

## Hooded Vulture

### Monnikaasvoël

#### *Necrosyrtes monachus*

Although largely restricted in southern Africa to the northern and eastern tropical lowveld regions, it occurs widely in Africa south of the Sahara outside the equatorial forest zone. It has been suggested that two subspecies occur (e.g. Brown & Amadon 1968; Clancey 1980b), but variation is apparently clinal, with the smallest birds occurring in Senegal and the largest in South Africa (Mundy *et al.* 1992). It is a small vulture and may be overlooked at carcasses. The adults are distinctive but the immatures can easily be confused in flight with those of the Lappetfaced *Torgos tracheliotos* and Whiteheaded *Trigonoceps occipitalis* Vultures (Mundy 1982; Mundy *et al.* 1992).

It is common only in the Okavango, the Kruger National Park, and in places along the Zambezi River in Zimbabwe; dozens may be seen at hunters' camps and offal dumps in these places. It also occurs in southeastern Zimbabwe, Hwange National Park and Caprivi, but it is largely a vagrant elsewhere. Nowhere in southern Africa does it exhibit the strong commensalism with humans that it does in West and northeastern Africa. The total Transvaal population has been estimated at less than 50 breeding pairs and breeding is restricted to the lowveld conservation areas, especially the Kruger National Park (Tarboton & Allan 1984).

**Habitat:** It favours well-developed woodland, as reflected in the vegetation analysis, especially the Okavango, Mopane, Arid Woodland and Northern Kalahari vegetation types. These are largely areas at low altitude, hot and semi-arid, but they nevertheless support stands of tall trees, including evergreen species. It is attracted to large well-foliaged trees, such as *Diospyros mespiliformis* (e.g. Kemp 1969) and *Xanthocercis zambesiaca*, and indeed its distribution largely coincides with the distributions of these two tree species in southern Africa (cf. Palgrave 1977).

**Movements:** The models indicate that it is present throughout the year in the three geographical areas where it occurs. There appears to be a peak in reporting rates in spring and summer in the Okavango (Zone 1) and a decline in summer in Zimbabwe (Zone 5). Movements of ringed birds up to 200 km are known.

**Breeding:** The atlas records largely span the dry, winter to early-spring period (June–October). A record in March is likely to be of a dependent juvenile.

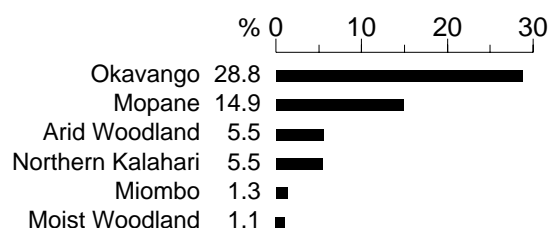
**Interspecific relationships:** It overlaps in distribution with several other vulture species in southern Africa, especially as it is a woodland-dependent species, this habitat supporting the highest diversity of vultures in the region. At carcasses there may be up to five species of vulture present, and the Hooded Vulture is at the bottom of the dominance hierarchy. This is one of the reasons for its relative abundance at food sources provided by humans, which the larger vultures are too cautious to attend: it is motivated to escape their dominance. The other reason is that it is relaxed in the company of carnivores such as lion, hyena, and humans (Kruuk 1972; Schaller 1972).

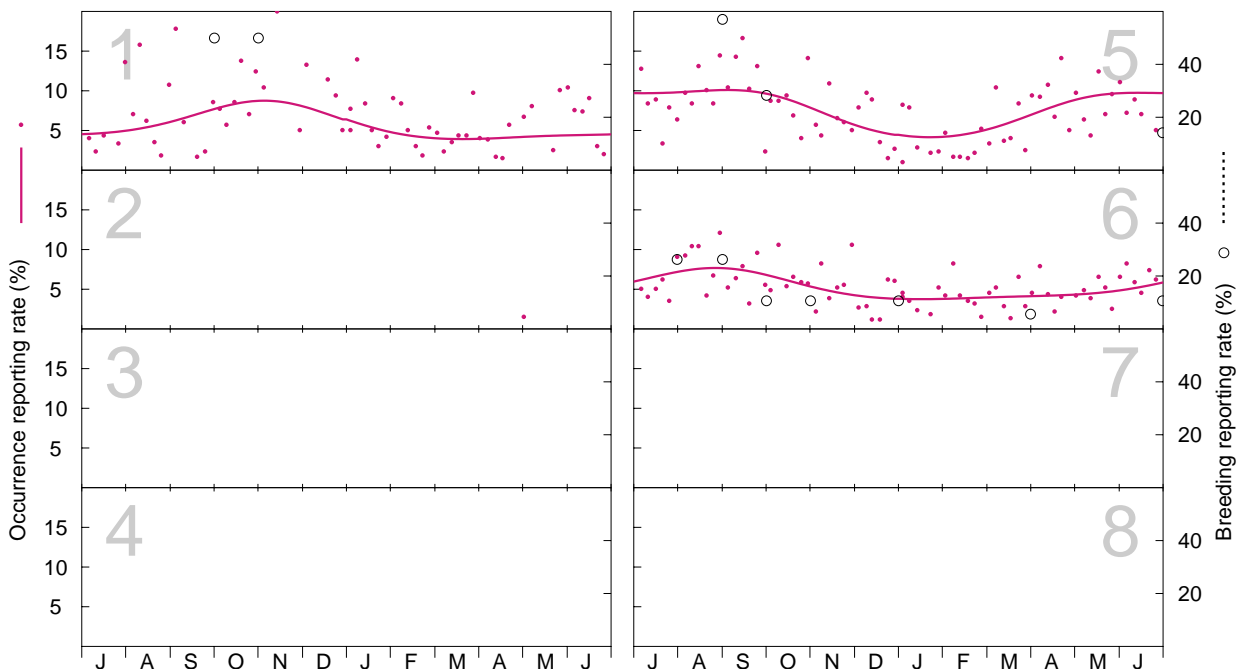
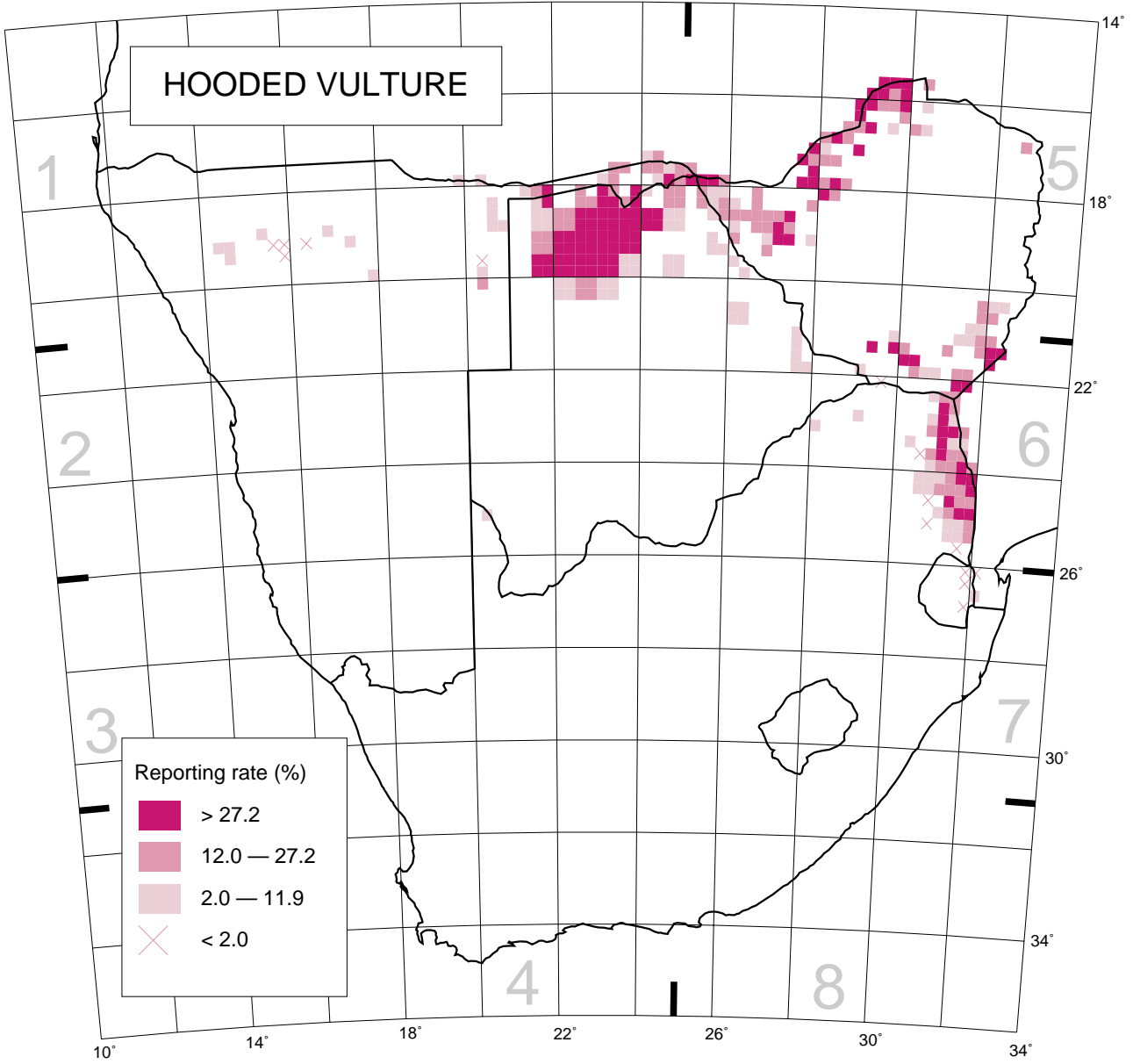
**Historical distribution and conservation:** It has undergone a dramatic contraction of range in recent times. It no longer occurs at the Hopetown (2924CA) type locality of its putative southern subspecies. Indeed, it no longer occurs anywhere in the Cape Province, apart from occasional sightings in the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (Boshoff *et al.* 1983), and there is also evidence that it has decreased to a 'remnant' population in the Transvaal (Tarboton & Allan 1984). The Hooded Vulture is considered to be 'rare' in South Africa, and is thought to have decreased in the face of persecution and poisoning (Brooke 1984b). Very few birds have been found poisoned (Mundy *et al.* 1992), but as a naturally rare and solitary species, poisoned individuals could easily be overlooked. The present extractive management of the Kruger National Park, which results in large amounts of offal being available, favours the survival of young birds there.

P.J. Mundy

Recorded in 320 grid cells, 7.1%  
Total number of records: 2655  
Mean reporting rate for range: 20.5%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 179, 1, 0, 0, 684, 587, 0, 0; Breeding: 2, 0, 0, 0, 7, 19, 0, 0.