

Woodland Kingfisher

Bosveldvisvanger

Halcyon senegalensis

The Woodland Kingfisher is an intra-African migrant, present on its austral breeding grounds during the summer. It occurs in the extreme north and, more extensively, in the northeastern parts of the atlas region. It is widely distributed in the savannas of the continent in two subspecies, with a third restricted to the rainforests of the equatorial belt.

Phylogenetically it is not distantly removed from the forest-dwelling Bluebreasted Kingfisher *H. malimbica*, but does not form a superspecies with it. Some workers aver that the Woodland and Mangrove *H. senegaloides* Kingfishers form a superspecies, but they differ in biology, vocalization, post-breeding movement patterns, bill-coloration and mass.

Birds with extensively or completely red bills have repeatedly been recorded (Hanmer 1983, 1984c, 1989c; Newman 1984), and they closely resemble Mangrove Kingfishers with which they are regularly confused. In southern Africa, the ranges of the two species meet only in extreme northern KwaZulu-Natal.

On its breeding grounds it is generally found in pairs, occupying relatively large territories, even in optimum habitat. It is perhaps the most readily visible of the dry country *Halcyon* spp., its characteristic trilling call drawing attention to its presence.

Habitat: It is found in well-developed woodland, particularly in tall riverine *Acacia* stands and Mopane, especially where the grass understorey is heavily grazed. It favours country below 1000 m. The reporting rates and pattern of distribution indicate that relative abundance in the Miombo woodlands of Zimbabwe is substantially lower than in

woodland types further south in southern Zimbabwe (Mopane Woodland), the Transvaal (Mopane, Moist and Arid Woodlands) and to the west in northern Botswana and the Caprivi (Okavango, Mopane). Reporting rates were highest in the Okavango where it is common in swamp-fringing woodland. Its preference for riverine woodland is illustrated by the strip of higher abundance along the Limpopo drainage on the Botswana–Transvaal border. It requires trees with holes for nesting.

Movements: The savanna races are migrants, whereas the forest form found north of southern Africa is largely sedentary, though a specimen has been collected on the Kunene River of Namibia, well to the south of the equatorial rainforests (Winterbottom 1971d). Migrants arrive in the first two weeks of November and the return migration takes place from mid-April (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Birds of the population stronghold in northern Botswana arrive about two weeks earlier than birds in southeastern Botswana which form part of the Transvaal population (Herremans 1994d). The atlas findings are similar. Southern breeders of the race *H. s. cyanoleuca* spend the winter in equatorial Africa. Migratory movements are undertaken at night.

Breeding: Breeding in the Transvaal takes place November–March, peaking December–January; data for Zimbabwe are comparable (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). There are two breeding records for October from Botswana (Skinner 1996a). The atlas data agree well with this.

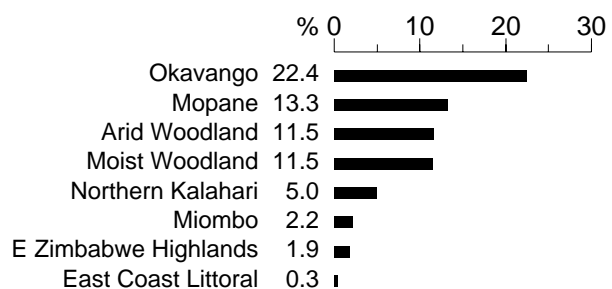
Interspecific relationships: Its distribution overlaps almost everywhere with the Brownhooded Kingfisher *H. albiventris*, and they frequently occur alongside each other. Although it is similar to the Mangrove Kingfisher in appearance, the two are largely allopatric, use different habitats and differ in diet. It has been recorded visiting Redbilled *Quelea quelea* colonies to feed on small chicks (Clancey 1992b).

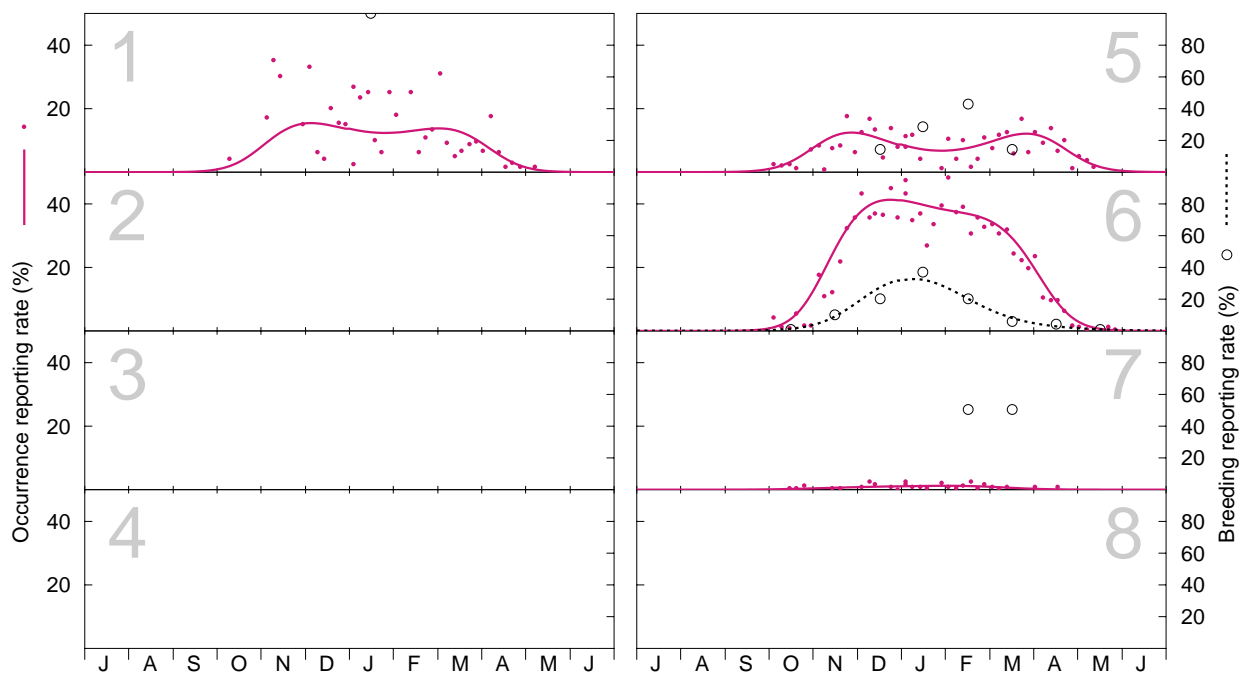
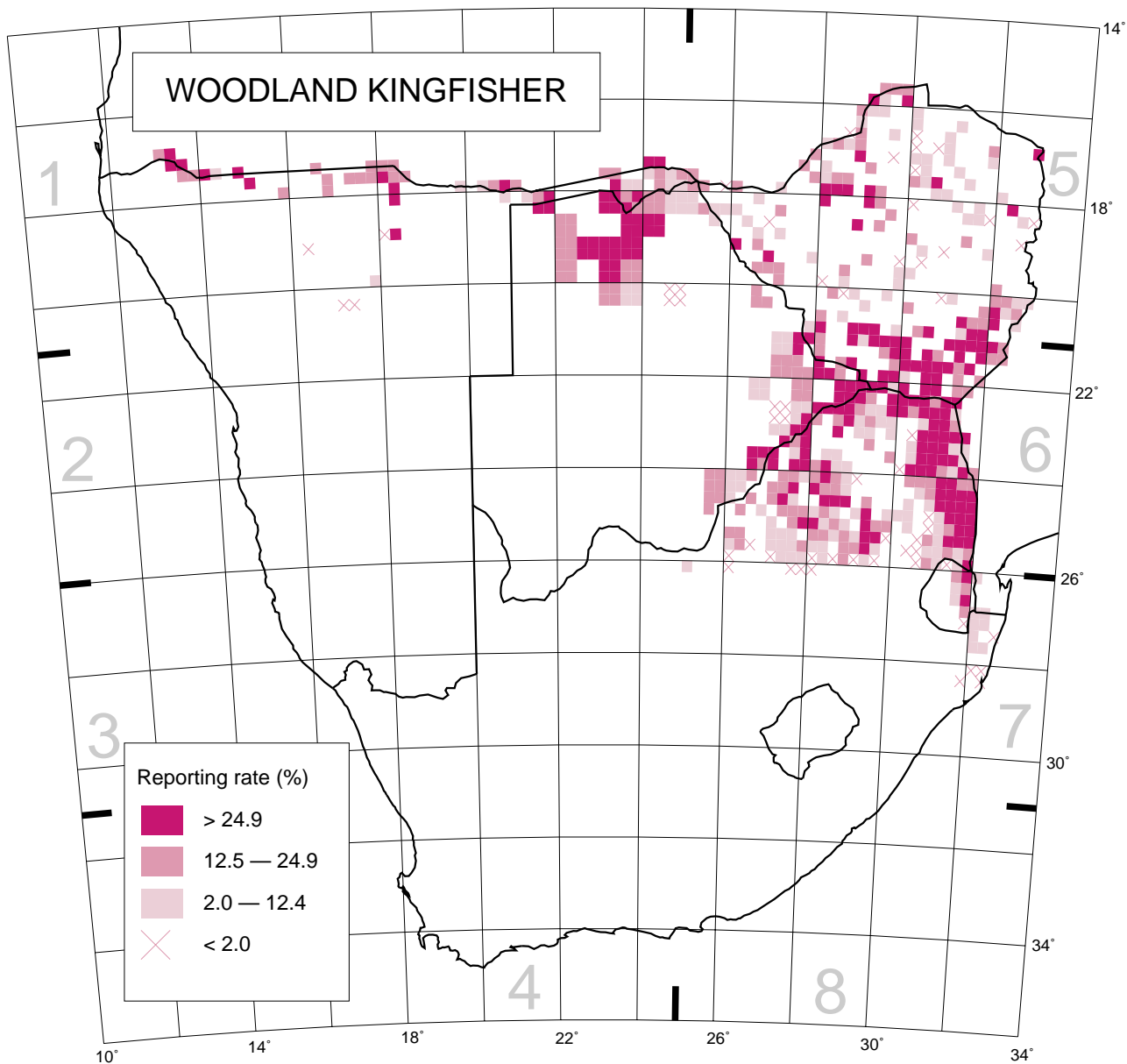
Historical distribution and conservation: The Woodland Kingfisher is not considered threatened at present, but is subject to some loss of numbers through accidents in built-up areas while on migration (Irwin 1981). Continued destruction of woodlands, particularly riparian woodlands, will have negative effects on the species.

P.A. Clancey

Recorded in 625 grid cells, 13.8%
Total number of records: 5000
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 171, 0, 0, 0, 440, 1771, 79, 0; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 0, 7, 70, 2, 0.