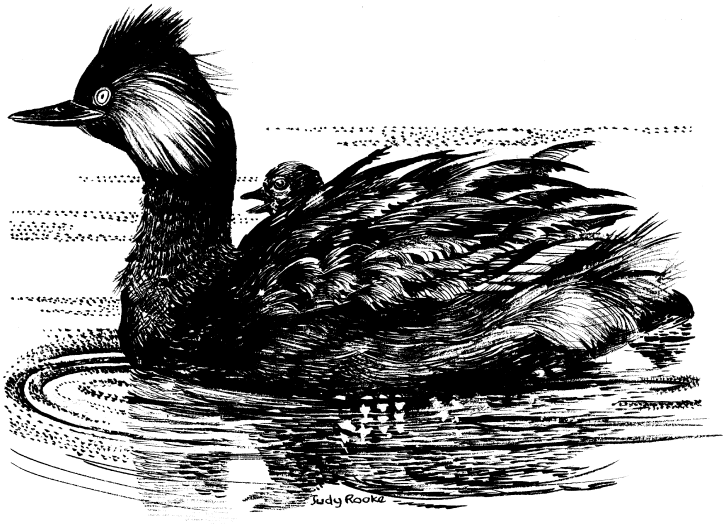

Blacknecked Grebe

Swartnekdobbertjie

Podiceps nigricollis

The Blacknecked Grebe has a fragmented distribution in Africa, Europe, Asia, and North America; the American population is estimated to exceed 750 000 birds, making this the world's most abundant grebe (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). Three races are recognized; *P. n. gurneyi* occurs in southern Africa. The southern African distribution is characterized as having two phases: during the nonbreeding phase, which may continue for several years during periods of drought, it is concentrated at bays and sheltered shorelines (especially Walvis Bay Lagoon (2214DA), Sandwich Harbour (2314AD), Lüderitzbucht (2615CA) and the Namibian offshore islands) and at shallow permanent wetlands along the coast of Namibia and the Cape Province, such as estuaries, saltworks, sewage works and impoundments, but also at times at interior wetlands such as Barberspan (2625DA). During the breeding phase, birds respond to sporadic floods, rapidly occupying and breeding at shallow eutrophic waters anywhere inland of the escarpment, but especially over the panveld region of the highveld, Botswana, Namibia and the northern Cape Province (Robertson 1981; Clinning 1995). It is a vagrant to Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981); the northeasternmost record during the atlas period was of 15 in breeding plumage at Chegutu sewage works (1830AA) in February 1990 after heavy rains (Williams, J. 1990).

During surveys of the coastal regions of South Africa and Namibia during 1976–81, *c.* 10 000 were counted (Underhill *et al.* 1991; Western Cape Wader Study Group unpubl. data). For much of this period rainfall over southern Africa was below the 50th percentile (Department of Water Affairs 1986) and most Blacknecked Grebes are likely to have been at drought refuges along the coast; hence this provides a satisfactory estimate of the southern African population.

It generally occurs in groups ranging from a few birds to large rafts numbering hundreds, and is unlikely to have been overlooked. Confusion between this species in nonbreeding plumage and the Dabchick *Tachybaptus ruficollis* is possible; however, the white underside flashes shown by preening Blacknecked Grebes is a distinctive field characteristic. The mapped distribution for the arid regions, where occurrence is associated with irregular floods, is not comprehensive.

Habitat: It breeds mostly on ephemeral pans in arid areas after flood events. After heavy rains in summer 1988–89 in Bushmanland, northeastern Namibia, the preferred breeding habitat was open pans with a water depth exceeding 1.2 m and with emergent *Diplachne fusca* grass (C. Hines *in litt.*). It has been less consistently reported at the endorheic pans of the cold, high-altitude grasslands of southeastern Transvaal and eastern Free State (Allan *et al.* 1995c). The nonbreeding habitat consists of perennial open water including bays of the sea.

Movements: It is nomadic; it may arrive and breed in numbers in areas from which it had only rarely been previously recorded. Colonization of pans after flooding is rapid; for example, it was recorded five days after the Nyae-Nyae Pans (1920CD), Bushmanland, filled with water after floods in December 1988 (C. Hines *in litt.*). Most long-distance movement occurs at night. Because flood events in the interior of southern Africa mostly occur during summer, numbers at coastal refuges tend to peak in winter, as observed in the southern Cape Province (Boshoff *et al.* 1991).

Breeding: Breeding is opportunistic at flooded ephemeral pans and seasonal vleis, from single nests to loose colonies (Maclean 1993b). The few breeding observations during the relatively dry atlas period confirm published egg-laying data: January–March in Namibia, October–November in the Cape Province, and October–April in the Transvaal (Winterbottom 1968a; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brown & Clinning in press).

Interspecific relationships: It occasionally occurs together with Dabchicks, and less frequently with Great Crested Grebes *P. cristatus*. It is often the only grebe present on ephemeral pans and temporary vleis, particularly when these are drying out and becoming saline.

Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence that the overall range in southern Africa has changed, but Stark & Sclater (1906) recorded it from few localities and considered it rare. It has been favoured by the construction of dams, both large and small, saltworks and sewage works. These permanent artificial wetlands provide drought refuges and Blacknecked Grebes have undoubtedly increased in numbers in southern Africa during the 20th century. Clinning (1995), however, listed oil pollution and entanglement with fishing nets as threats to birds at sea.

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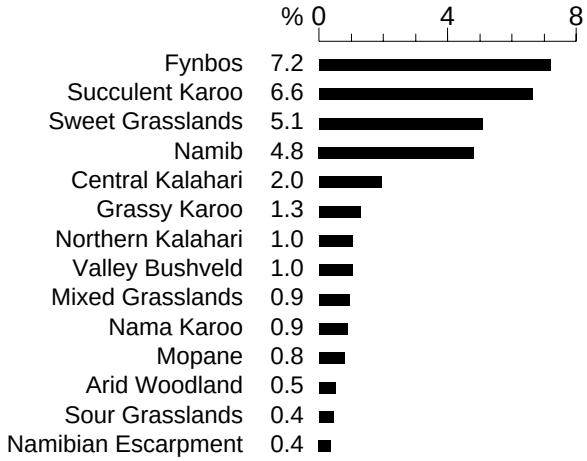
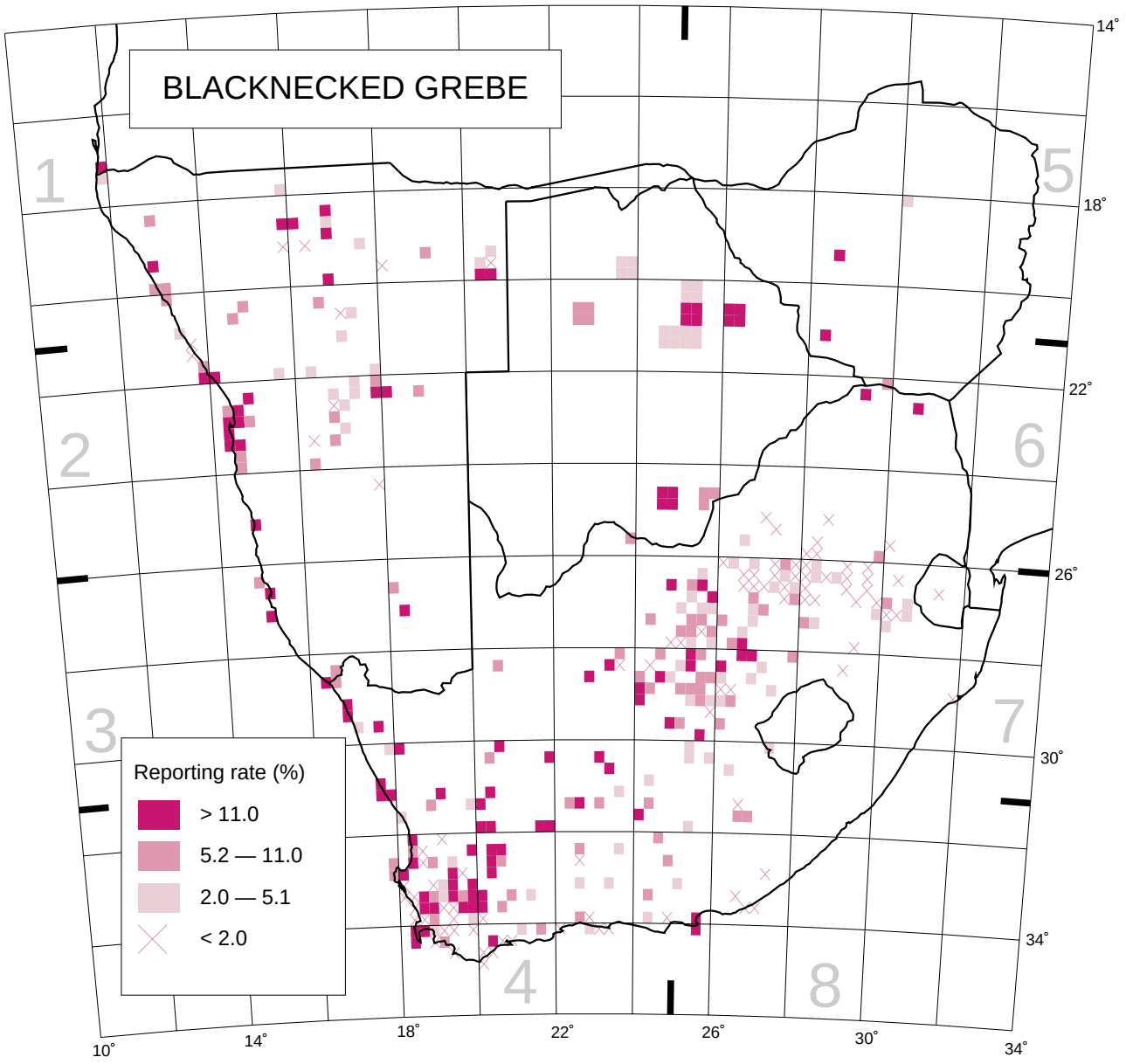
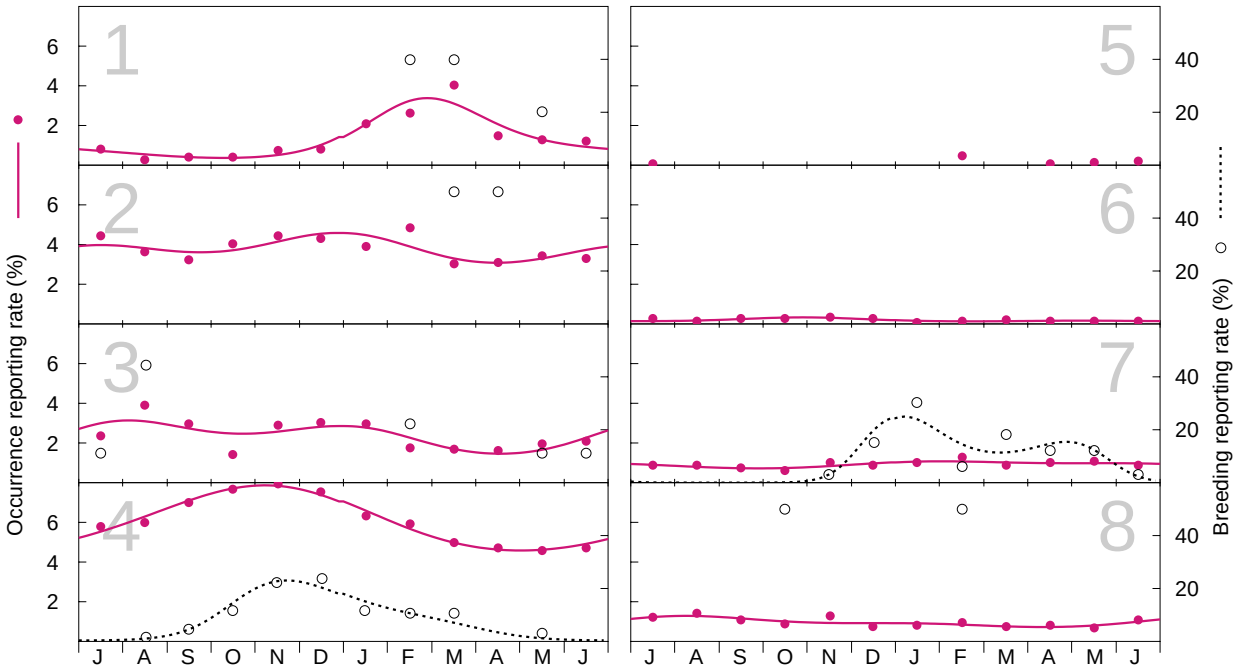
Recorded in 371 grid cells, 8.2%
Total number of records: 2925
Mean reporting rate for range: 6.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

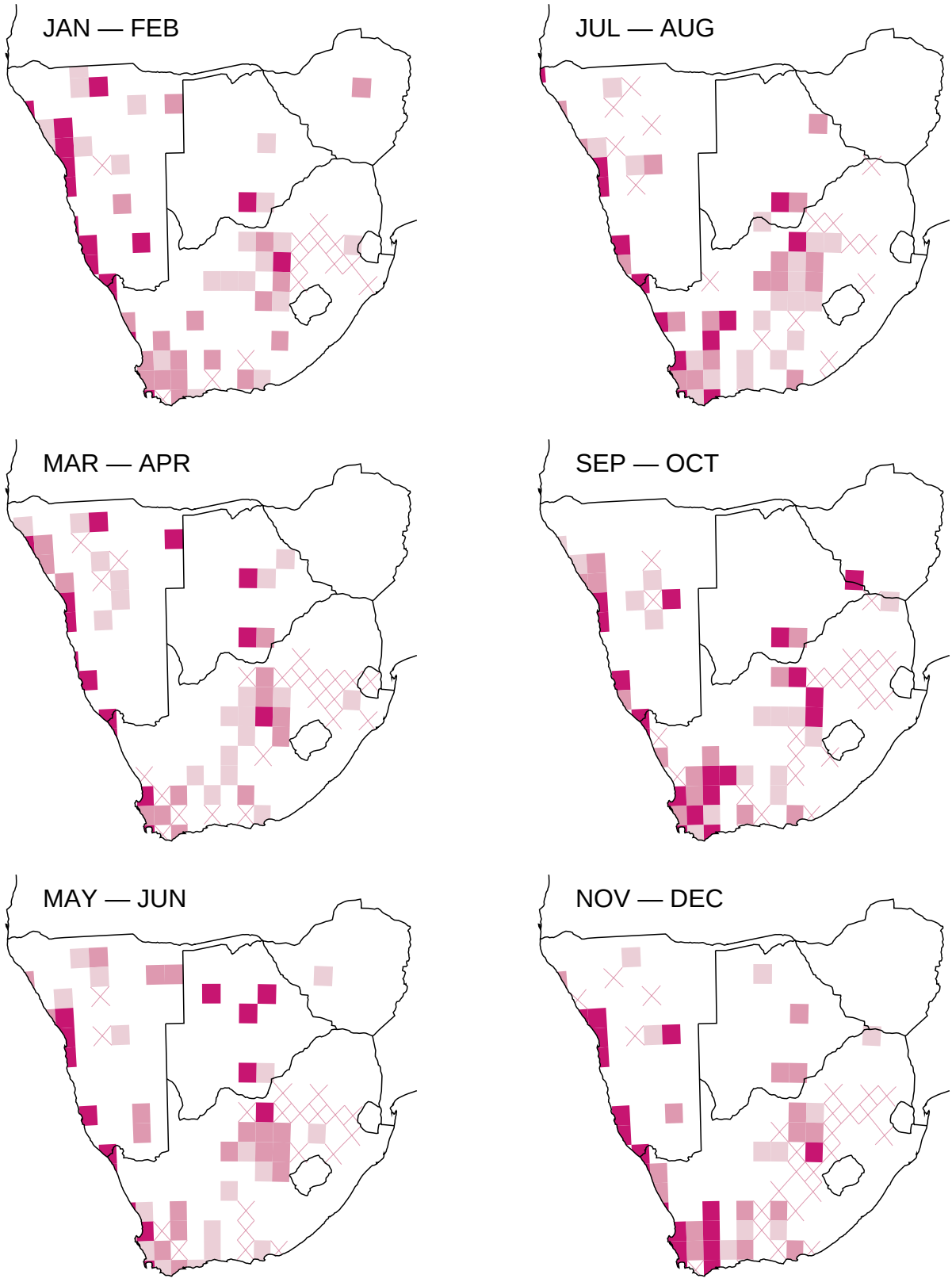






Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 122, 403, 229, 1561, 9, 47, 411, 113; Breeding: 10, 2, 9, 67, 0, 0, 33, 2.

BLACKNECKED GREBE



Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.