

Spotted Eagle Owl

Gevlekte Ooruil

Bubo africanus

The Spotted Eagle Owl is the most widespread owl in southern Africa, having been recorded virtually throughout the region. It is also abundant and widely distributed elsewhere in Africa, with the range encompassing all of sub-Saharan Africa except lowland forest in western and central Africa and parts of Somalia and Ethiopia (Fry *et al.* 1988). Reporting rates were highest in the northeastern areas of southern Africa, and lowest in northwestern areas. Compared with other species, however, variation in reporting rates was relatively small, *c.* 5–15% in the eight Zones. This suggests that populations are fairly evenly spread throughout the region. On a more local basis, the atlas data suggest pockets of relatively high and low abundance. It appears to be absent from most of Lesotho and the Namib Desert sand sea, while it may be comparatively more abundant in the southwestern Cape Province, KwaZulu-Natal midlands, northeastern Transvaal, and in northeastern Zimbabwe.

Few population or density estimates are available. Three pairs were found in 5.8 km² in Zimbabwe (Fry *et al.* 1988), an estimated four pairs in 69 km² in the central Transvaal (Mendelsohn 1989a), and an estimated 10 pairs in 620 km² in the Matobo National Park (2028C,D) (Macdonald & Gargett 1984).

It is large and often perches alongside and on roads; it also calls loudly, making it a conspicuous and well-recorded species.

Habitat: Its broad range of habitats is confirmed by the atlas data which came from all vegetation types in the region. Reporting rates were above 5% in all vegetation types, except the Okavango and Afromontane Forest; the highest reporting rate came from Miombo. It also readily occupies man-made habitats, roosting and nesting in gardens, quarries and buildings. The occupation of different habitats is associated with

a similarly wide range of prey types, varying in size from the smallest insects to large birds. Rodents are the predominant prey in most areas. A great variety of nest sites is used, including scrapes on the ground, cavities and stick nests in trees, and cavities and ledges on cliffs and buildings.

Movements: Regular movements are not known in southern Africa and the models show little seasonal variation in reporting rates. However, nomadic movements occur into areas where prey is abundant, resulting in dense aggregations; these movements are usually associated with rodent plagues. A remarkable record, showing that this species can wander long distances, is of an immature bird ringed near Postmasburg (2722CC) and recovered almost 700 km away at Saldanha (3317BB), and presumably reflects juvenile dispersal (Oatley 1996).

Breeding: Clutches are typically laid in early summer, the peak egg-laying months being July–October (Steyn 1982b; Fry *et al.* 1988; Mendelsohn 1989a). Most atlas breeding data span August–January and appear remarkably uniform throughout the region, although perhaps about one month later in the western Zones on average.

Interspecific relationships: Because of its broad distribution and abundance, it is sympatric with other owls, including Cape Eagle *B. capensis* and Giant Eagle *B. lacteus* Owls. Competitive or other relationships between these species are not known to affect their distribution or abundance.

Historical distribution and conservation: Thousands of Spotted Eagle Owls, mainly juveniles (R.K. Brooke pers. comm.), are killed each year on southern African roads, 26 dead birds being found along 200 km of road in Namibia (Steyn 1982b). Despite such heavy mortality, its broad diet, abundance and use of a wide range of habitats, including man-made ones, are features contributing to a secure status. No evidence is available to suggest recent changes in distribution.

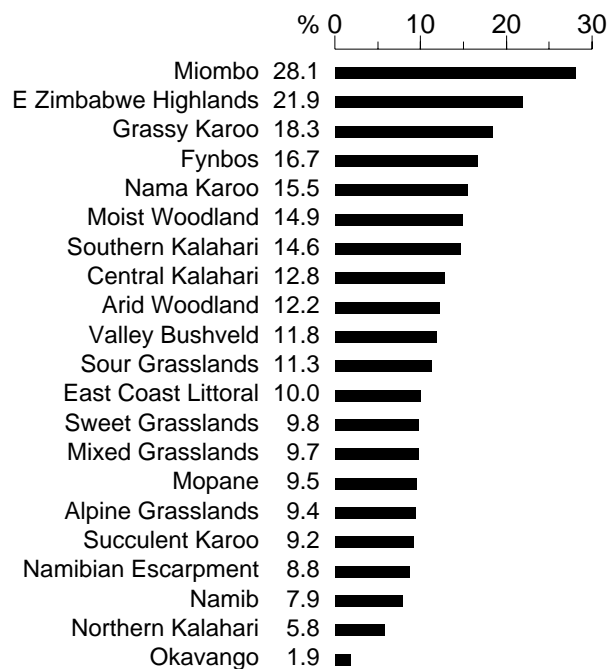
J.M. Mendelsohn

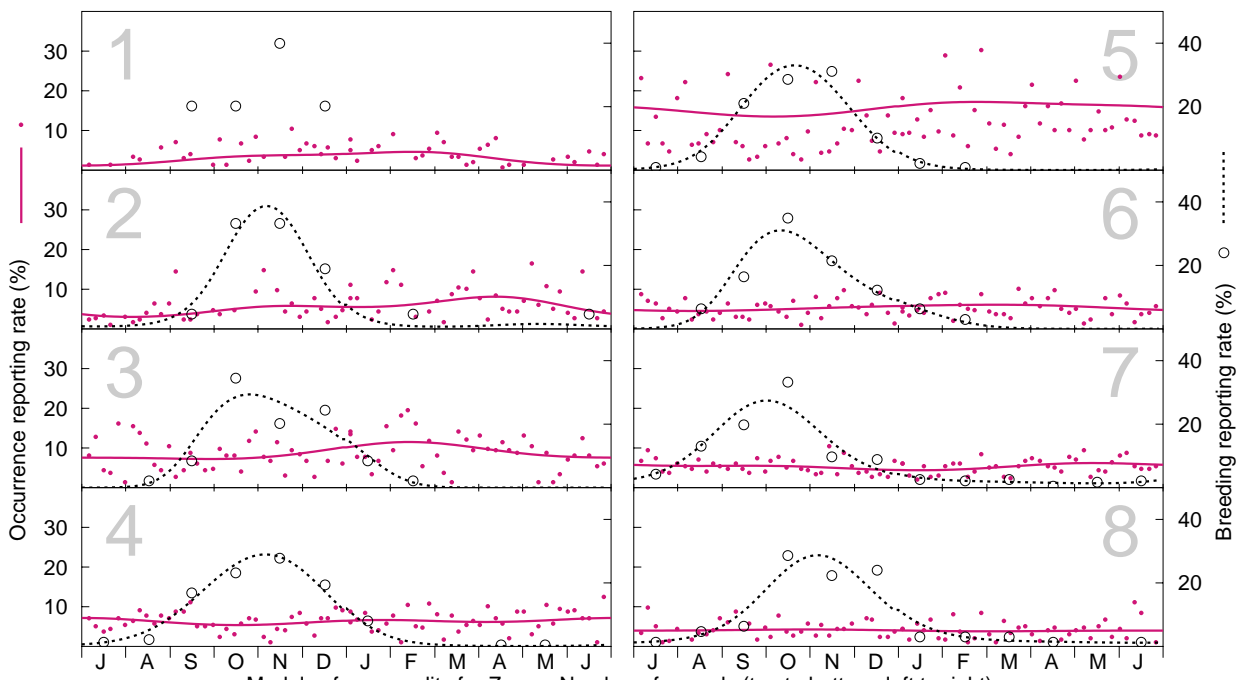
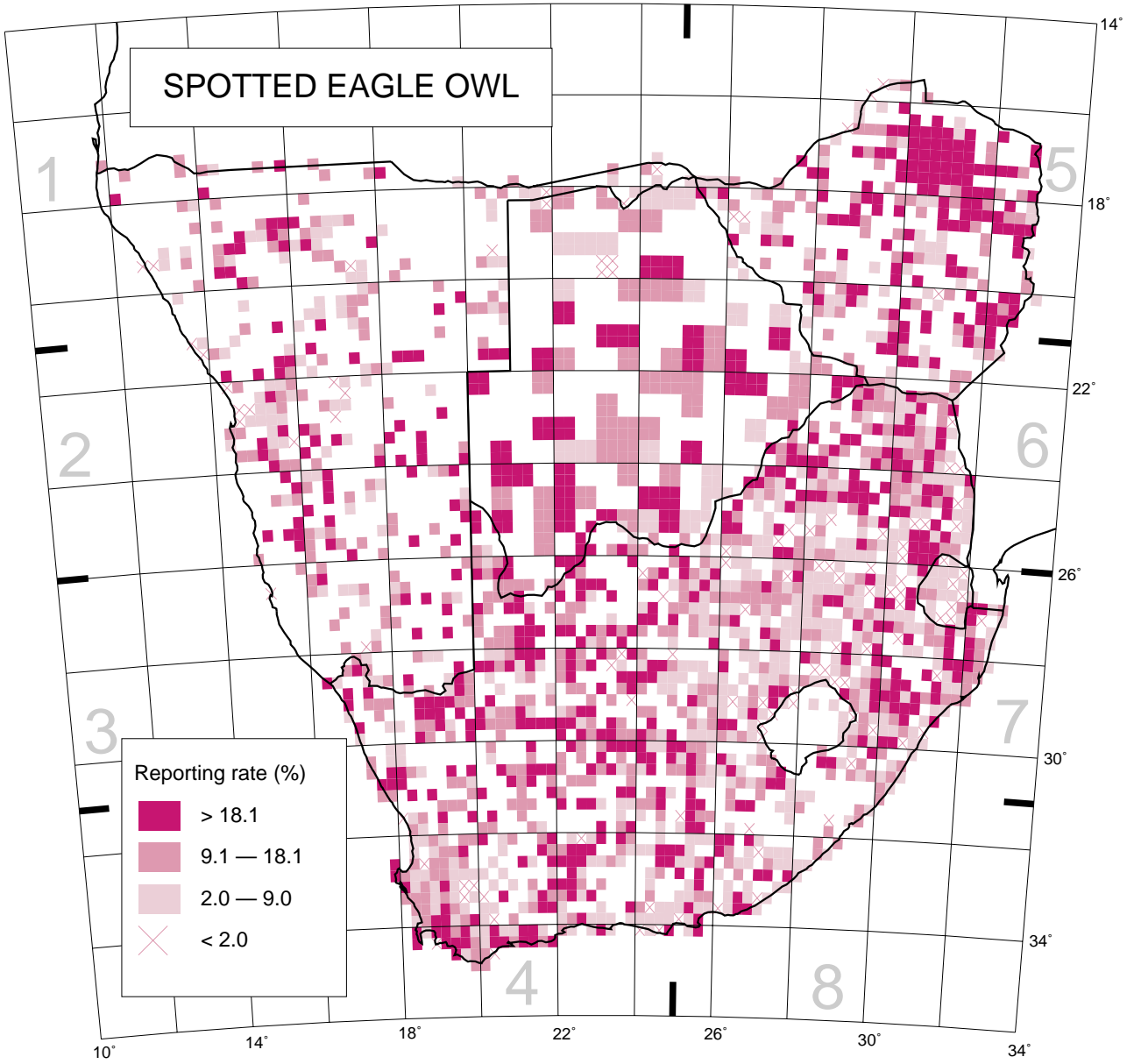
Recorded in 2186 grid cells, 48.2%

Total number of records: 19 211

Mean reporting rate for range: 15.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 92, 201, 479, 549, 1357, 611, 1043, 221; Breeding: 15, 21, 49, 165, 90, 66, 193, 63.