

Emerald Cuckoo

Mooimeisie

Chrysococcyx cupreus

The Emerald Cuckoo is an Afrotropical forest species with a wide range across central Africa, from Senegal in the west to Ethiopia in the east and South Africa in the south (Fry *et al.* 1988). In southern Africa, the distribution extends through forested areas from the southern Cape Province north-eastwards. It occurs east of the escarpment in KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland and the Transvaal (and into Mozambique), along the Save River valley, in the southeastern lowveld and the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, and along the Zambezi drainage to Kasane (1725C) in northern Botswana and the eastern Caprivi in Namibia. It is also present on the Zambezi escarpment and there are scattered records from the central plateau in Zimbabwe. Vagrants have occurred in the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989) and at Maun (1923C) near the Okavango (C. Brewster & M. Muller pers. comm.).

It is secretive in its lush forest habitat (Irwin 1981; Maclean 1993b), but the four-syllable 'pretty georgie' territorial call is loud, carries far and is diagnostic. It was probably overlooked when not calling; the atlas data are likely to be spatially reliable, but not seasonally comprehensive.

Habitat: With highest reporting rates in the Eastern Zimbabwe Highlands, Afromontane Forest, East Coast Littoral and Miombo, the atlas data confirm the association of the Emerald Cuckoo with evergreen forest, galleries, densely wooded, mesic savannas and riparian forest (Irwin 1981; Rowan 1983; Fry *et al.* 1988). It also occurs in alien trees in towns (Fry *et al.* 1988).

Movements: Its migratory patterns are uncertain; the southern African population is generally considered to be an intra-African migrant, spending the nonbreeding season to the north (Rowan 1983). It was recorded in the atlas region mainly from August onwards, with few observations after March. The

southern African population is thought to winter in Zaire and Kenya because specimens of the southern African race *C. c. sharpei* have been recorded there (Rowan 1983). It has also been suggested that some birds are resident (Irwin 1981; Rowan 1983; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Parker 1994); winter observations would then represent the occasional encounter with a population of silent and secretive residents, but it is equally possible that overwintering birds may have moved from other parts of the breeding range.

The seasonality analysis shows essentially synchronous arrival in the eastern Zones; the most rapid increase in reporting rates is in October. If it migrates south to southern Africa, the uniformity of apparent arrival suggests that it is silent on migration and on arrival in breeding areas, remaining undetected until it starts calling simultaneously throughout the region at the onset of the breeding season. Except for the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4), there are records throughout the year; it still remains unclear what proportion of the population is migrant and to what extent the seasonality pattern is due to variation in conspicuousness.

Breeding: The atlas records span December–February; these are compatible with the October–January egg-laying period given in the literature (Dean 1971; Rowan 1983; Fry *et al.* 1988).

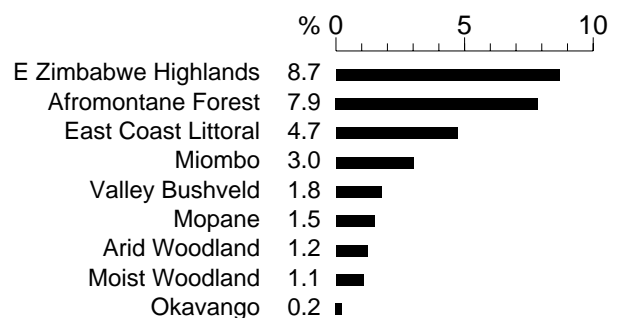
Interspecific relationships: It is a brood parasite whose hosts may be a variety of small insectivorous passerines. The nestling closely resembles that of the more common Klaas's Cuckoo *C. klaas*, and the range of hosts of the Emerald Cuckoo is therefore uncertain (Rowan 1983). The substantiated hosts in southern Africa are the Bleating Warbler *Camaroptera brachyura*, Starred Robin *Pogonocichla stellata* and Bluegrey Flycatcher *Muscicapa caeruleascens* (Maclean 1993b). Taken together, these hosts have wider ranges in the region than the cuckoo.

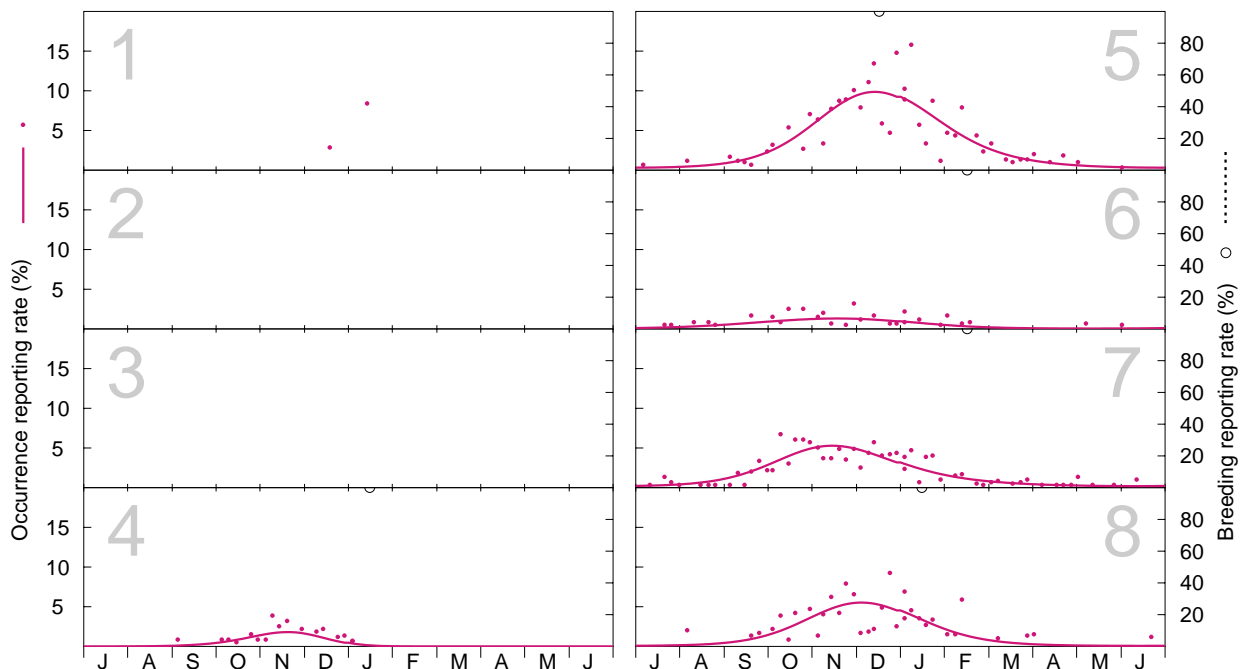
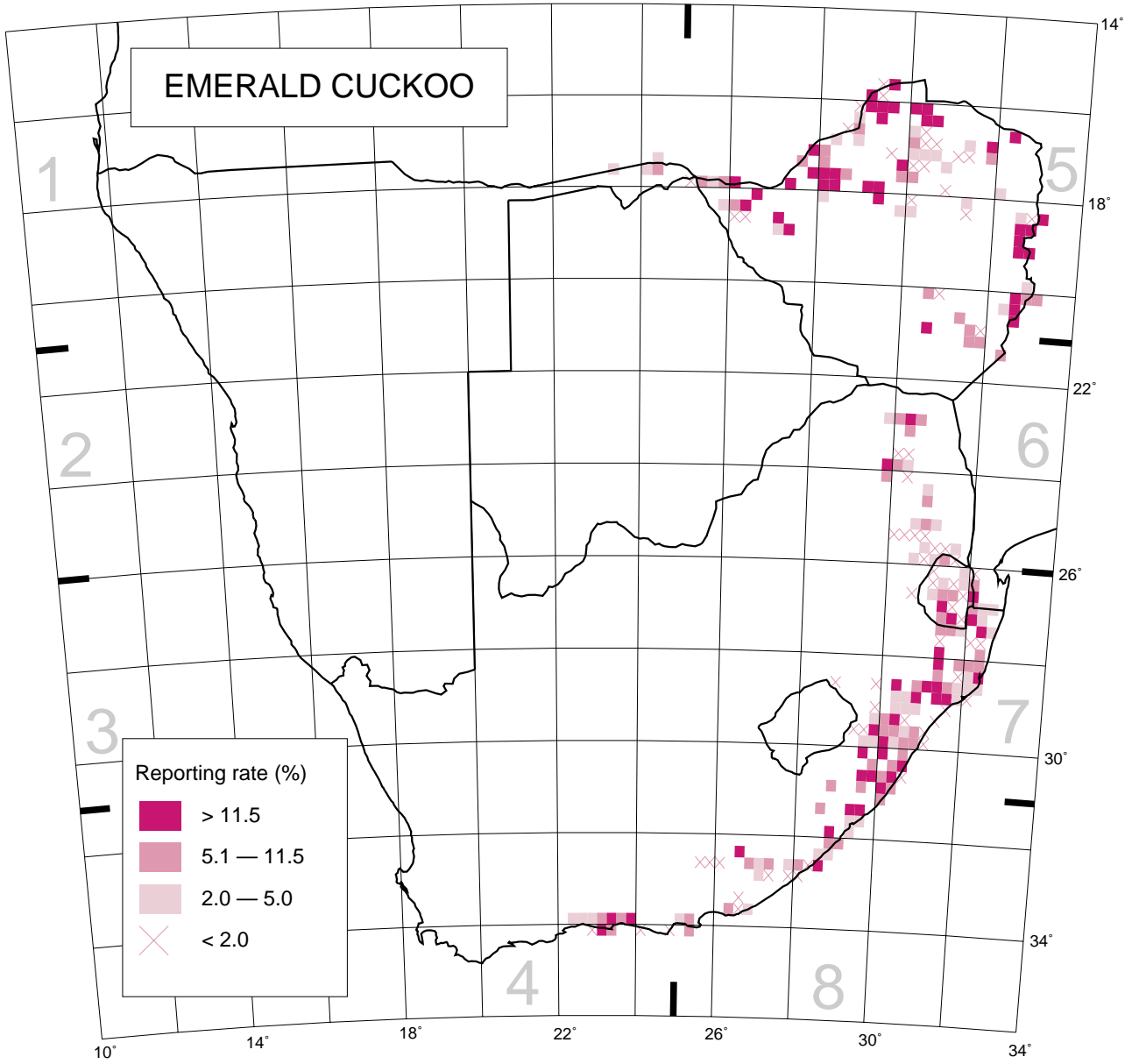
Historical distribution and conservation: The historical range is not known to differ from the present, although destruction of forest habitat has probably reduced population sizes (Rowan 1983). At the beginning of the 20th century it was apparently hunted for its plumage; Taylor (1909) stated that it was persecuted in Knysna (3423AA) from 'the day it arrives until the day it departs' and that 'one man told me he often killed as many as 60 in a season'. Currently, the Emerald Cuckoo is not threatened, but its preferred forested habitat is under pressure in many regions.

C.J. Vernon and L.G. Underhill

Recorded in 277 grid cells, 6.1%
Total number of records: 1846
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: 2, 0, 0, 28, 267, 58, 346, 88; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 2, 1, 1, 2, 1.