

## Ringed Plover

### Ringnekstrandkiewiet

*Charadrius hiaticula*

The Ringed Plover breeds in the tundras of northeastern Canada, Greenland, Iceland, and from northern Europe eastwards across northern Siberia to the Bering Strait. It is primarily, but not exclusively, a coastal bird in southern Africa. It is most abundant along the coastlines of KwaZulu-Natal and the southern and southwestern Cape Province, with lower densities along the Namibian coastline (Summers *et al.* 1987a). It occurs quite widely, albeit locally, at suitable wetlands in the interior, mostly during southward migration, and small numbers linger throughout the summer months (Irwin 1981). Concentrations of up to 56 birds were recorded at Lake Manyame (1730DC) in October 1992 in Zimbabwe (Tree 1993b).

The total population is about 450 000 birds (Rose & Scott 1994). The population of the South African and Namibian coastline was estimated to be 5500 birds (Summers *et al.* 1987a). At most a further 1000 occur in the interior, so that *c.* 1.5% of the world population of Ringed Plovers migrate to southern Africa.

**Habitat:** It favours muddy to sandy-mud estuaries and lagoons, but it is also found on mixed and rocky shores, especially on wave-cut platforms. Inland it occurs at wetlands with a muddy, sandy or gritty substrate, gently sloping shorelines and eutrophic water conditions, including sewage works. There is no direct association with any of the vegetation types; it occurs wherever there are suitable wetlands and coastal habitat.

**Movements:** Most migrate to Africa south of the Sahara; it is a vagrant in Australasia (Hayman *et al.* 1986). It is likely that the far eastern populations migrate distances of up to 18 000 km to southern Africa, as does the Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*. There are four recoveries of ringed birds between the northern hemisphere and southern Africa, but none were as far north as the tundra breeding grounds. Three were in Europe, two near Moscow and one at the Rhône delta, France, but the most interesting recovery was of a bird ringed in Kazakhstan (50°N 68°E) on migration southwards on 31 July 1983, and recovered at Richards Bay (2832CC) eight months later (SAFRING). This bird provides a point on the likely migration route

from far eastern Siberia lying north of the chain of mountains of central Asia. The Palearctic race *tundrae*, and the race *psammodyroma*, which breeds from the Faeroes west to Baffin Island, have been identified in southern Africa (Clancey 1980b; Clancey *et al.* 1987).

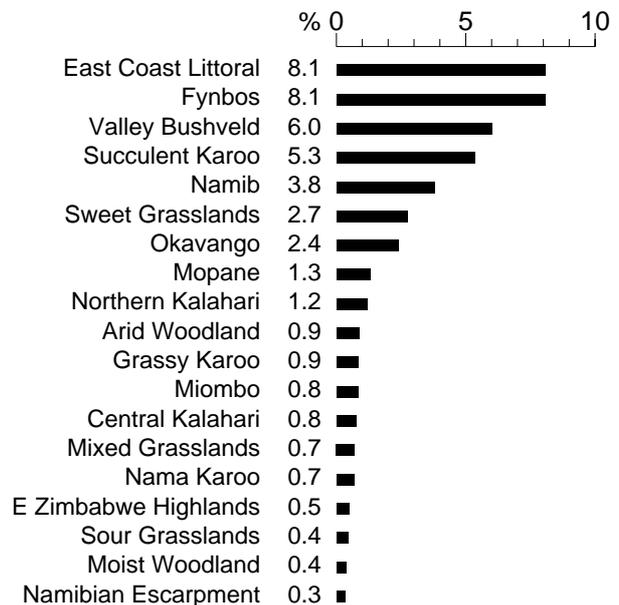
The first birds arrive in early September and numbers build up October–November. There is a slow, steady departure from all coastal Zones from late March with the last birds leaving by early May; very few spend the austral winter in the region.

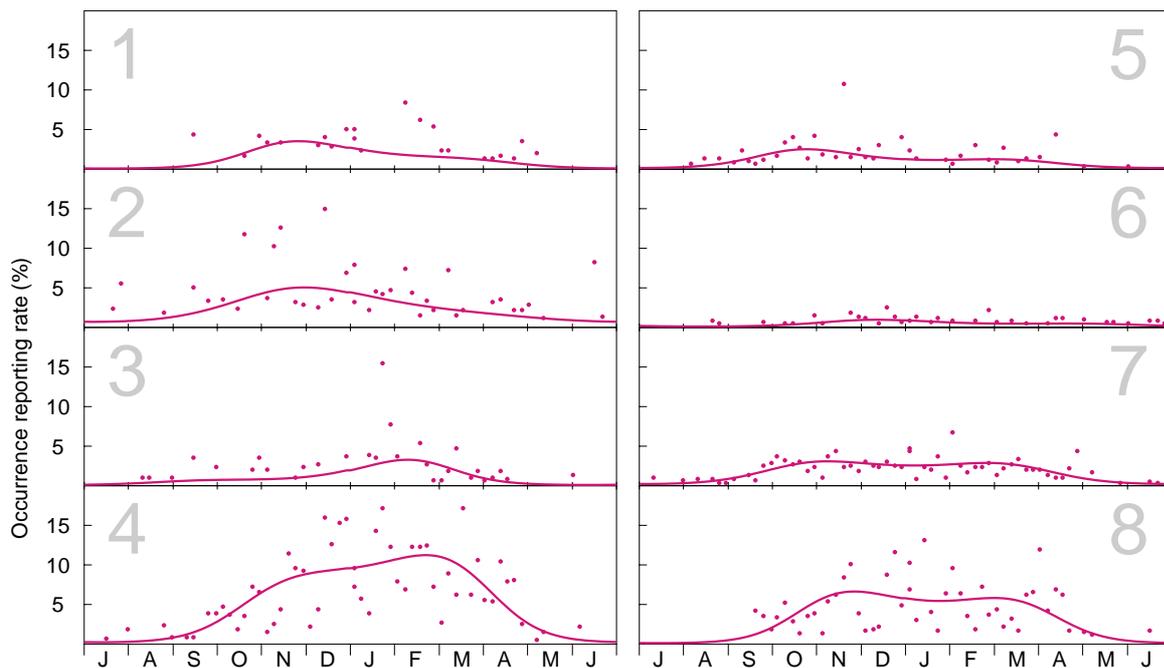
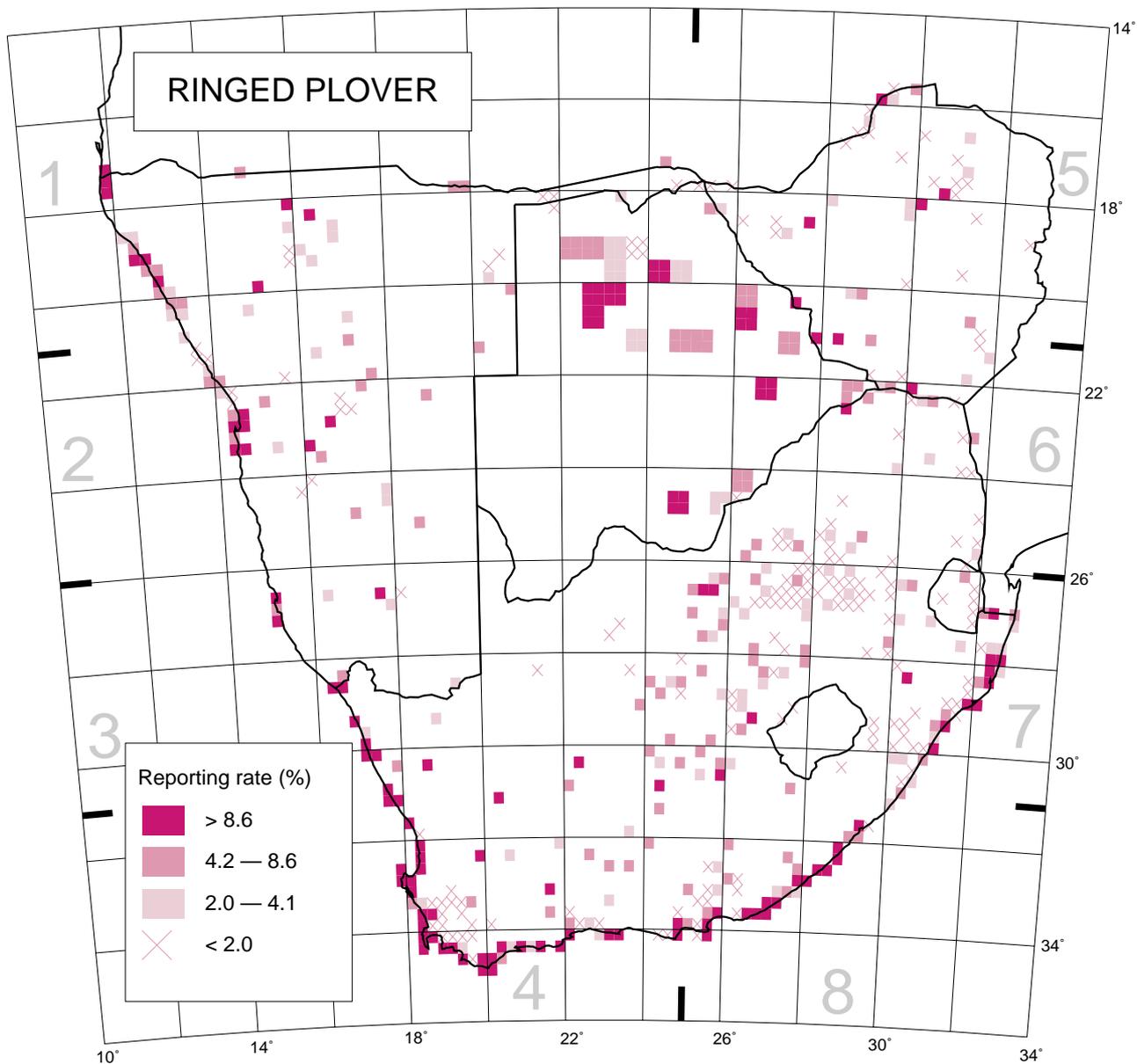
**Historical distribution and conservation:** There is unlikely to have been any major change in overall distribution along the coastline, but many estuarine and coastal lagoon areas have been drastically reduced in area through reclamation during the 20th century. A total of 3000 were counted in the mid-1970s at prime habitat in KwaZulu-Natal, particularly at Durban Bayhead (2931CC) and Richards Bay (G. Nicholls pers. comm.), but numbers along the entire KwaZulu-Natal coast had declined to 1700 by 1980 (Summers *et al.* 1987a). Decreases in the abundance of Ringed Plovers at coastal wetlands in the eastern and southwestern Cape Province were reviewed by Martin & Baird (1987), although there have been subsequent increases in the eastern Cape Province (Tree 1994a). A large number and variety of waterbodies have been constructed inland and these may have created suitable alternative habitats for some displaced birds. The extent to which habitats are below their carrying capacity for Ringed Plovers is unknown, but they do not appear to occur at high densities in southern Africa compared with habitats further to the north (e.g. Pienkowski 1972). Although those migrating to southern Africa are not under any immediate threat, ongoing reclamation of estuarine habitats might lead to further decreases in abundance of this ultra long-distance migrant.

A.J. Tree

Recorded in 538 grid cells, 11.9%  
Total number of records: 4049  
Mean reporting rate for range: 6.0%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 36, 77, 51, 427, 94, 53, 344, 179.