

Black Coucal

Swartvleiloerie

Centropus bengalensis

The Black Coucal occurs widely across tropical Africa (Fry *et al.* 1988). It is uncommon and localized, even in its strongholds on the Mashonaland Plateau and the Okavango Delta. It also occurs in the eastern Caprivi and in the western part of Hwange National Park; from Mozambique it extends sparsely into the lowlands of southeastern Zimbabwe and into the eastern Transvaal lowveld, Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal. There are scattered records from the middle Zambezi Valley and from northern Namibia. It is inconspicuous and makes rather atypical calls for a coucal.

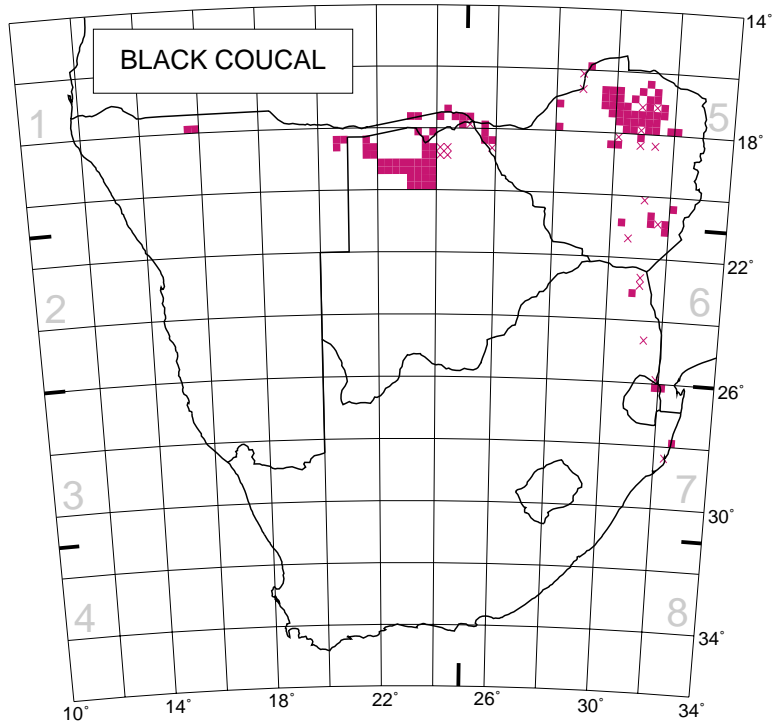
It inhabits marshes, moist, partly flooded and seasonally inundated rank grasslands (Irwin 1981; Fry *et al.* 1988), but is not often found in reedbeds or permanent marshes (Rowan 1983). In the Okavango Delta it prefers senescent floodplain grasslands (R. Randall pers. comm.).

Its status is not clear. It is presumed to be sedentary in parts of central Africa (Fry *et al.* 1988), but most populations within the region are markedly migratory, birds being wet-season breeding visitors to seasonally available habitat. In Zimbabwe it is described as a summer visitor, departing when habitat dries out and rarely overwintering (Irwin 1981; Rowan 1983). The atlas data indicate that it arrives mainly from late October in Zones 1 and 5; it reaches a peak in November in Zone 1, but only in February in Zone 5. It occupies rain-fed wetlands in Zimbabwe (Zone 5), but floodplain habitat in the Okavango (Zone 1), where peak flooding is in the dry season. Departure from both Zones is in April, but several May records are known (Irwin 1981). Numbers fluctuate considerably between years, with higher numbers in very wet years (Irwin 1981).

In Zimbabwe it has been recorded breeding December–March (Irwin 1981), and three records from Botswana are January–February (Skinner 1996a). Atlas records confirm this pattern, but indicate that egg-laying may begin in November in Zone 5.

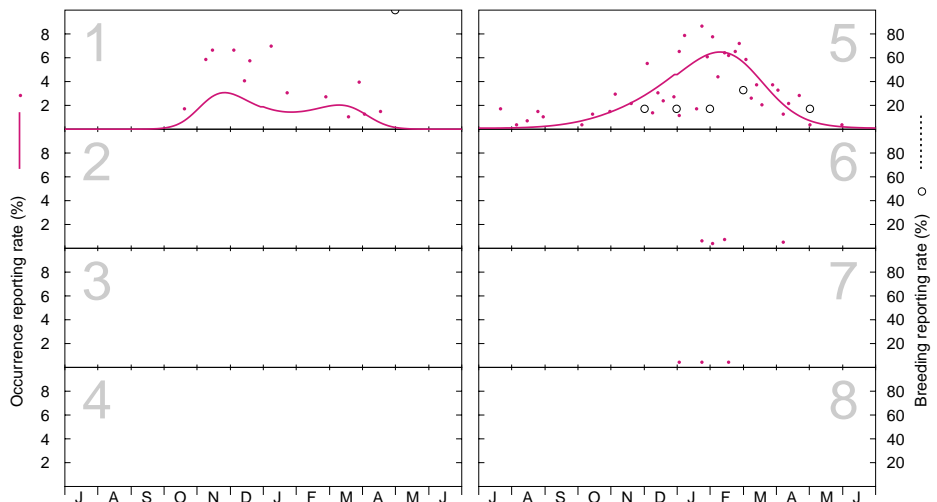
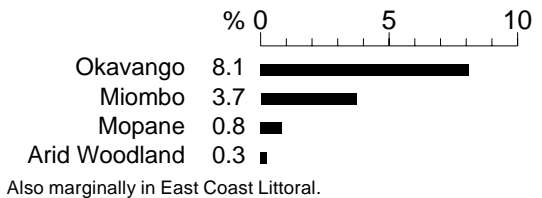
The Black Coucal formerly occurred in KwaZulu-Natal as far south as Durban (2931CC) (Clancey 1964b). This range contraction is probably due to habitat loss, e.g. conversion of wetlands into sugarcane fields. Much potential habitat in the Okavango Delta is lost through the burning of senescent grasslands.

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Recorded in 129 grid cells, 2.8%
Total number of records: 404
Mean reporting rate for range: 6.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 26, 0, 0, 0, 176, 4, 3, 0; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 0, 6, 0, 0, 0.