

## South African Shelduck

### Kopereend

#### *Tadorna cana*

The South African Shelduck is a common, often locally abundant, southern African endemic. Its distribution is similar to that of the Cape Teal *Anas capensis*. The highest reporting rates were from the Karoo, but it ranges into the southwestern Cape Province, Namibia, the Free State, the Transvaal, KwaZulu-Natal (uncommon, in the uplands only; Cyrus & Robson 1980) and extreme southeastern Botswana. It is virtually absent from Kalahari sandveld and the Lesotho massif. It is most abundant in regions with rainfall below 600 mm p.a. (Geldenhuis 1976a).

There are 23 major wing-moult localities: 17 widely distributed localities in the Free State, three in the Transvaal (Barberspan 2625DA, Leeuwpan 2625DA and Rietspruit Dam 2626BC), and three in the Cape Province (Van Ryneveld's Pass Dam 3224BA, Vogelvlei 3319AA and Smartt Syndicate Dam 3023CB) (Geldenhuis 1981). These accommodate about 30 000 birds of which about 25 000 gather in the Free State; this is about 70% of the South African population and about 60% of the global population.

It is a rare vagrant to Zimbabwe with one record in 1973 (Irwin 1981). Its population in the southern Transvaal highveld is about 5000 birds (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It is a common resident and partial migrant in the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989).

It is most easily confused with the Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*, but its body is a more uniform rich rufous. The male's head is plain grey while the female's is grey with white on the face and around the eye. Confusion between the female shelduck and the Whitefaced Duck *Dendrocygna viduata* is possible. The loud honking voice is diagnostic. During the breeding season it usually occurs in pairs, otherwise in flocks.

**Habitat:** It is usually found at shallow, stagnant, temporary waters, often brackish and warm, which evaporate during dry periods (Siegfried 1965a). In the southwestern Cape Province it uses small farm dams, large estuaries and coastal lagoons (Hockey *et al.* 1989). It rarely occurs at sea off the west coast (Maclean 1993b). Its major wing-moult habitat is large impoundments (Geldenhuis 1981). Fallen wheat grain nearby enhances the attractiveness of large dams, especially during moult (Geldenhuis 1980b). Its main breeding habitat is open country near a small body of water, often a farm dam.

**Movements:** Regular moult migrations are undertaken to large bodies of water, mainly November–December, when flocks may occur at a maximal density of 280 birds/ha (Gelden-

huys 1981a). Birds ringed in the southwestern Cape Province have been recovered in Namibia and the Transvaal (Hockey *et al.* 1989); birds ringed at Barberspan have been recovered in the Free State, the Cape Province and southwestern Namibia (Milstein 1975). It also has nomadic movements between temporary waters; the median distance moved in 328 ring recoveries was 249 km (Oatley & Prÿs-Jones 1986). The models do not show the moult migrations clearly; increases in reporting rates in winter, especially in Zones 3, 4 and 8, possibly show that birds have dispersed at those times for breeding and are therefore more readily encountered. In the far northwest of its range (Zone 1) it appears to be present mainly in summer.

**Breeding:** This species has a well-defined winter (April–September) breeding season. Egg-laying spans April–August in the Transvaal, May–September in the Free State, and August–September in the southwestern Cape Province (Winterbottom 1968a; Geldenhuis 1980a; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). About 90% of breeding in the Free State is June–August (Geldenhuis 1980a). The models confirm a late-winter/spring season but are skewed towards later dates, probably because of the conspicuousness of chicks. Breeding occurs later southwards, with a July–September peak in Zone 2 and a September–November peak in Zones 4 and 8.

**Interspecific relationships:** It often occurs in mixed flocks with other waterfowl, especially Egyptian Geese.

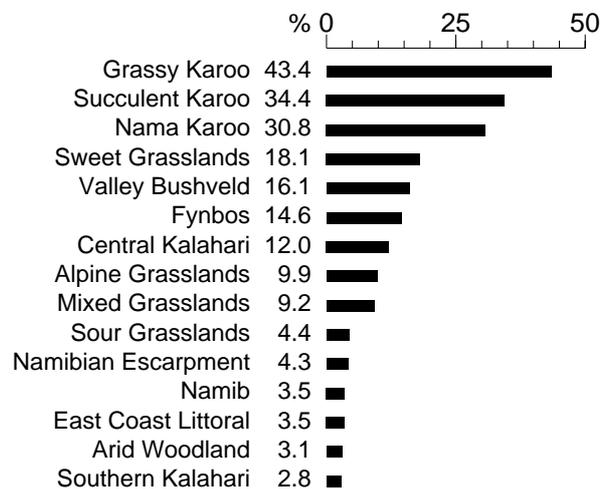
**Historical distribution and conservation:** It has increased its range roughly twofold since the 19th century, when it was not known from KwaZulu-Natal, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia, being confined to the Cape Province and the highveld of the Free State and southern Transvaal (Stark & Sclater 1906). For example, at the edge of the range in southeastern Botswana, Smithers (1964) had a single record, Beesley & Irving (1976) had two records from Gaborone (2425D), and now it is common and still increasing in that area (Bishop 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994c).

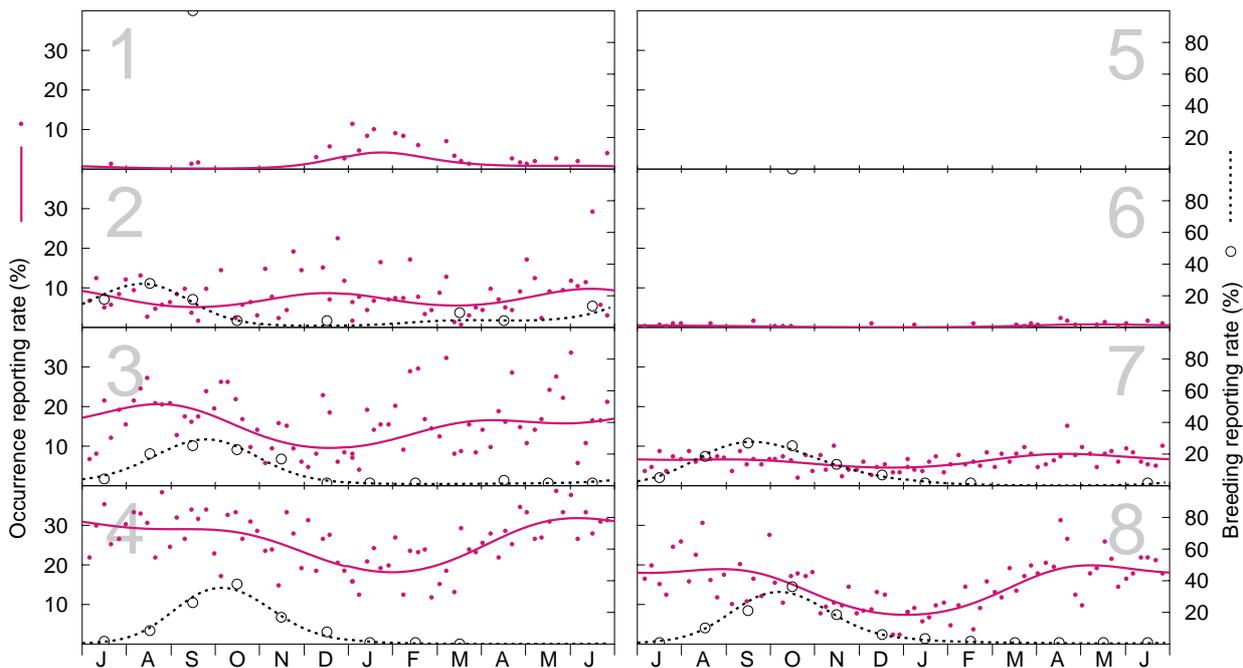
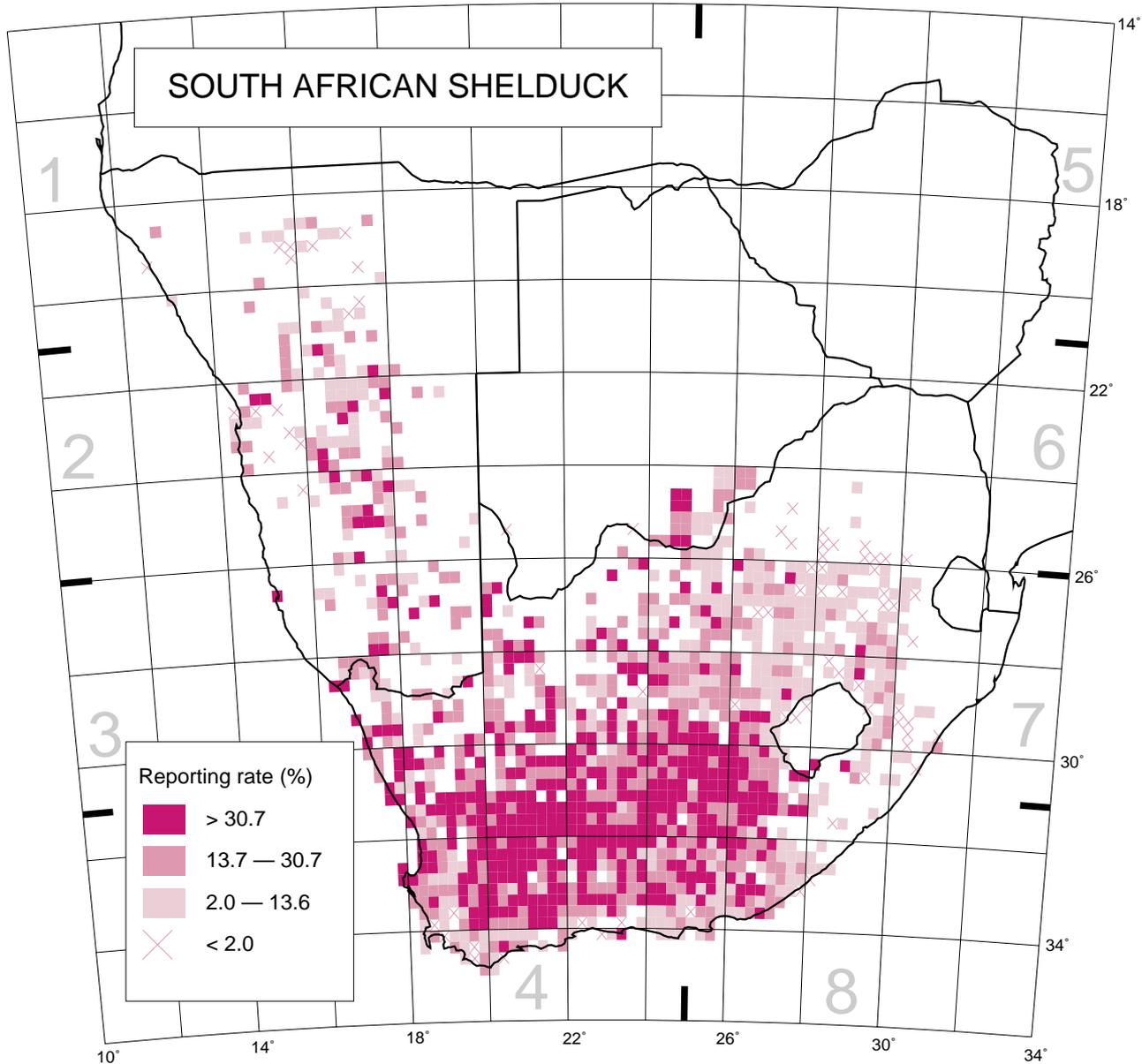
The increased number of large and small dams has greatly influenced the spread of this species which is in no need of special conservation measures.

G.L. Maclean

Recorded in 1313 grid cells, 28.9%  
Total number of records: 13 564  
Mean reporting rate for range: 16.1%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 36, 259, 871, 2298, 0, 39, 1238, 819; Breeding: 1, 22, 66, 298, 0, 1, 105, 185.