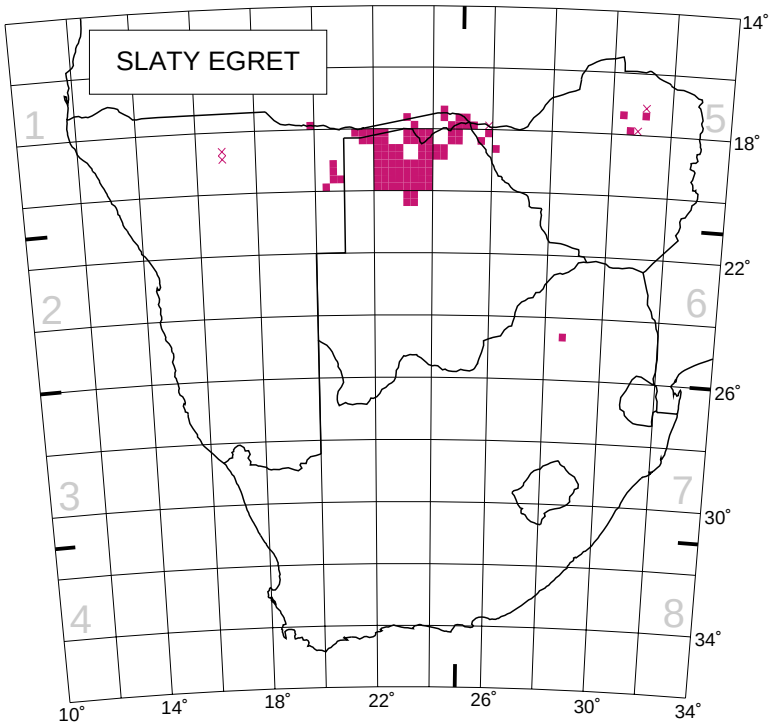
Slaty Egret

Rooikeelreier

Egretta vinaceigula



Recorded in 101 grid cells, 2.2%
Total number of records: 314
Mean reporting rate for range: 9.6%

The status of the Slaty Egret as a valid species separate from the Black Egret *E. ardesiaca* was appreciated only in 1971 (Benson *et al.* 1971), but it is still widely confused with that species and overlooked as a consequence. It has a restricted range in the southern third of Africa, primarily in Zambia and Botswana, with probably less than 10 000 birds in total (Brown *et al.* 1982; Collar *et al.* 1994). The main stronghold in southern Africa is the Okavango Delta where it is common to abundant towards the centre of the delta (Dryden 1982; Fothergill 1982, 1983a, 1983b; Randall 1990; Randall & Herremans 1994). Elsewhere in the region it occurs regularly along the Chobe River, in the Caprivi Strip and extreme western Zimbabwe, and sporadically at ephemeral wetlands in northern Namibia (Hines 1992), and on the Mashonaland plateau in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981).

It forages singly or in loose associations in shallow, receding floodplains and at the edges of ephemeral pans, mostly in grassy vegetation (Vernon 1971a; Milewski 1976a; Dowsett 1981; Dryden 1982; Mathews & McQuaid 1983; Hines 1992). Breeding is primarily in tall, dense reeds, but also in thickets of *Ficus verruculosa* and *Acacia* (Benson *et al.* 1971; Dowsett 1981; Fry *et al.* 1986; Hines 1992; Randall & Herremans 1994).

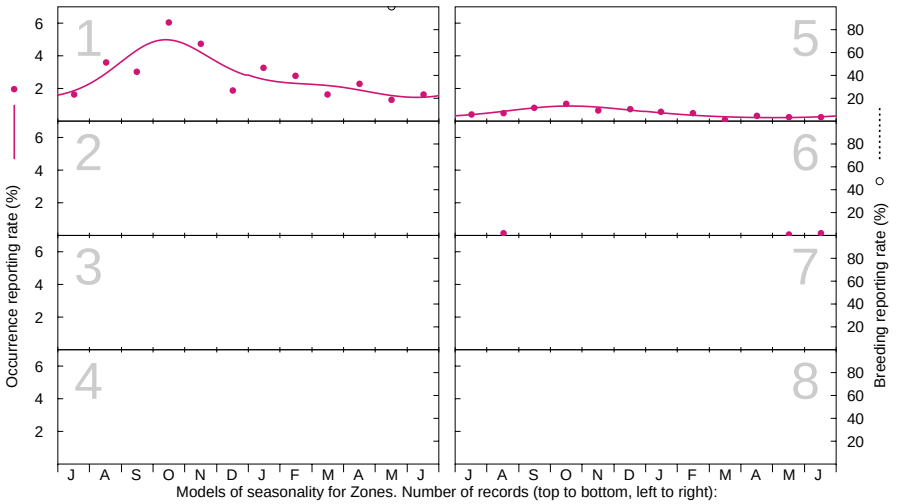
It disperses widely to ephemeral wetlands on the periphery of the Okavango Delta during the rainy season (when flood-levels are low in the Okavango), and far beyond in wet years, when it has been found to range to Owambo, the Transvaal and Mashonaland. There is no evidence for regular migration. Reporting rates dropped during the dry season when the birds are concentrated in the interior of the Okavango Delta.

Breeding information is scant, but small colonies occur in permanent swamp in the Okavango and Chobe floodplains, with egglaying starting March–June and coinciding with peak flood-levels (Benson *et al.* 1971; Dowsett 1981; Fry *et al.* 1986; Randall & Herremans 1994). Breeding was also found at ephemeral wetlands in Bushmanland, Namibia, and at the Nyl floodplain (2428DA), with eggs in March at the end of peak rainfall (Hines 1994; Tarboton 1996). Breeding success in small colonies was below 10% (Hines 1992; Randall & Herremans 1994). A colony of 100s of pairs at an unprotected lagoon in the Okavango was highly productive during 1992, but was not active 1993–95 (T. Liversedge pers. comm.). Breeding appears to be irregular and dependent on high flood-levels.

Initially it was believed to be a relict species, perhaps competing unsuccessfully with the Black Egret (Benson *et al.* 1971); clear ecological and morphological differences have been established (Vernon 1971a; Irwin 1975; Milewski 1976b; Mathews & McQuaid 1983) and, although the two species co-occur, their habitat preferences differ (e.g. Hines 1992). The Black Egret is less common in the centre of the Okavango, the core area for the Slaty Egret (Randall 1990; pers. obs). Slaty Egrets breed regularly in mixed heronries, particularly with Rufousbellied Herons *Butorides rufiventris* (Fry *et al.* 1986; Hines 1992; Randall & Herremans 1994; Tarboton 1996b).

Two type specimens were collected near Potchefstroom (2627CA) in 1895, where it has not occurred since; they were probably vagrants (Benson *et al.* 1971; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It was again recorded in South Africa, at Nylsvley, during the very wet years of 1989 and 1996 (when it also bred), and at Vaalkop Dam (2527AD) in January 1994 (Hockey *et al.* 1992, 1996; Tarboton 1996b). The Slaty Egret is considered globally threatened (Collar *et al.* 1994). Quality reedbeds are considered a limiting factor for successful breeding in part of the Okavango, and reed cutting and burning may be important threats (Randall & Herremans 1994).

M. Herremans



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 248, 0, 0, 0, 60, 6, 0, 0; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0.