Trumpeter Hornbill

Gewone Boskraai

Bycanistes bucinator

The Trumpeter Hornbill is endemic to the Afrotropics and ranges from the equator in Kenya to the forests of the eastern Cape Province (Kemp 1995). It occurs along the major tributaries of the Zambezi River in northern and western Zimbabwe, in the eastern Caprivi Strip and along the Chobe River east of Kavimba (1824B) in northern Botswana. It is surprisingly absent from riverine forests in the Okavango Delta. It occurs primarily in the tropical lowlands of southern Africa, but ranges up into the Zimbabwean Highlands and the KwaZulu-Natal midlands.

Its largely black-and-white plumage, seen to advantage when it is in flight, sets it apart from most other southern African hornbills, and it can be confused only with the larger Silverycheeked Hornbill *B. brevis* which has a restricted, though overlapping, range in eastern Zimbabwe. The Trumpeter Hornbill's loud wailing calls are distinctive and can be heard at a considerable distance; they are sufficiently similar to those of a crying human child for a novice observer to be misled into believing there to be a crèche in the vicinity rather than a group of these vociferous birds.

It is primarily frugivorous and so is seldom found far from fruit-bearing trees. It normally occurs as pairs or in groups of five or more birds; if a singleton is observed it is likely that other members of its group are nearby but unseen, or are breeding. Groups may assemble into feeding or roosting flocks of up to 200 birds outside of the breeding season (Kemp 1995).

Habitat: In southern Africa it is found primarily in warm lowland forest and especially riverine forest, though it may range up to the lower levels of Afromontane forest in some areas. The vegetation analysis clearly shows its preference for the East Coast Littoral; its occurrence in dry habitats (such as Mopane) is likely to be due to its capacity to range far into savanna habitats along strips of riverine forest, seeking fruiting *Ficus* trees to satisfy its penchant for wild figs. It will also visit fruiting trees around farm homesteads within their range; they are, for example, fond of guavas (pers. obs).

Movements: Maclean (1993b) stated that it shows 'some local seasonal movements'. The models provide little support for marked seasonal movement, aside from the modest late-winter peak in Zone 7. August is probably the month of peak fruiting of trees in riverine and forest communities (pers. obs), and the species is likely to be more noticeable and perhaps prone to visit areas in which it is seldom seen at other times of the year. Flights with seasonally changing destinations within fairly large home ranges are its basic foraging strategy.

Breeding: Breeding records, with one exception, occurred during the summer months, in agreement with Kemp (1995) who stated that egglaying occurs October–January. The nest is typically sited in a tree cavity or, less often, in a hole in a cliff. Du Plessis (1994b) surveyed 220 ha near Morgan's Bay (3228CB) and found that, on average, fewer than three suitable cavities occurred per 100 ha; this implies that suitable nest sites are a limited resource. Du Plessis (1994b) found this species to be a cooperative breeder.

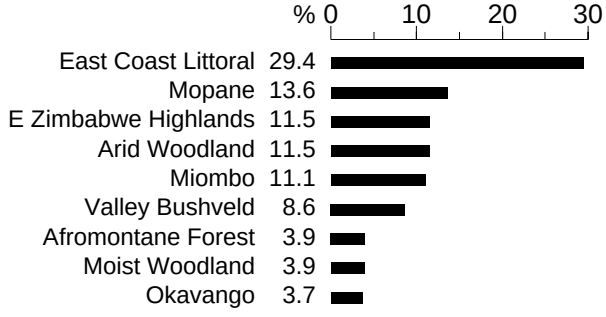
Interspecific relationships: Kemp & Crowe (1985) placed it along with six other Afrotropical species in the endemic genus *Ceratogymna*. The only congener within the atlas region is the Silverycheeked Hornbill. Both species have been observed feeding in the same tree without dispute, as is usual amongst frugivorous birds when feeding on abundant food, and they are alleged also to roost together on occasion (Fry *et al.* 1988).

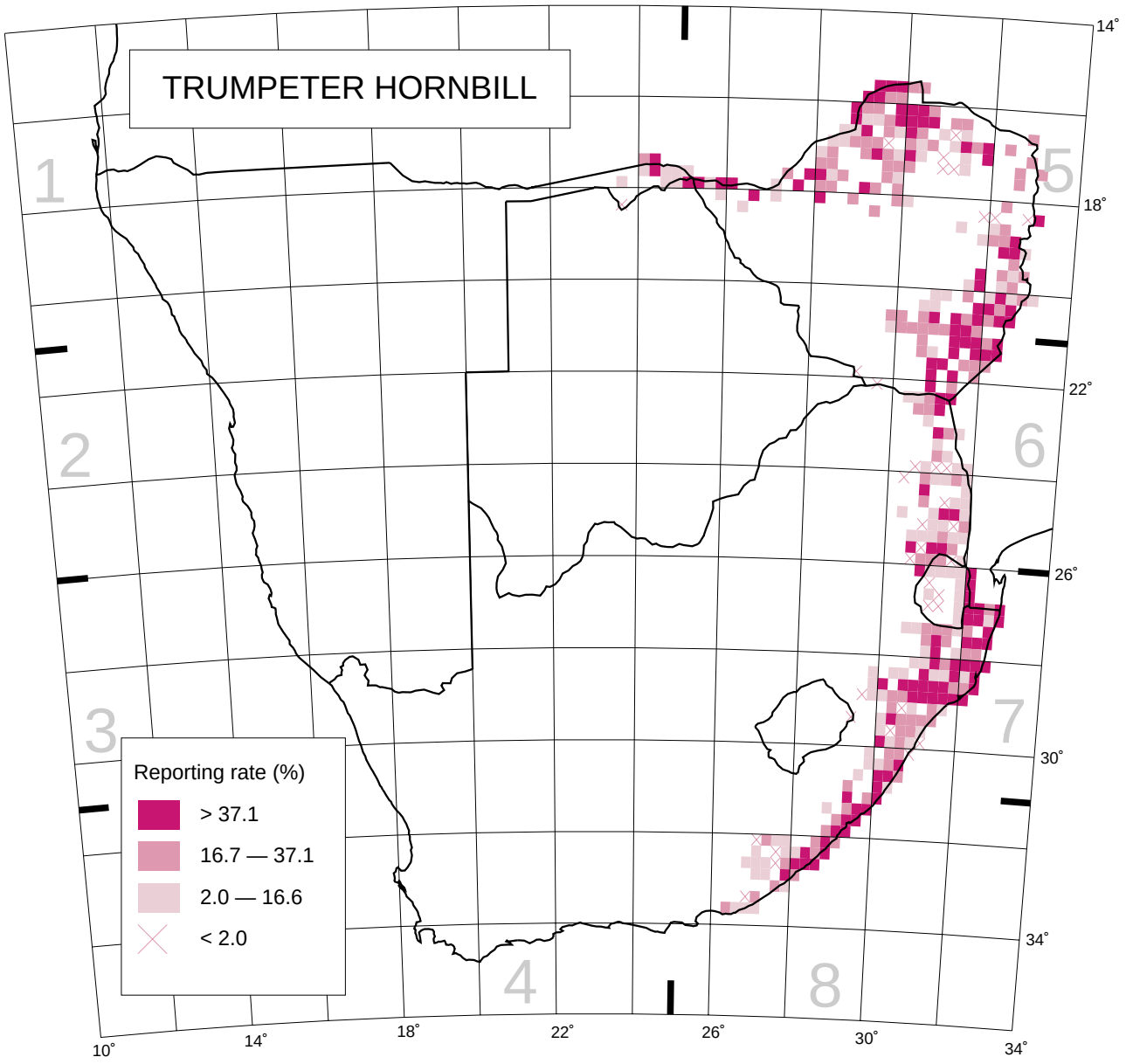
Historical distribution and conservation: It has evidently not attained pest status for attacking fruit and nut crops and so does not suffer serious persecution from farmers. Its extensive range in southeast, central and East Africa implies a large population, so it is not currently considered vulnerable or threatened. However, the denudation of riverine forests such as the 'fig forests' of *Ficus sycomorus* along Maputoland rivers, which has been increasingly practised by slash-and-burn cultivators over the past three decades, and the effects of drought on *Ficus* spp. and *Trichilia* spp. trees in the Pafuri area (2231AD), are depriving the Trumpeter Hornbill of prime habitat and food resources. This ongoing forest destruction must inevitably have an impact on local populations.

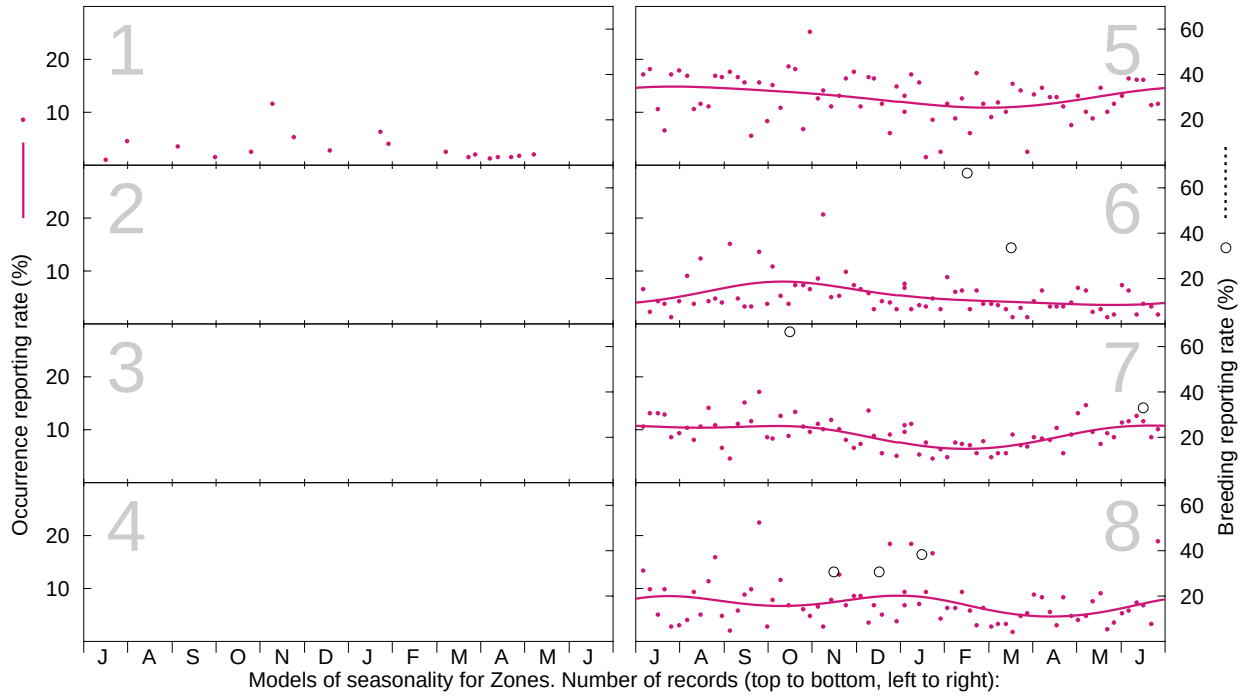
T.B. Oatley

Recorded in 421 grid cells, 9.3%
Total number of records: 8385
Mean reporting rate for range: 25.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 20, 0, 0, 0, 1140, 603, 1791, 382; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 3, 3, 13.