



## White Pelican

### Witpelikaan

#### *Pelecanus onocrotalus*

The White Pelican breeds in Africa, and across Eurasia from Greece to Vietnam. About 75 000 pairs, 80% of the estimated global population, breed in Africa, including *c.* 6000 pairs in southern Africa (Urban 1984; Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). Breeding occurs annually at three localities in southern Africa: the guano platform constructed over Bird Rock, Walvis Bay (2214DC) (150–200 pairs), Dassen Island (3318AC) (500 pairs), and Lake St Lucia (2832CB) (2000 pairs) (Crawford *et al.* 1981, 1995b; Brooke 1984b). About 150 pairs breed at Hardap Dam (2617DD) when high water-levels in the dam turn a rocky hill into an island (Williams & Randall 1995). Additionally, it breeds at inland localities when flood conditions are suitable, as in 1971 when 1500 pairs bred at Lake Oponono (1815BB), then moved to join another 1500 at Etosha Pan (Berry *et al.* 1973). Breeding is irregular in Botswana, but the largest colonies in the region are in that country: over 1000 pairs at Lake Ngami (2022B) in 1970–71 (Clauss 1972; Dickinson 1972; Jacka 1972), with 9500–10 000 birds present October–December 1971 (Dawson & Jacka 1975; Patterson 1976) and 4000 birds in 1981 (Kahl 1981); *c.* 130 breeding pairs at the Nata River delta in Sua Pan (2026A) in 1974 (Tree 1978b), several thousand breeding birds in 1979 (Penry 1994), *c.* 6000 birds in 1989 (Liversedge *et al.* 1989), and *c.* 2000 birds by mid-1996 (T. Liversedge pers. comm.).

**Habitat:** Typically it is a bird of shallow, warm, fresh or moderately alkaline waterbodies with adequate supplies of fish. It also forages in large tidal inlets on the west coast, Walvis Bay Lagoon, Sandwich Harbour (2314AC) and Langebaan Lagoon (3318AA), and at large estuaries, particularly the Kunene (1711BC), Orange (2816CB), Olifants (3118CA) and Berg (3218CC) rivers. Along the central Namibian coast and at Dassen Island, it sometimes traps fish in coastal rock pools. All regularly used breeding sites, except Lake Ngami, have some form of protection. It usually breeds colonially on islands, including artificially created ones, as at Hardap Dam and Bird Rock guano platform. Inaccessibility to land predators is a key criterion.

**Movements:** It moves in response to changing water-levels and favours drying waterbodies where fish become concentrated in shallow water. During the 1990s, up to *c.* 200 birds arrived at the Manyame Lakes (1730DC,DD) in late winter, leaving once the summer rains became established (A.J. Tree *in litt.*). At

Barberspan (2625DA) it is a summer visitor, mostly October–April (Skead & Dean 1977), but over most of the interior of southern Africa it tends to be nomadic or to occur as an occasional vagrant (Williams & Randall 1995). The major breeding sites in Botswana (Lake Ngami and Nata Delta) can be abandoned for years in succession during drought periods, but are occupied within weeks after flooding. While breeding at Lake St Lucia, birds regularly forage 100 km away on the Pongolo River floodplain (2732A) (Whitfield & Blaber 1979).

**Breeding:** Breeding, which requires at least four months, usually follows peak local rains but may occur whenever conditions are suitable and for as long as such conditions prevail (Whitfield & Blaber 1979).

**Interspecific relationships:** It sometimes waits until other species have demonstrated that an area is safe from predators before it begins to breed. It displaces breeding Whitebreasted Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* at Bird Rock (A.J.W. pers. obs) and Greater *Phoenicopterus ruber* and Lesser *P. minor* Flamingos at Etosha Pan (Berry *et al.* 1973). At Dassen Island it preys on the young of seabirds, including Cape Cormorants *Phalacrocorax capensis* (Crawford *et al.* 1981) and Kelp Gulls *Larus dominicanus* (D.C. Nel pers. comm.).

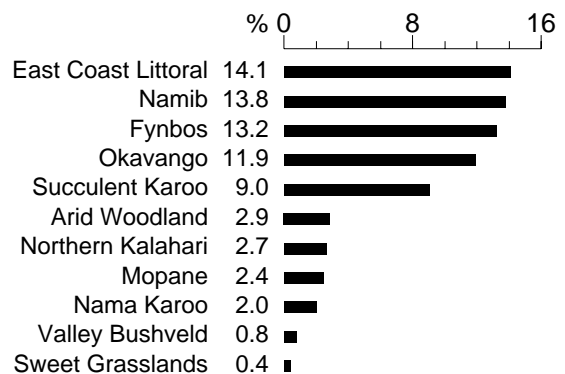
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The southwestern Cape Province population is known to have bred at Robben Island (3318CD) in the 17th century, on Dyer (3419CB) and Quoin (3419DC) islands in the 19th and early 20th centuries, on Seal Island (3418BA) from 1931 to 1954, and since 1956 on Dassen Island (Brooke 1984b; Crawford *et al.* 1994). Movements between these guano islands were due to a combination of persecution, because it preys upon, and displaces, more valuable guano-producing species, naval use of Seal Island for target practice, and increasing Cape Fur Seal *Arctocephalus pusillus* populations (Brooke 1984b). The population which formerly bred on sandy islets at Sandwich Harbour moved to the guano platform at Bird Rock in the 1930s (Crawford *et al.* 1981). C.J. Andersson reported breeding at Lake Ngami in 1853 (Andersson & Gurney 1872).

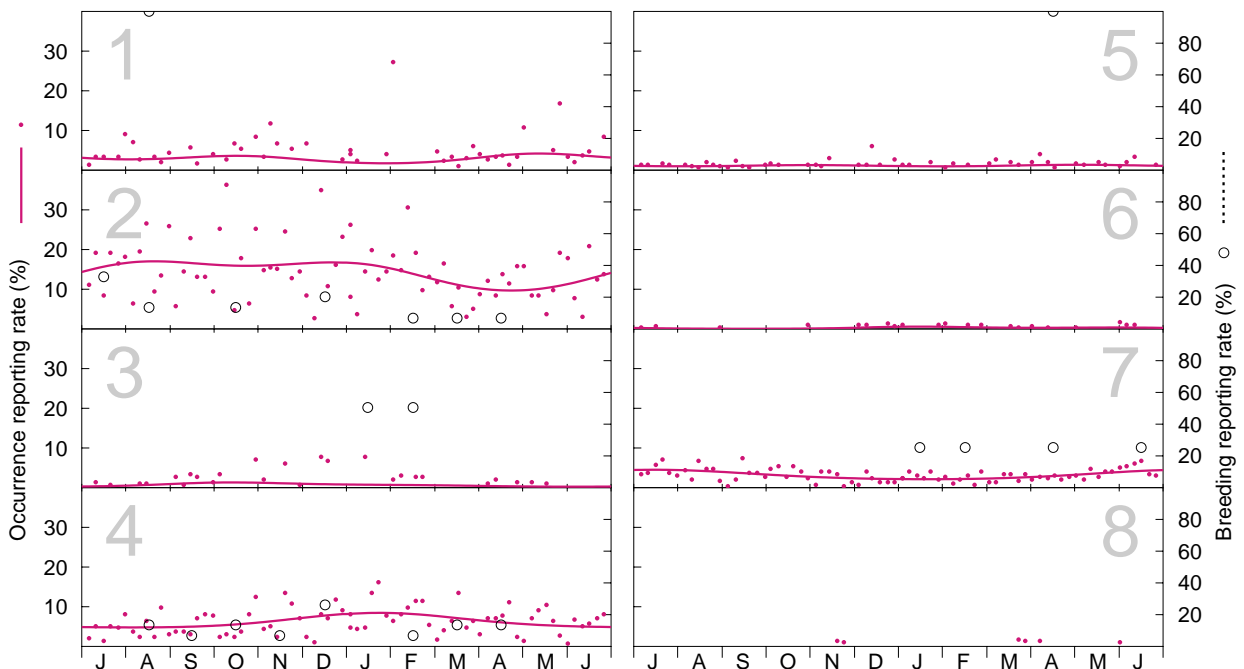
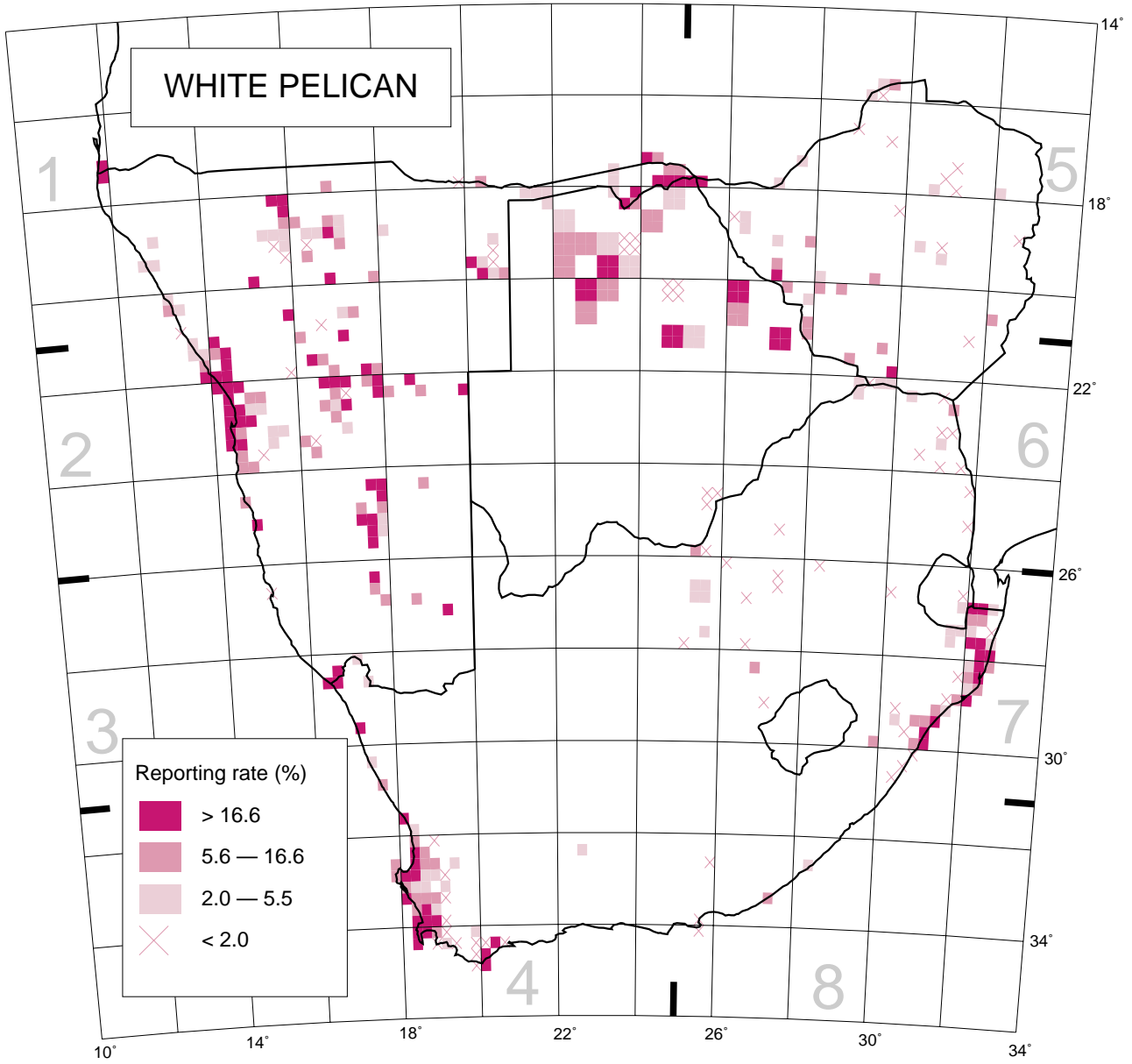
The White Pelican was listed as ‘rare’ in South Africa (Brooke 1984b) because of the vulnerability of the few breeding localities. It has benefited from the increased availability of permanent water in dams, especially those with fish (Guillet & Crowe 1981). Use of chicken and pig farm offal is locally beneficial but may lead to poisoning (Crawford *et al.* 1995b).

A.J. Williams and W.D. Borello

Recorded in 403 grid cells, 8.9%  
Total number of records: 6353  
Mean reporting rate for range: 16.0%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 103, 502, 36, 534, 100, 31, 612, 6; Breeding: 1, 15, 2, 15, 1, 0, 4, 0.