

Caspian Tern

Reuseseswael

Hydroprogne caspia

The Caspian Tern occurs widely throughout the Holarctic, Australasian, Oriental and Afrotropical regions (Cooper *et al.* 1992). The population in the Afrotropical region is a few thousand pairs, mainly in western Africa (Cooper *et al.* 1984). In southern Africa, 27 breeding localities with *c.* 500 pairs are known (Cooper *et al.* 1992). Four inland breeding sites (Kalkfontein Dam (2925CB), Vaal Dam (2628CC) and Barberspan (2625DA) in South Africa, and Sua Pan (2026A) in Botswana) contribute *c.* 9% of the southern African population. The remaining sites are on the coast between Swakopmund (2214DA) and Lake St Lucia (2832AD). Higher reporting rates between Walvis Bay (2214CD) and Sandwich Harbour (2314AD), near the Orange River mouth (2816CB), between St Helena Bay (3218CC) and Saldanha Bay (3317BB), in the vicinity of the Cape Peninsula (3418CC), east of Cape Agulhas (3420CA), near Port Elizabeth (3325DC), around Lake St Lucia, and near Kalkfontein Dam, Barberspan, Vaal Dam and Sua Pan, correspond with breeding localities. It also occurs regularly at some nonbreeding localities, e.g. Bloemhof Dam (2725DA) (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and the mouth of the Kunene River (1711BC). The southern African population has been considered geographically and perhaps genetically isolated (Underhill 1986; Cooper *et al.* 1992).

Habitat: It nests on the ground on offshore islands and on islands in waterbodies, including some in salt, sewage and soda-ash works. In southern Africa it feeds mainly in coastal embayments, estuaries, rivers, pans, lakes and artificial dams that contain food fish of suitable size (Brooke 1984b; Maclean 1985c). It does not occur far out to sea in southern African waters (Cooper *et al.* 1992).

Movements: At the coast and near permanent waterbodies, breeding birds are resident around their colonies, but some immatures wander far to forage (Brooke 1984b). A juvenile bird moved 889 km from the Swartkops estuary (3325DC) to Lake St Lucia (Martin 1991). A nestling ringed at Redhouse (3325DC), South Africa, on 8 March 1996, was recovered at Machangulo (2632BB), Mozambique, on 15 December 1996, a distance of 1099 km (SAFRING). Birds breeding at Sua Pan leave the inland regions when the pan becomes dry, and probably move to the coast. Migrants and vagrants occur widely at inland water bodies.

Breeding: It breeds colonially, with the season varying between localities. In the west, breeding is generally September–March, whereas in KwaZulu-Natal it is March–September (Berruti 1980a; Underhill 1986; Cooper *et al.* 1992).

In the Transvaal, egg-laying is in midwinter (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), and in two colonies in Botswana, egg-laying started March–April (N.J. Skinner *in litt.*). The models indicate that most breeding in the eastern Cape Province takes place January–August, intermediate between patterns farther east and west. Breeding usually occurs in dry seasons when water-levels are low and islands exposed. It is most frequently sighted in the west in summer, but in the east in winter, so that reporting rates are highest during the respective breeding seasons. It infrequently changes breeding localities (Crawford *et al.* 1994).

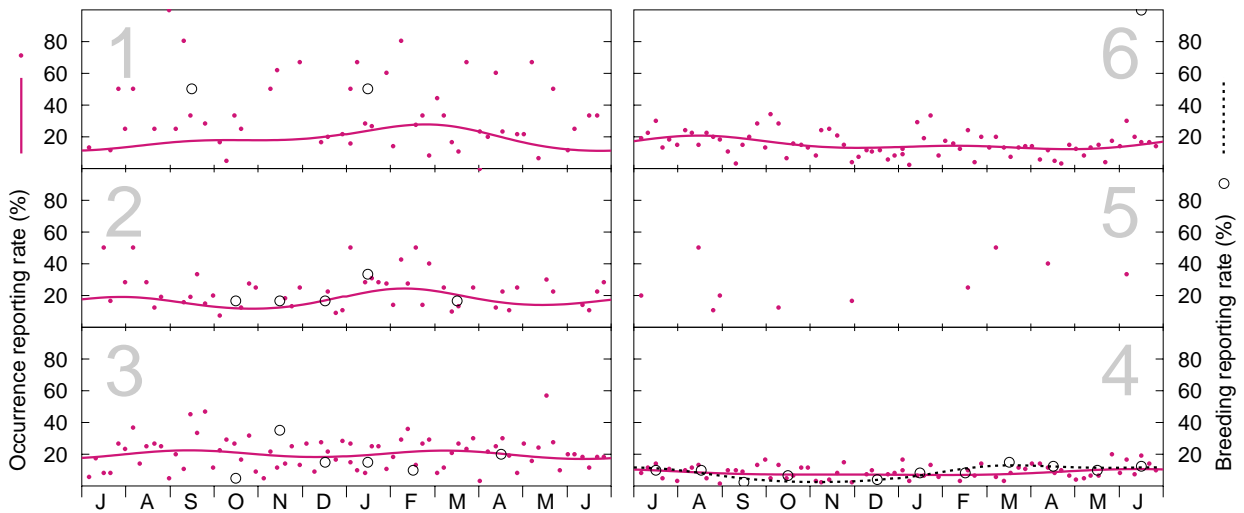
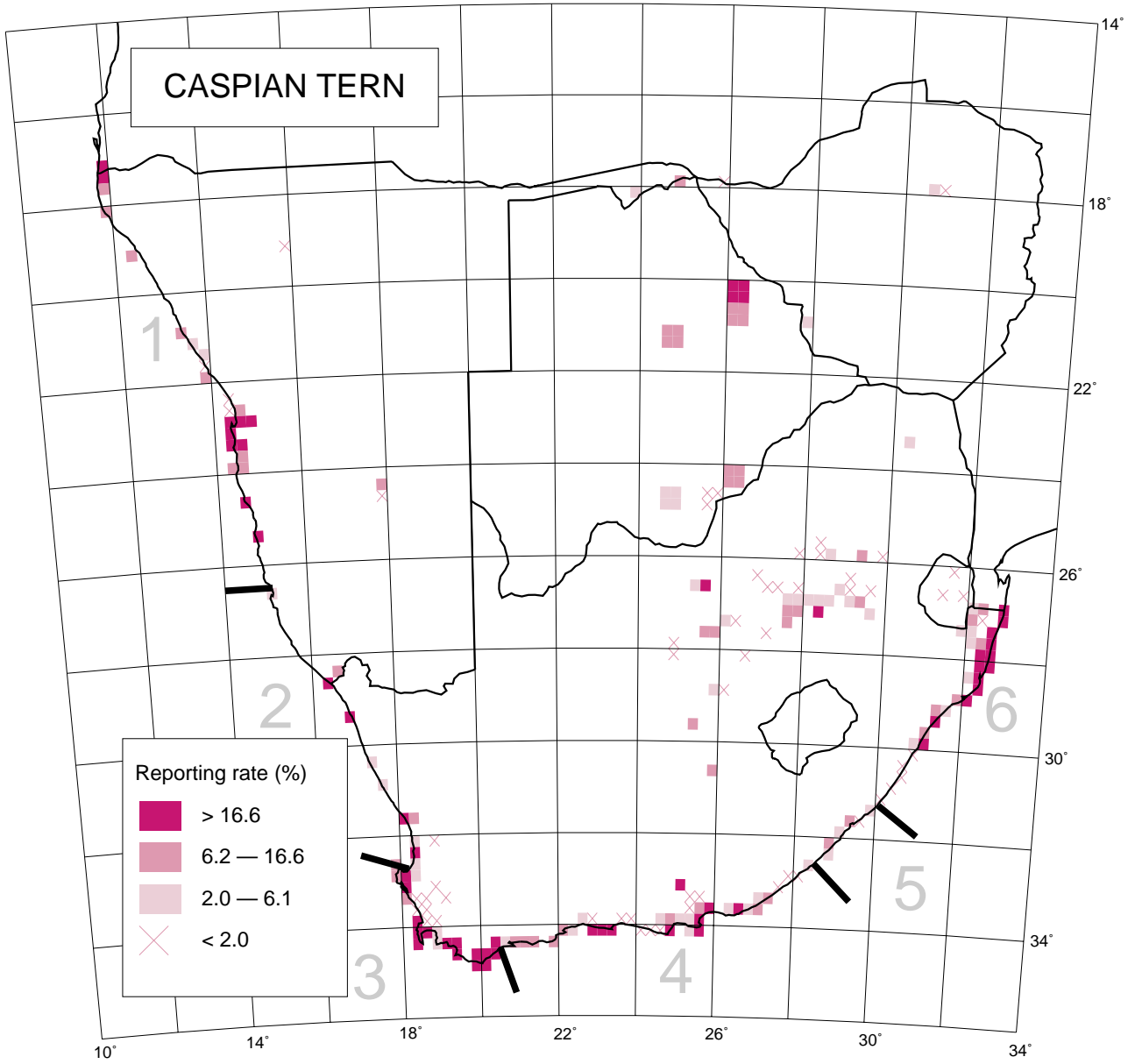
Interspecific relationships: Breeding at some western localities is in association with Kelp Gulls *Larus dominicanus* (Hockey *et al.* 1989), which prey on eggs and chicks of other seabirds. Numbers breeding at Schaapen Island (3318AA), Langebaan Lagoon, decreased sharply in the 1980s; the birds may have moved to the Berg River estuary (3218CC), possibly because of increased numbers of Kelp Gulls at Schaapen Island (Crawford *et al.* 1994).

Historical distribution and conservation: The overall range in southern Africa does not appear to have changed during the 20th century. It bred in the Zambezi River estuary, Mozambique, in the 1860s (Cooper *et al.* 1992). Only 16 breeding sites have been used since 1980, the most important being Lake St Lucia, where there were *c.* 330 pairs in 1949, 150–180 pairs in the 1950s, 500–1000 pairs in 1972 and 290 pairs in 1990 (Berruti 1980a; Cooper *et al.* 1992). The number of colonies used for breeding and the numbers of birds present at each varies widely between years.

The Caspian Tern was included in the South African Red Data book as ‘rare’ (Brooke 1984b). It is intolerant of any forms of disturbance while breeding (Clinning 1978). A missile test range which operated near the Lake St Lucia colony until 1990 was implicated in the decrease there (Berruti 1980a; Cooper *et al.* 1992). The taking of eggs and fluctuations in water-level, which flood nests or allow access by predators, reduce breeding success. Conservation needs include the legal protection of breeding localities. Raising the level of islands in commercial salt and soda extraction works would reduce flooding, and increasing the depths of channels around islands would control access by predators (Cooper *et al.* 1992).

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Recorded in 214 grid cells, 4.7%
Total number of records: 4522
Mean reporting rate for range: 12.5%



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 128, 98, 271, 214, 11, 378; Breeding: 2, 6, 20, 48, 0, 1.