

African Finfoot

Watertrapper

Podica senegalensis

The African Finfoot occurs widely in sub-Saharan Africa, except in the drier southwest and northeast (Urban *et al.* 1986). In southern Africa it occurs in the mesic east, from Mossel Bay (3422AA) eastwards along the coast to northern KwaZulu-Natal. There is a paucity of records from Transkei. The population in Swaziland is *c.* 40 birds (Parker 1994). In the Transvaal, it is common along the eastern watercourses of the lowveld: the Levuvhu, lower Olifants, Letaba, Sabie, (eastern) Crocodile and Komati rivers. It is less common in the interior: upper Olifants, Pienaar's, (western) Crocodile, Hennops, Magalies, Skeerpoort and Palala-Limpopo rivers (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The first records for the Free State were made subsequent to atlas fieldwork by Colahan *et al.* (1995) at Renoster River (2727BC) and Vredespruit (2827AD). In Botswana, it occurs along the Limpopo River, between Kasane and Kazungula on the Chobe River, and on the Linyanti River (Randall 1993a; Penry 1994; M. Herremans pers. comm.); only those along the Limpopo River are mapped. It is absent from the Okavango system (Penry 1994). In Namibia, it is found in the eastern Caprivi Strip along the Zambezi and Kwando rivers (Winterbottom 1971d). It occurs widely in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981).

It is found on river systems draining east or south; apart from a single atlas record from the Vaal River (2627DD) and the two Free State records, it was not recorded in westward-draining catchments, such as the Vaal-Orange and Kunene systems.

It is found alone or in pairs (Maclean 1993b). It is highly local, owing to its specialized habitat requirements, and it is often overlooked (Skead 1967b; Irwin 1981; Urban *et al.* 1986; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Densities of one pair/1.5 km and one pair/2.2 km of river have been reported from Zimbabwe and Kenya (Irwin 1981; Urban *et al.* 1986).

Habitat: The vegetation analysis shows that it occurs in forest and woodland regions. Here it inhabits streams and rivers lined with reeds, overhanging trees and shrubs (Irwin 1981; Brooke 1984b; Urban *et al.* 1986; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It avoids both stagnant and fast-flowing water, is typical of perennial rather than ephemeral watercourses, and apparently prefers clear to silted water. It is occasionally found in dams, especially the upper reaches. The plumage is probably not

waterproof and water temperature may be important in determining its distribution. Its absence from the Okavango may be related to the static nature of the waterflow there, the generally nutrient-poor nature of the system, and the fact that the treeline is usually set well back from the floodplain. It apparently avoids 'sand rivers' in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981), which have a paucity of overhanging woody vegetation along the banks.

Movements: It is thought to be largely sedentary but its occasional appearance along seasonal rivers shows that some local movements do occur (Irwin 1981; Urban *et al.* 1986). The models do not suggest any pattern of migration.

Breeding: Egglaying in Zimbabwe occurs August-March, mainly September-January (Irwin 1981). In the Transvaal breeding activity has been recorded in April, May and August (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and in KwaZulu-Natal three egglaying records come from January,

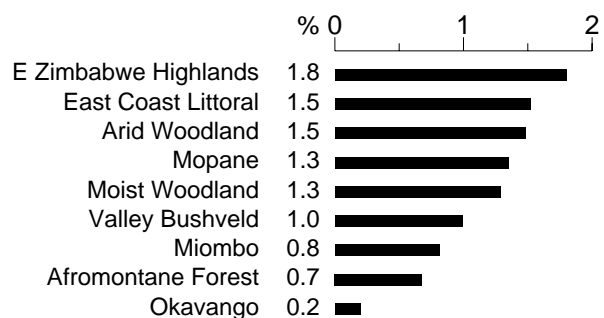
March and December (Dean 1971). Atlas breeding records were November-March, mainly November-January, except for a single August record.

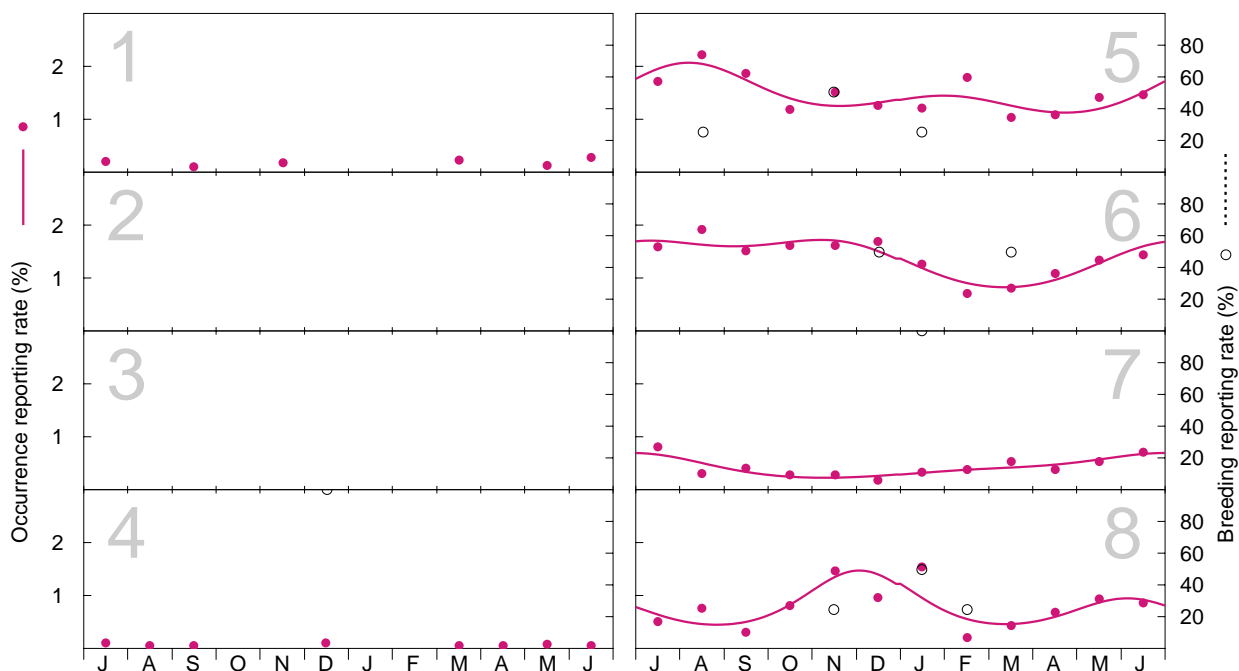
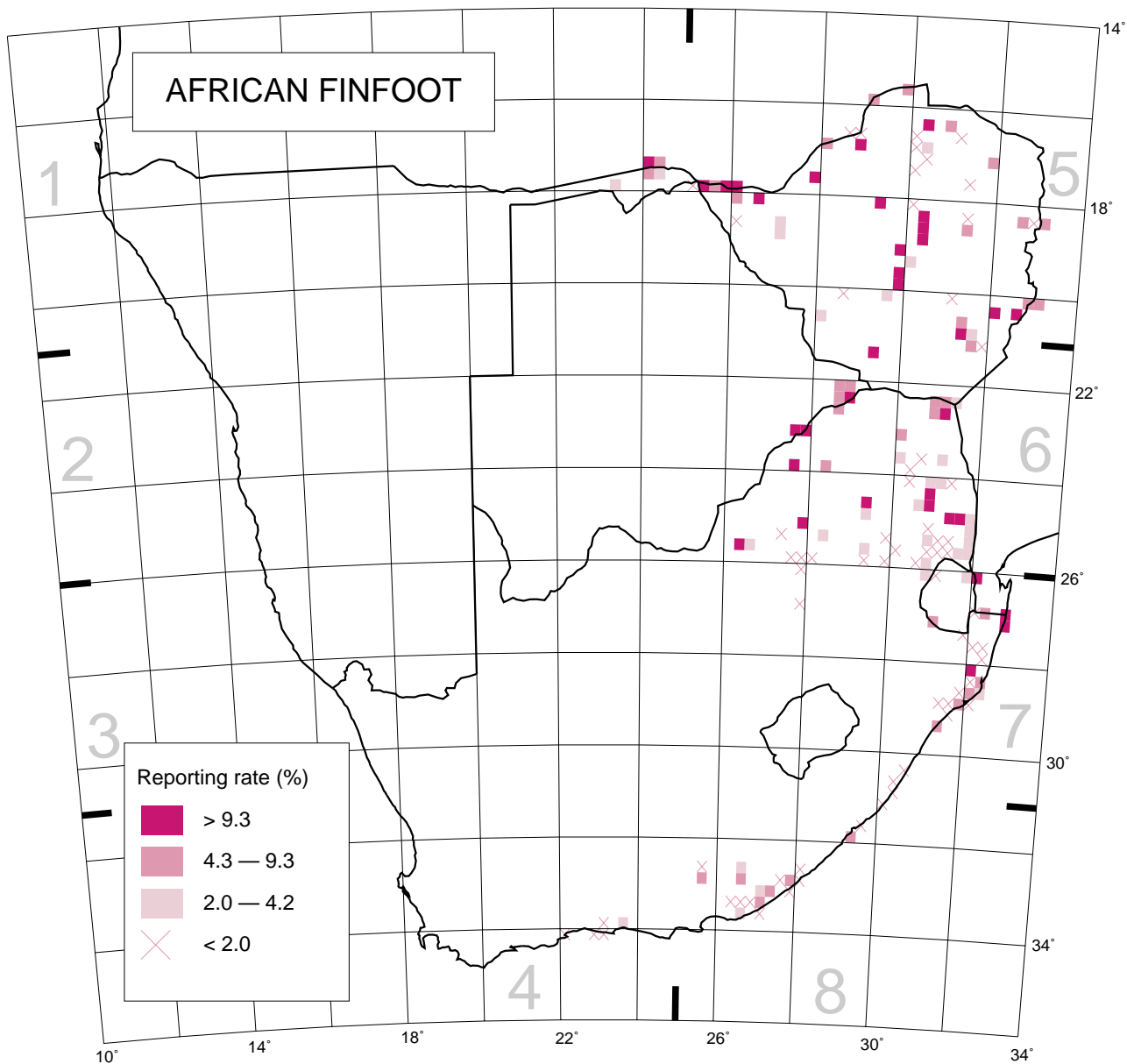
Historical distribution and conservation: It was listed as 'indeterminate' by Brooke (1984b). It has decreased in parts of South Africa owing to reduction of water flow through commercial afforestation of catchment areas, water extraction and damming, degradation of riverine vegetation and increased silt loads in rivers. Reduced waterflow is particularly severe in the Transvaal where many of the rivers have been degraded from perennial to intermittent flow (pers. obs). The impact of vegetation removal appears most severe in Transkei (Skead 1967b) and that of siltation in KwaZulu-Natal (Garland 1981). It was considered extinct in Transkei by Brooke (1984b) but was recorded from two coastal grid cells during the atlas (see Quicquelberge 1989 for historical Transkei records). There are old records from the southwestern Cape Province, but it is unclear whether these were vagrants (Brooke 1984b) or came from a breeding population that disappeared through habitat destruction (Hockey *et al.* 1989). The Swaziland population is considered 'endangered' (Parker 1994). The African Finfoot requires careful monitoring; its conservation status is likely to become precarious with ever-increasing pressure on rivers.

D.G. Allan

Recorded in 172 grid cells, 3.8%
Total number of records: 824
Mean reporting rate for range: 3.8%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 9, 0, 0, 11, 171, 338, 190, 93; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 1, 4, 2, 2, 4.