



African Hawk Eagle

Afrikaanse Grootjagarend

Hieraaetus spilogaster

The African Hawk Eagle is widespread in the well-developed woodlands of sub-Saharan Africa, although its distribution is patchy in West Africa and it does not occur in forest. It is rarely found south of 26°S.

Its population density varies across habitat types from 0.5–1.8 pairs/100 km² in the Kruger and Hwange National Parks (Tarboton & Allan 1984; Hustler & Howells 1988) to 2.8 pairs/100 km² in the Matobo Hills, Zimbabwe (Macdonald & Gargett 1984) and 3.3 pairs/100 km² in the Sabi Sand Reserve, South Africa (Simmons 1994). The total population in the Transvaal is estimated at c. 1600 pairs (Tarboton & Allan 1984), and, based on these estimates, c. 7000 pairs occur in southern Africa.

It is frequently recorded in pairs. Adults are unlikely to be confused with any other species except Ayres' Eagle *H. ayresii*, which is rare and usually darker in appearance. Immatures are brown in colour and can be easily confused with other raptors.

Habitat: It occurs in a range of woodland habitats, from dry highland areas in Namibia to the relatively mesic miombo woodlands of Zimbabwe. A particularly favoured vegetation type is Mopane. Nests are usually situated on

hill slopes or along watercourses in flat terrain (Steyn 1982b; Tarboton & Allan 1984). In the driest areas of Namibia suitable tall mopane and *Acacia* trees are confined to dry riverbeds (pers. obs.). In Zimbabwe, breeding densities are over twice as high on basalt soils (1.3 pairs/100 km²) as they are on Kalahari sands (0.5 pairs/100 km²) (Hustler & Howells 1988).

Movements: Only one substantial movement has been documented; an adult ringed in the northern Transvaal was found seven years later at Victoria Falls (1725DD) 795 km away. The average distance moved of six other recoveries was 28 km (SAFRING). An apparent increase in seasonal records of occurrence during the winter may arise from greater conspicuousness during the breeding season, rather than any movement into the region.

Breeding: Eggs are laid during midwinter (June–July in the Transvaal; May–June in Zimbabwe), although the rearing of the chick may extend through to December (Tarboton & Allan 1984; Hustler & Howells 1988). The atlas data are consistent with this. Its productivity is remarkably constant across several biomes at 0.53–0.59 young/pair/year (Steyn 1975b; Tarboton & Allan 1984; Hustler & Howells 1988). It usually nests in trees, occasionally on cliffs (Brown *et al.* 1982; pers. obs.) and on pylons (Allan 1988a; J. Mendelsohn pers. comm.).

Historical distribution and conservation: The current and historical distributions of the African Hawk Eagle appear to be similar. It may be decreasing owing to woodland destruction in some regions (Brown *et al.* 1982), although little concrete evidence exists for this. Since this powerful and rapacious eagle does little if any scavenging, it has not suffered from poisoning to the degree that other eagles in similar habitats have. Its poultry-raiding habits have resulted in some shooting and trapping, but there is little evidence for any population declines caused by direct persecution.

R.E. Simmons

Recorded in 908 grid cells, 20.0%
Total number of records: 4829
Mean reporting rate for range: 12.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



