



Wood Owl

Bosuil

Strix woodfordii

The distribution of the Wood Owl in southern Africa is essentially that of a tropical African species, extending south in tall, dense moist woodland and forest wherever these habitats exist in the region. Outside of the atlas region, Wood Owls are found throughout Mozambique to the east and most of Central and West Africa in tropical woodlands south of the Sahara (Fry *et al.* 1988). Unlike most other tropical species extending into southern Africa, they are not confined to low altitudes, but also occur in forests fringing the Drakensberg range and in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe. The nominate subspecies occurs in southern Africa, including southern Angola, southern Zaire and southern Tanzania. Three other races are recognized elsewhere in Africa. Members of the genus *Strix* occur in woodlands elsewhere in the world, in South and North America, Europe, and southeast Asia. The Wood Owl is the African counterpart of the Eurasian Tawny Owl *S. aluco*.

Within suitable habitat it is often common, loud and distinctive calls making it easy to detect at night. During the day, however, it roosts in thick foliage where it is difficult to see (Steyn 1982b). It is strictly nocturnal.

Twenty-three pairs were found along 15 km of the Levuvhu River in the Kruger National Park (Kemp & Kemp 1989). Atlas reporting rates show that it is most abundant

in the northeast of the region and least abundant in the southwest.

Habitat: The highest reporting rates were all in well-wooded habitats. Records elsewhere would usually have been in riparian woodland along large rivers transecting otherwise unsuitable habitat. Woodlands occupied include dense, broadleaved miombo savanna; coastal, riverine and montane forests; valley bushveld; and plantations of alien trees. Altitudes at which it occurs range from sea-level to over 2100 m in southern Africa (Carlyon & Meakin 1986).

Movements: Wood Owls remain on their territories throughout the year. Some local dispersal by young birds may take place, but no other movements of a regular or irregular nature are thought to occur. Slight changes in reporting rates probably reflect changes in calling activity, it being more vocal in summer than in winter.

Breeding: Its primary prey consists of insects, so it breeds in summer when such prey are most abundant. Most nests are started August–October. In common with other insectivorous owls, the clutches are small, consisting usually of two eggs. The same nest sites are used year after year, these generally being large natural cavities in trees.

Interspecific relationships: No other species of owl consistently occupies the same habitats and range in southern Africa. Competition for nest sites with other birds and mammals may restrict its abundance.

Historical distribution and conservation: Some populations may have expanded with the planting of alien trees, while deforestation elsewhere has led to local disappearances. The widespread distribution of the Wood Owl and the wide range of woodland types occupied, however, means that it will not require special conservation measures in the near future.

J.M. Mendelsohn

Recorded in 391 grid cells, 8.6%
Total number of records: 3362
Mean reporting rate for range: 8.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



