

Reed Cormorant

Rietduiker

Phalacrocorax africanus

The Reed Cormorant (Longtailed Cormorant) occurs throughout sub-Saharan Africa, with a separate race on Madagascar (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). In southern Africa it is common in the mesic south and east, with strongholds in the Okavango basin and the panveld region of the southern Transvaal and Free State (Allan *et al.* 1995c). It occurs in otherwise arid areas along the lower Orange River and up the Fish River from its confluence with the Orange River to near Ai Ais (2717CD). In central Namibia its occurrence is mainly associated with impoundments. It is largely absent from the highlands of Lesotho. Along the Atlantic Ocean coast, where the similar Crowned Cormorant *P. coronatus* occurs, the two species are likely to be confused, especially at wetlands close to the coastline, such as tidal estuaries, lagoons and saltworks; some records in marine habitats on the arid west coast are probably of Crowned Cormorants. At inland habitats it may be confused with immatures of the much larger Whitebreasted Cormorant *P. carbo* in spite of the obvious size difference.

Habitat: It occurs at freshwater wetlands of any size, including ephemeral habitats, rivers and fast-flowing streams with pools. It has adapted to artificial wetlands, rapidly colonizing dams and sewage works. Rare in marine habitats on the west coast, it commonly occupies these habitats along the south and east coasts (e.g. Every & Spearpoint 1984). In the north-western part of its range in Africa it is found regularly in marine habitats (De Naurois 1969; Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992).

Movements: Seasonal fluctuations in numbers at several wetlands suggest that large-scale movements occur. In Zimbabwe, at Lakes Mutirikwi (2031A) and Kariba, the numbers increase steadily from July, peak November–December and then decrease until June (Junor 1969; Junor & Marshall 1987; Hustler 1991b). At Barberspan (2625DA) in the Transvaal, numbers are low November–December and peak June–July (Skead & Dean 1977). At the Wilderness Lakes complex (3322DC) in the southern Cape Province, there was a well-defined autumn–winter peak and spring–summer trough (Boshoff *et al.* 1991a). These regular annual patterns in numbers show that the Reed Cormorant is a partial migrant, but the directions and destinations of these movements remain unknown. Because movements are partial and the models are based on presence/absence observations, they show little amplitude and offer no obvious insights.

Breeding: The models show that breeding activity continues throughout the year in the northeastern Zones 5 and 6; Irwin (1981) reported egg-laying in all months in Zimbabwe. Breeding appears to become more seasonal further south, with mid-summer peaks in Zones 7 and 8, and a late-spring peak in the winter-rainfall region of the south-western Cape Province (Zone 4).

Interspecific relationships: At one time this species and the marine Crowned Cormorant were regarded as conspecific (Crawford *et al.* 1982b). These two species sometimes co-occur at coastal wetlands, especially estuaries, where freshwater and marine environments meet.

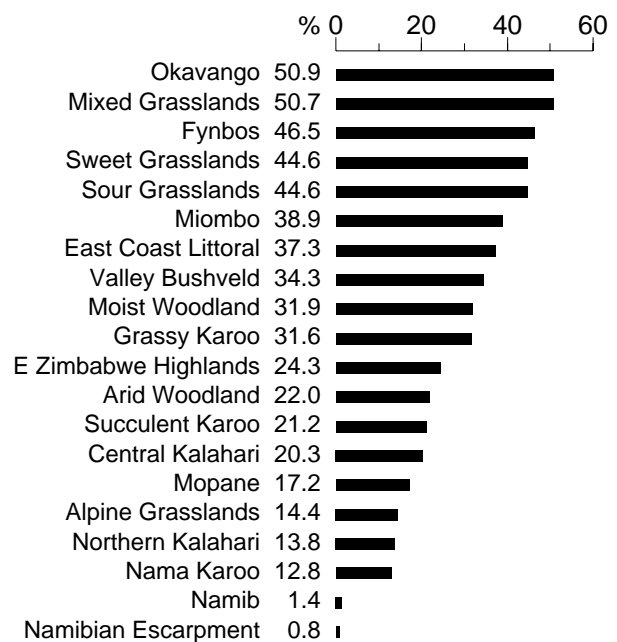
Historical distribution and conservation: It has greatly benefited from the construction of dams and reservoirs of all sizes, and the fish which are frequently available in these impoundments; this is particularly true of Lake Kariba (Irwin 1981).

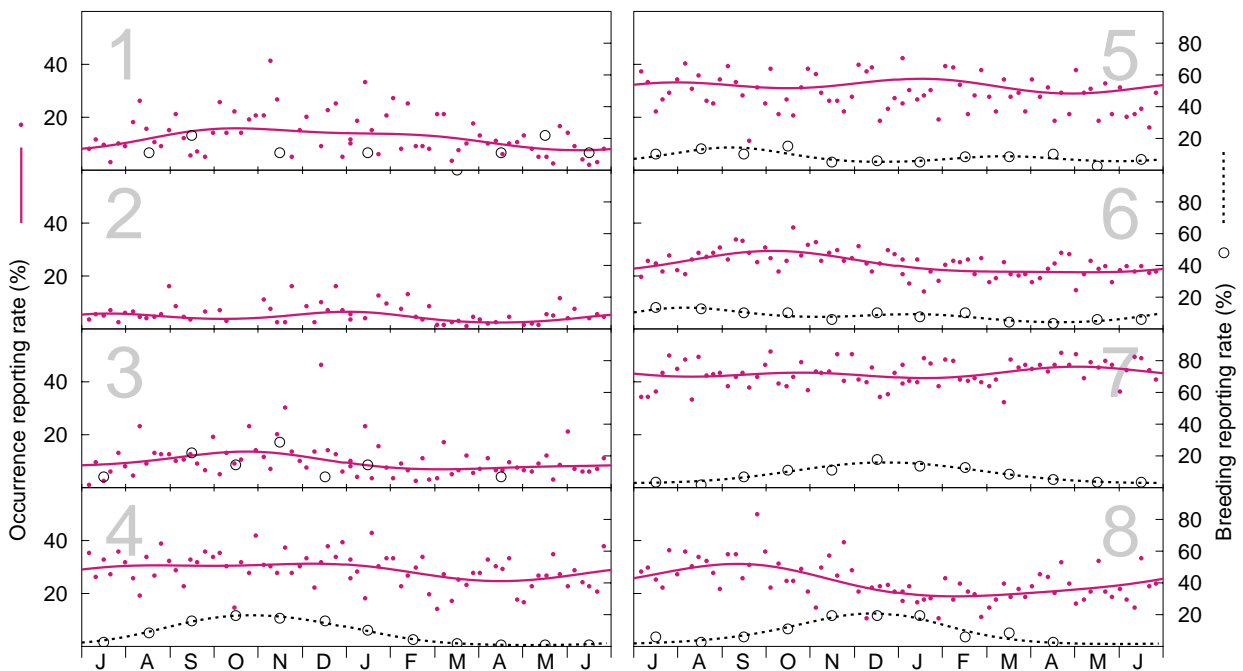
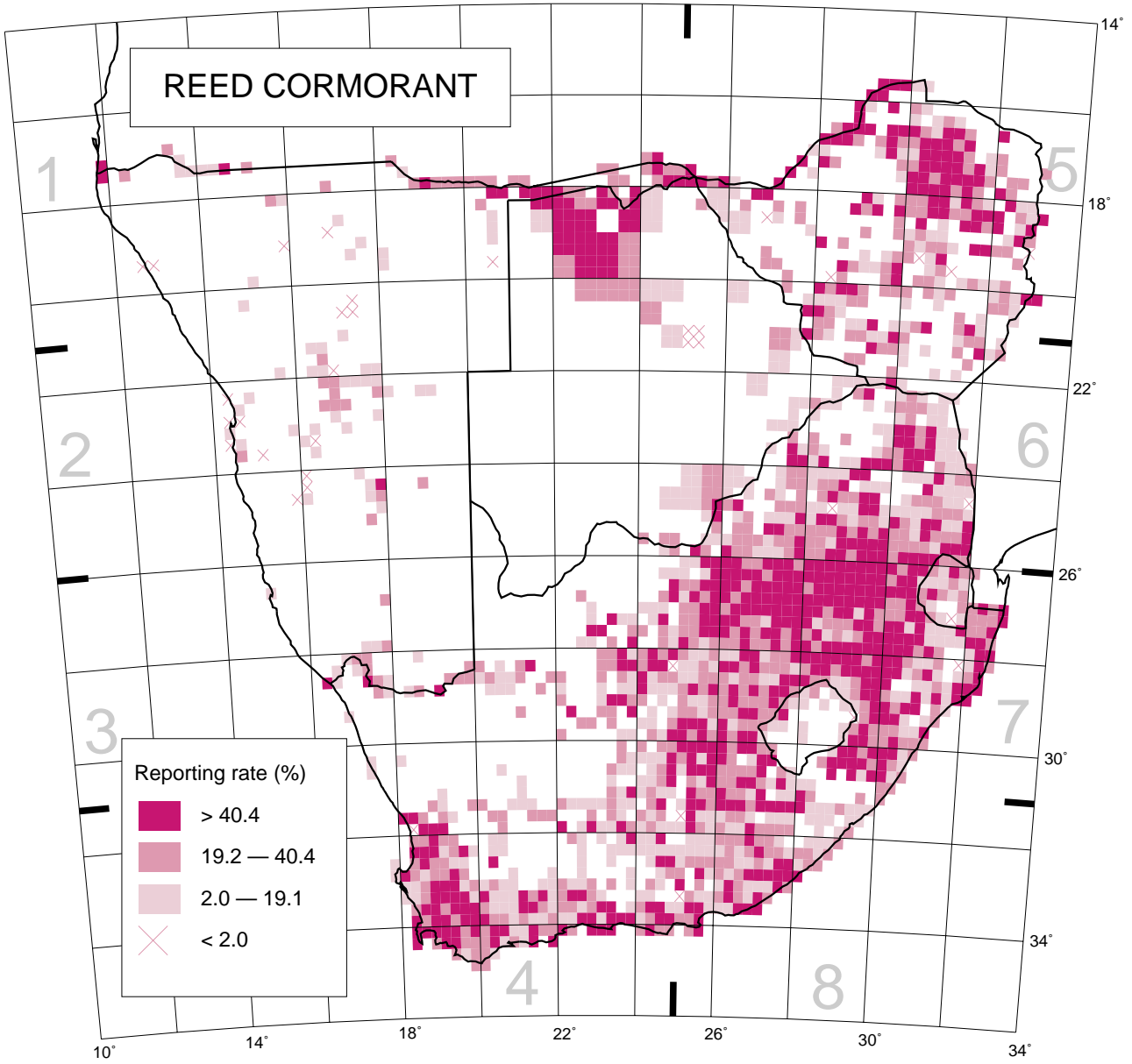
It was absent from the arid interior of Namibia until the construction of dams there. Its current distribution is therefore more extensive than in the past. On the other hand, habitat has been lost through the drainage of wetlands and the degradation of river systems. The Reed Cormorant is under no immediate threat. However, as with all piscivorous birds, it is sensitive to bio-accumulation of pesticides and is known to carry large concentrations of DDT and its metabolites, particularly in the Zambezi River catchment (De Kock & Boshoff 1987; Douthwaite *et al.* 1992). Williams & Randall (1995) recommended that the species be used as an indicator species of general pollutant levels in waterbodies. It is not a significant predator of trout in rivers and dams that have been stocked for angling or fish-farming (Alletson 1985).

C.W. Hustler

Recorded in 1879 grid cells, 41.4%
Total number of records: 48 953
Mean reporting rate for range: 38.9%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 386, 157, 519, 2503, 2785, 2776, 8445, 1328; Breeding: 9, 1, 14, 287, 83, 111, 472, 36.