Meyer's Parrot

Bosveldpapegaai

Poicephalus meyeri

Meyer's Parrot is found in the western and northern Transvaal, throughout most of Zimbabwe, eastern and northern Botswana, and northeastern Namibia. The ranges of the two races in the region (Clancey 1980b), in the eastern part of the region and from the Okavango delta westwards, respectively, are continuous on the present map. Outside southern Africa the species occurs from Angola to Malawi and northwards through East Africa to southern Chad, Sudan and Ethiopia (Fry *et al.* 1988; Forshaw 1989).

It is the most common parrot in the atlas region, and is usually encountered in pairs or small groups (Forshaw 1989; Maclean 1993b), but larger groups of up to 30 birds may be found at good food sources (Rowan 1983; Fry *et al.* 1988). Its highly vocal nature and distinctive plumage make it conspicuous. The atlas data are thus reliable, except perhaps in areas of overlap (northern Transvaal, southern Zimbabwe and Namibia) with the similar-sized Brownheaded Parrot *P. cryptoxanthus* and Rüppell's Parrot *P. rueppellii*, where misidentifications may have been made or where hybrids may occur (Irwin 1981; Maclean 1993b).

Habitat: It occurs in open wooded habitats, with a preference for watercourses, though it is also found in dry woodland away from water (Fry *et al.* 1988; Forshaw 1989; Maclean 1993b). The highest reporting rates were recorded in the Okavango of northern Botswana, followed by Miombo, Northern Kalahari and Mopane woodlands. It is the only avian species able to break open the pods and seeds of the many leguminous trees that characterize miombo woodland, allowing it to enjoy an abundant food supply with little competition (Rowan 1983).

Movements: Populations in the Transvaal, Zimbabwe and eastern Botswana (race *P. m. transvaalensis*) appear to be resident, while the atlas data show significant seasonal trends in northern Namibia and northern Botswana (race *damarensis*), with an apparent influx during the summer rains. The reasons for this increase in reporting rates are unclear, though it may be related to greater seasonality of food supply in these more arid regions, and to seasonal contraction of birds into mesic swamp-fringing forests of the Okavango. This parrot is known to wander during drought years, and local movements to exploit rich food sources have been recorded all year round (Rowan 1983; Fry *et al.* 1988).

Breeding: Atlas data suggest that populations in the Transvaal begin breeding a few months earlier (mainly March–October, with a May peak) than those further north in Zimbabwe (mainly July–October, with a September peak). Egglaying data for Zimbabwe span March–August, with an April–May peak, and five Transvaal records come from March and a sixth from June (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Interspecific relationships: On the basis of museum specimens with apparent intermediate and yellow coloration, Clancey (1977b) considered the area between the Motale River in the northeastern Transvaal and the Save River in southern Zimbabwe to be a zone of extensive hybridization between this and the Brownheaded Parrot. However, Rowan (1983) pointed out that such atypical specimens are found throughout the range of Meyer's Parrot and fall within the natural colour variation present in the species, and that natural hybrids may in fact be rare. It may compete for nest holes with Cape *P. robustus*, Brownheaded and Rüppell's Parrots where their ranges overlap, and with other secondary cavity-nesting species.

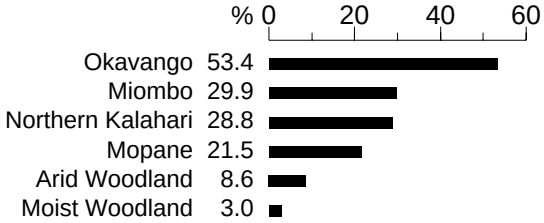
Historical distribution and conservation: The distributional limits of this parrot do not appear different from those given almost a century ago (Stark & Sclater 1903).

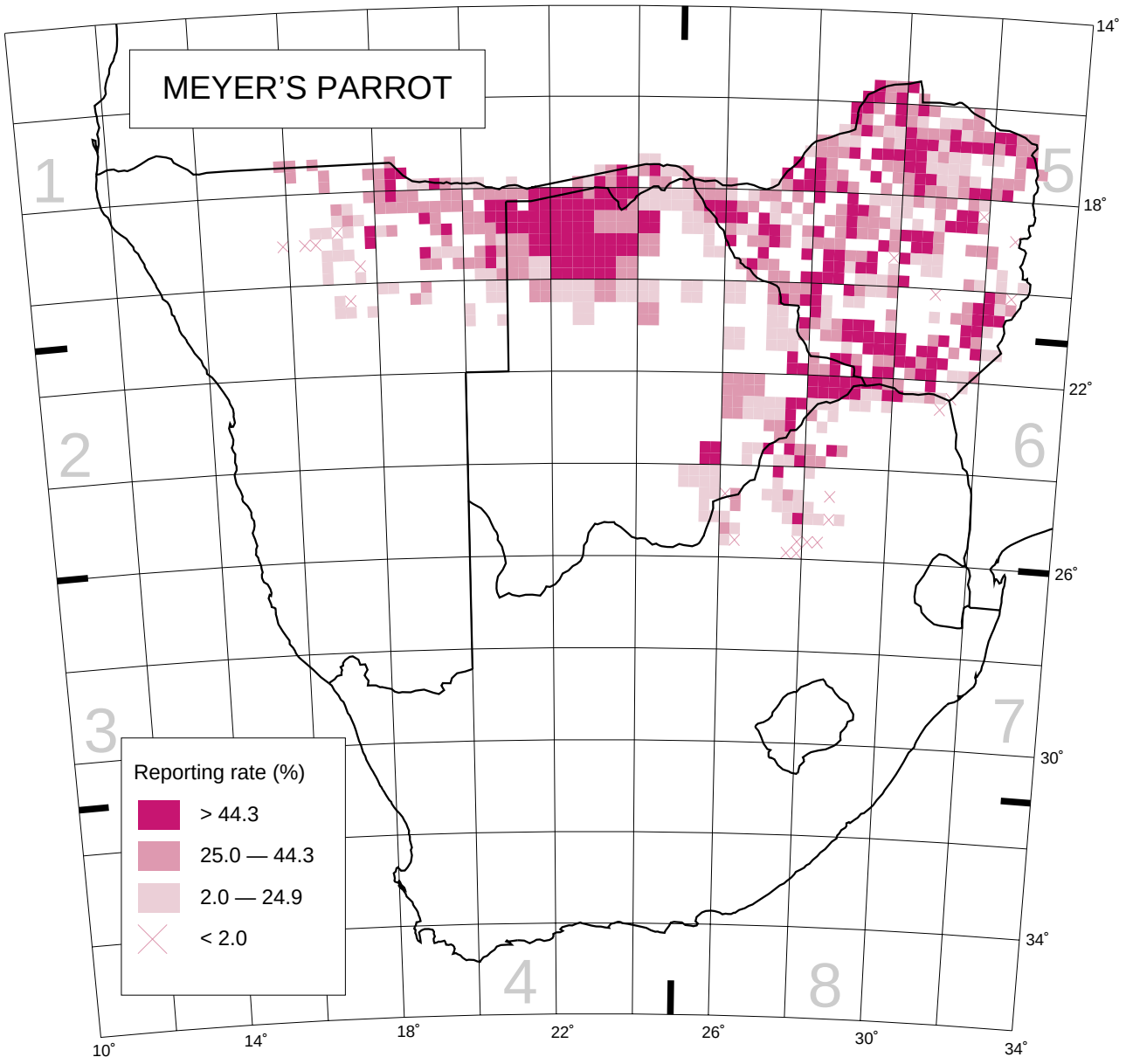
Meyer's Parrot is still common in part of the region and is not considered threatened, but numbers have been much reduced in the Transvaal and Zimbabwe by habitat destruction (Rowan 1983; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Fry *et al.* 1988). They have been known to raid orange orchards and maize crops (White 1945; Rowan 1983).

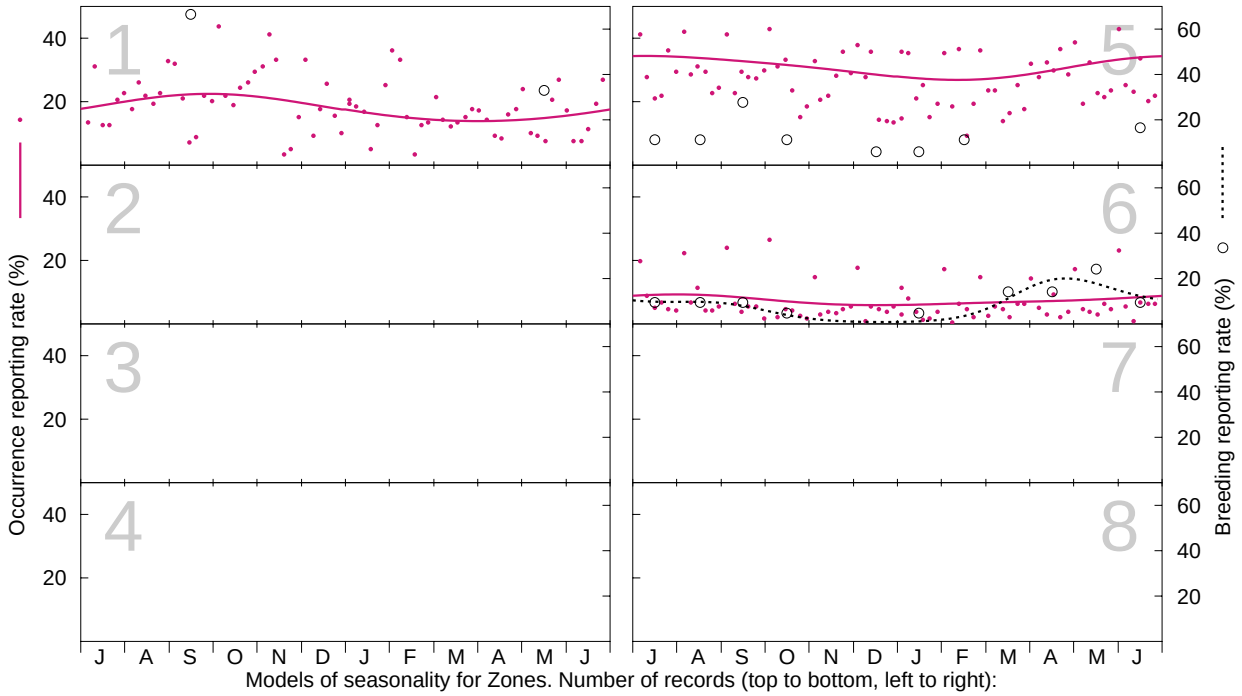
J.O. Wirminghaus

Recorded in 805 grid cells, 17.7%
Total number of records: 6296
Mean reporting rate for range: 29.8%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 584, 0, 0, 0, 2701, 842, 0, 0; Breeding: 3, 0, 0, 0, 18, 21, 0, 0.