herbivores, both of which allowed the woodland habitat to become denser and less suitable for this species. The Grey Lourie is not threatened.

D.N. Johnson

Recorded in 1751 grid cells, 38.6%
Total number of records: 31 101
Mean reporting rate for range: 49.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 1483, 556, 5, 0, 4831, 6780, 305, 0; Breeding: 7, 22, 0, 0, 73, 122, 30, 0.