

# Diederik Cuckoo

## Diederikkie

*Chrysococcyx caprius*

The Diederik Cuckoo is common and widespread throughout the Afrotropics and occurs in the savanna and forest areas from West to East Africa, and over most of southern Africa (Fry *et al.* 1988). There are strongholds in Kwa-Zulu-Natal and most of the Transvaal and adjacent hardveld in eastern Botswana; reporting rates drop sharply further west on Kalahari sands. It is absent from the Lesotho highlands and thinly reported from the Transkei. It is scarce in the more arid parts of the Kalahari and the interior of the western Cape Province; it is absent from the Namib Desert.

It is one of the most conspicuous cuckoos and the atlas data are comprehensive. Its name is onomatopoeic for the energetic territorial call of the male, and most atlas records would have been identified on vocalization.

**Habitat:** It occurs in a variety of habitats, from the forest edge to semi-desert (Fry *et al.* 1988). It is not usually found in forest and is uncommon in Mopane woodland, but otherwise is tolerant of a wide range of woodland habitats (Rowan 1983).

**Movements:** It is an intra-African migrant; first arrivals are in September, while most rapid arrival is during October over the core of the range (Zones 4–8); in the drier western regions (Zones 1–3), arrival is on average about a month later, probably dependent on the onset of the rains. The data confirm published information on arrival (Rowan 1983; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Hockey *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b; Herremans 1994d).

The period of presence, as indicated by vocalizations, decreases southwards. In Zimbabwe (Zone 5) it calls for about six months, while it stops calling at the end of January in the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4) where it calls for only about three months (Rowan 1983; Hockey *et al.* 1989). Most adults may leave the breeding grounds by late February (Maclean 1993b), but evidence from late-hatching chicks indicates that some do so only by late April, at least in some years (Rowan 1983). The latest birds of the season are mostly juveniles (Rowan 1983; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Atlas records confirm that it very occasionally overwinters in southern Africa (Rowan 1983; Earlé & Grobler 1987; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

**Breeding:** Egg-laying by this brood parasite spans October–April (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Rowan 1983; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Skinner 1996a; Brown & Clinning in press), peaking progressively later from south to north: November in the Cape Province, December in KwaZulu-Natal and the Transvaal, January in Zimbabwe, and February in Namibia and Botswana (Rowan 1983).

Atlas records are biased towards later dates because fledged young are the most conspicuous signs of breeding, but they confirm that most breeding takes place November–April, with a December–January peak. Breeding in the most arid region (Zone 2) is clearly later than in other regions. The fine-tuning of breeding seasonality may be dependent on veld



conditions and the timing of breeding of hosts, and may consequently differ between years and according to which host species contributes most to the data set.

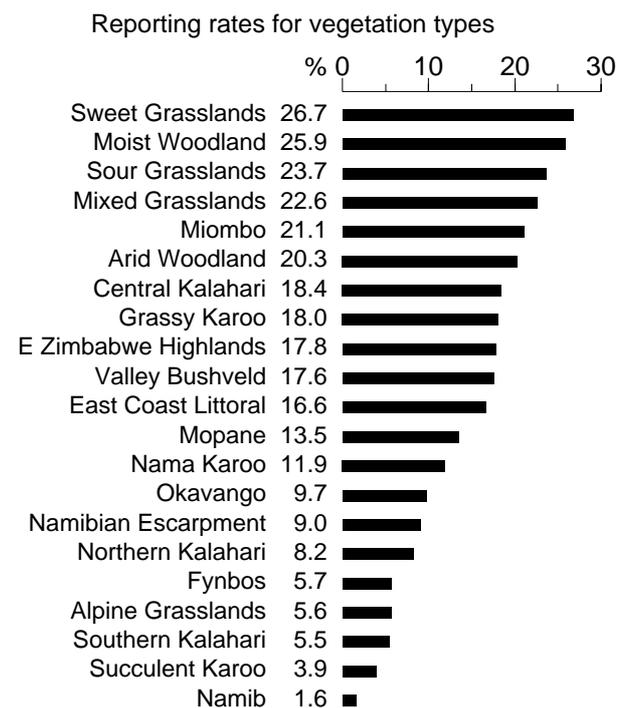
**Interspecific relationships:** 24 host species are known, with Cape Sparrow *Passer melanurus*, Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus*, Cape Weaver *P. capensis*, Spottedbacked Weaver *P. cucullatus*, Red Bishop *Euplectes orix* and Cape Wagtail *Motacilla capensis* being most frequent (Maclean 1993b). Most hosts start breeding well before Diederik Cuckoos arrive on the breeding grounds and their earlier clutches are free from nest parasitism.

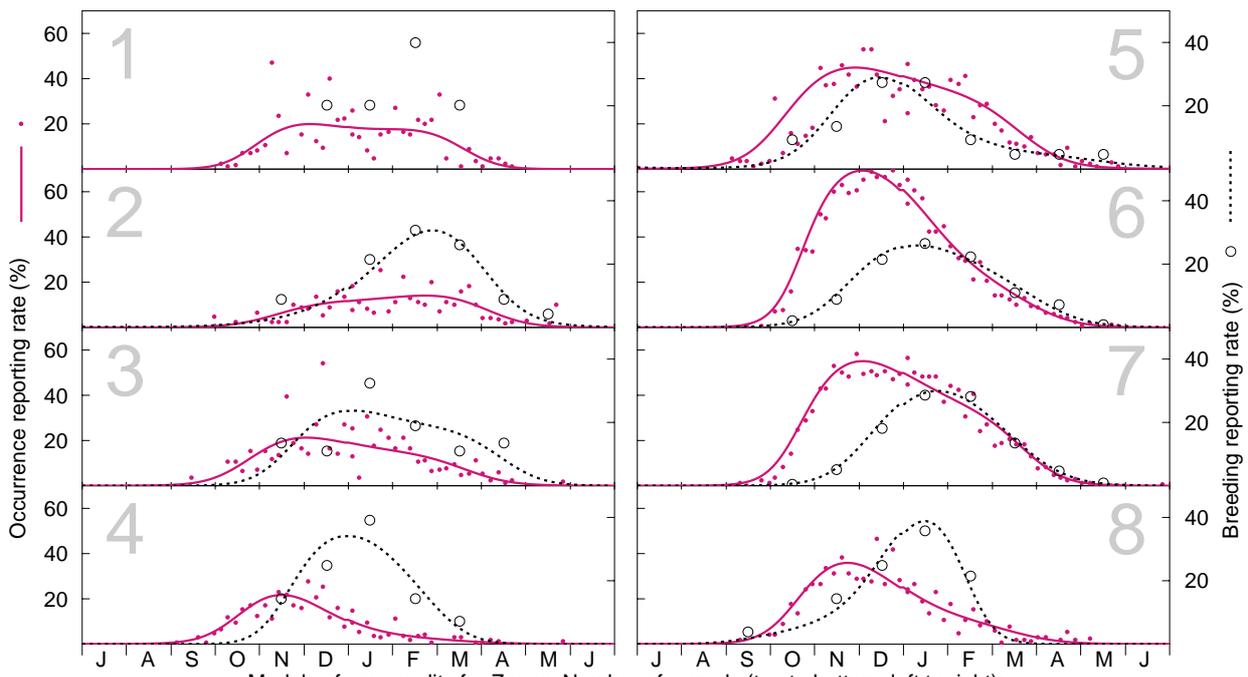
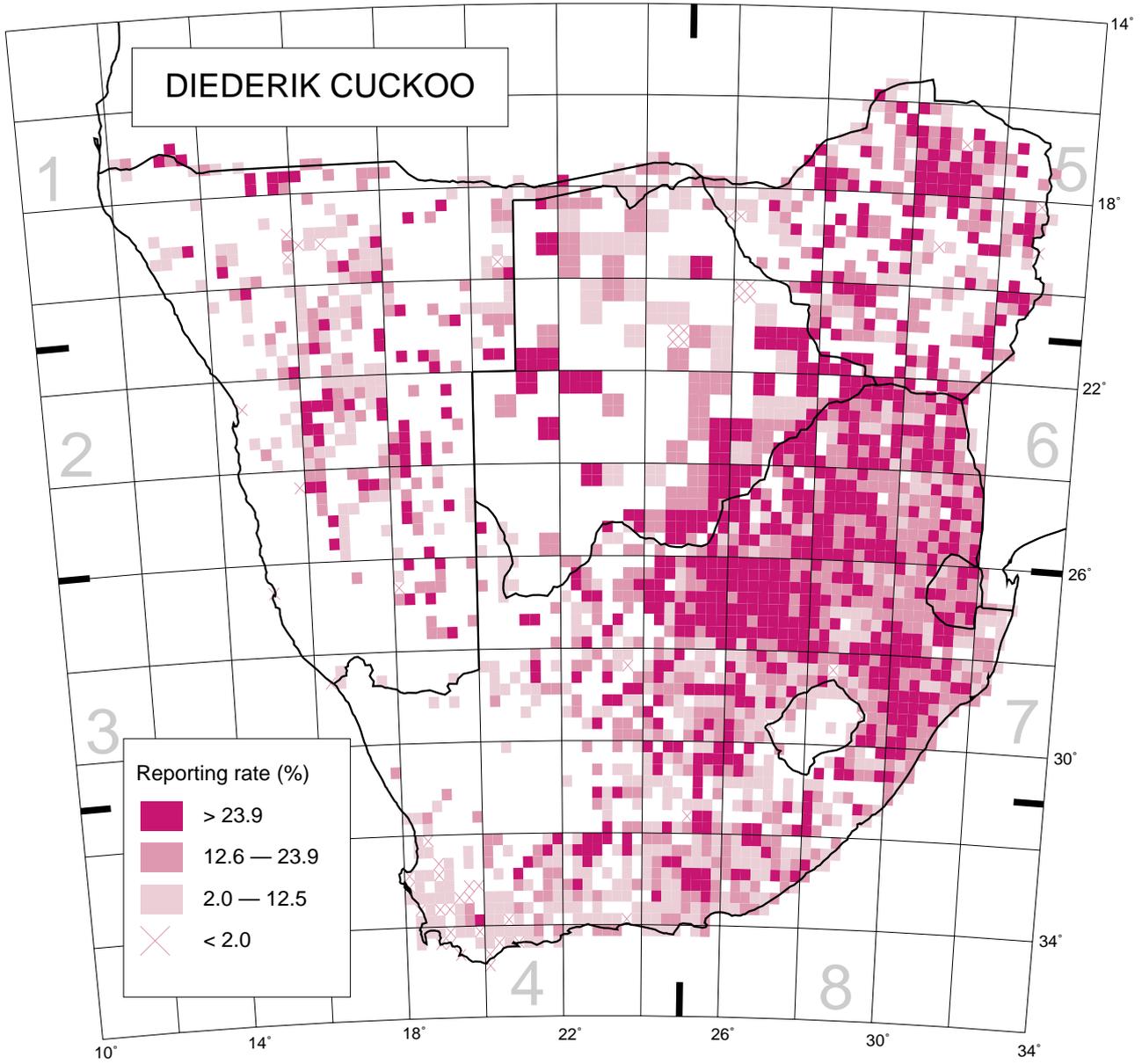
The Diederik Cuckoo is ecologically separated from the Emerald Cuckoo *C. cupreus*, but overlaps with Klaas's Cuckoo *C. klaas*. Although both eat caterpillars, they have different brood hosts and no instances of interspecific competition have been recorded (Rowan 1983).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** Although there is no specific evidence, it is likely that it has expanded its range during the 20th century, mainly because of the planting of alien trees, and by indirect promotion of its granivorous hosts. It has increased in abundance in the southwestern Cape Province in the past decades; this has been attributed to an increase in the abundance of its hosts (Hockey *et al.* 1989). The Diederik Cuckoo is not threatened.

*C.J. Vernon and M. Herremans*

Recorded in 2257 grid cells, 49.7%  
Total number of records: 24 915  
Mean reporting rate for range: 19.3%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 183, 186, 352, 437, 1510, 2395, 3841, 565; Breeding: 5, 23, 37, 28, 22, 127, 209, 28.