

## Pinkbacked Pelican

### Kleinpelikaan

#### *Pelecanus rufescens*

The Pinkbacked Pelican occurs in sub-Saharan Africa, Madagascar and the southern Red Sea (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). The global population is thought to number between 4000 and 6000 pairs; the southern African population is estimated to be below 250 pairs (Rose & Scott 1994; Williams & Randall 1995).

There appear to be two breeding populations in southern Africa. In KwaZulu-Natal a population of 100+ pairs bred for many years in trees at the mouth of the Hluhluwe River, Lake St Lucia (2832AD), but has moved to nearby Mkuzi Game Reserve (2732C) (Johnson 1993). Some pairs, presumably from this population, bred at Richards Bay (2832CC) in 1975–76 and in newly flooded trees at the Jozini Dam (2732AC) on the Pongola River in 1975 and in 1986 (Berruti 1980a, 1980b; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Breeding also occurs in the Okavango Delta and Linyanti Swamps (Child 1972; Fothergill 1983a; Newman 1985; Koen 1988; Skinner 1989b, 1995b), but the colonies reported are small in relation to the high reporting rates in this area. Some breeding may go unreported or birds breeding in Zambia may visit the Okavango Delta and upper Zambezi River basins. Breeding has been reported from the Chobe River of northern Botswana (Irwin 1981) but there have been no reports of breeding in this area during the last decade. Nests have been built, but no reproduction recorded, in heronries near Pretoria (2528C) and at Vaalkop Dam (2527AD) in the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

It usually forages singly but sometimes communally in deep water or where fish are trapped against a bank. Confusion with the White Pelican *P. onocrotalus* does occur, but the atlas data were vetted carefully.

**Habitat:** It requires permanent wetlands for foraging and trees for breeding. In southern Africa it prefers large freshwater lakes in the eastern littoral zone and in the Okavango Delta, but it also occurs on alkaline and saline lakes and in estuaries. It feeds exclusively on fish which range from fry to individuals of up to 440 g. It breeds colonially, usually in flooded trees, including mangroves, but occasionally in reeds or on the ground.

**Movements:** It is generally resident within an area of wetlands but makes local movements which reflect changes in

water conditions and the need to seek safe breeding localities. Birds from the KwaZulu-Natal population generally range north towards, and into, Mozambique (Brooke *et al.* 1981). Atlas records in the northern Cape Province, western Transvaal, eastern Botswana and the south-western part of Zimbabwe are presumably due to dispersal of birds from the Okavango–Chobe population. Most wanderers are immature but, in the Transvaal, flocks of 40 pelicans at Bloemhof Dam (2725DA) and 90 at Barberspan (2625DA) (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) must have comprised mainly adults.

**Breeding:** Breeding in South Africa starts December–January when summer rains cause flooding around the base of the trees used for breeding and so provide protection from predators. Breeding in the Okavango and Linyanti is in winter (June–September) (Child 1972; Newman 1985; Koen 1988; N.J. Skinner *in litt.*), also at high water-levels.

**Interspecific relationships:** It often shares breeding trees with storks and herons (Child 1972; Fothergill 1983; Newman 1985; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Koen 1988), but unlike the White Pelican does not prey on their young.

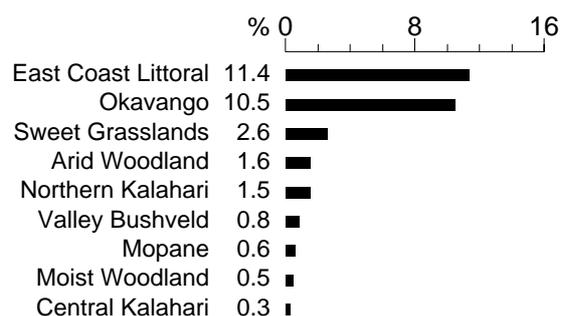
**Historical distribution and conservation:** It is unlikely to have been more widespread in southern Africa than now, though it may have been more numerous (Brooke 1984b). There are records from the 1800s of vagrants in the western Cape Province, but at least some of these are likely to have been misidentifications of young White Pelicans (Hockey *et al.* 1989).

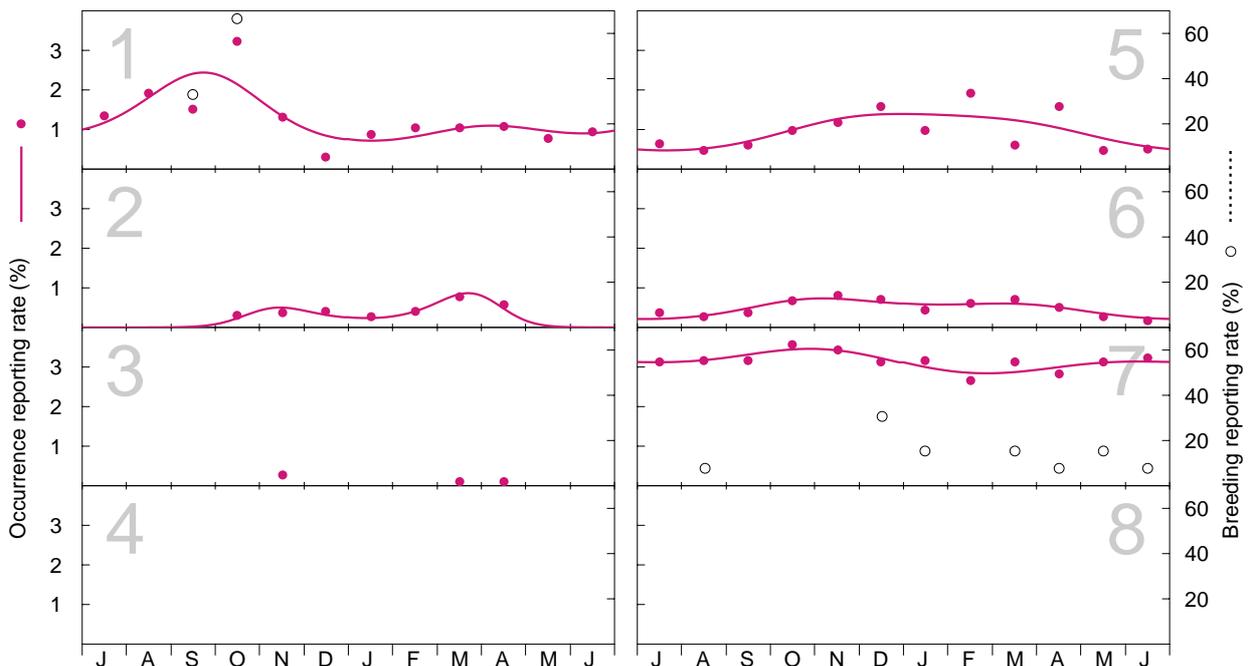
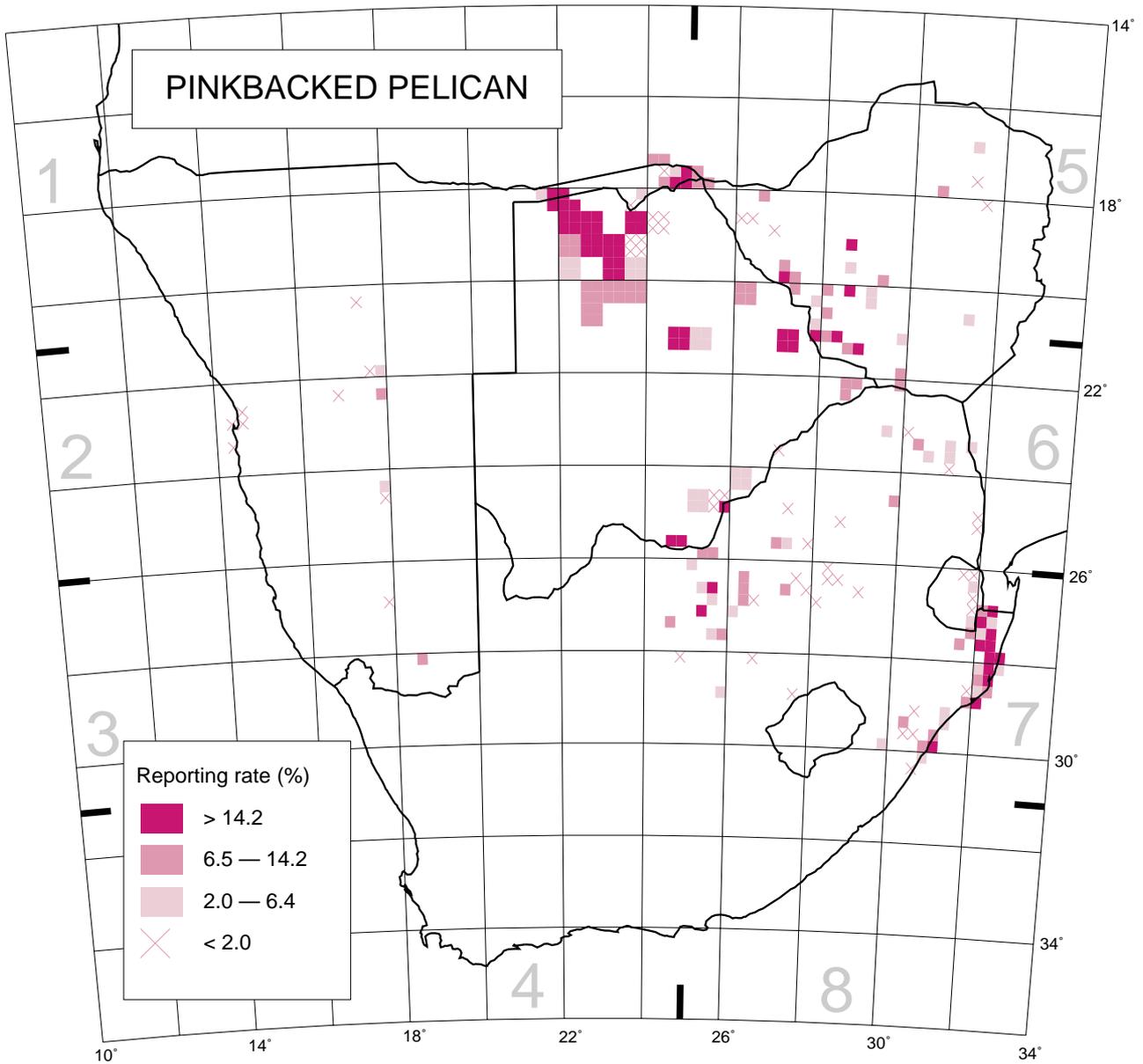
The Pinkbacked Pelican is a Red Data species in South Africa (Brooke 1984b) and merits that status throughout its range in southern Africa. Human disturbance at St Lucia, which formerly included rocket testing and low-flying aircraft near the breeding colony, may have been responsible for the shift in colony location to Mkuzi Game Reserve. On the Chobe River floodplains, disturbance has also greatly increased with the proliferation of settlements and cattle. In the eastern Caprivi Strip and in Botswana, there has been an increasing frequency of fires and more tourism. Elevated elephant populations have devastated trees in the riparian woodlands on floodplains used as breeding sites.

*A.J. Williams and W.D. Borello*

Recorded in 240 grid cells, 5.3%  
Total number of records: 1797  
Mean reporting rate for range: 8.9%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 119, 28, 4, 0, 111, 120, 1406, 0; Breeding: 3, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 13, 0.