

## African Scops Owl

### Skopsuil

#### *Otus senegalensis*

This species is called the African Scops Owl to distinguish it from the European Scops Owl *O. scops* which migrates into Africa north of the equator for the nonbreeding season. The African species is widely distributed in savanna woodlands, extending north from southern Africa throughout Angola, Zambia, southern Zaire, East Africa and Ethiopia and, south of the Sahara, across into West Africa. Within southern Africa, it is widely, though rather patchily distributed: throughout Mozambique (Fry *et al.* 1988), Zimbabwe, northern, eastern and southern Botswana, northern and central Namibia, the northeastern Cape Province, the Transvaal, eastern Swaziland, and at scattered localities in KwaZulu-Natal and the eastern Cape Province.

It is absent from several areas where it might have been expected, particularly in central Botswana since it is well represented in tall *Acacia* savanna in the southern part of the Kalahari; the absence from eastern Namibia is also striking. Another gap is in parts of central and northwestern Transvaal, an area that was well covered. There are also several disjunct strongholds, where it is apparently very common: northern Botswana and adjacent Caprivi and southwestern Zimbabwe, the southwestern part of the central Kalahari in Botswana, and in the lowveld of southeastern Zimbabwe, the eastern Transvaal and Swaziland. The eastern Cape Province population is isolated and occurs in dry valley woodlands, much like the relict populations of the Barred Owl *Glaucidium capense* and Giant Eagle Owl *Bubo lacteus* in the same area.

Reporting rates were dependent on its vocal behaviour, because it is difficult to see during both the day and night. **Habitat:** A range of woodland types is inhabited, especially where trees are relatively tall and scattered; forests are avoided. Reporting rates in Okavango and Mopane were substantially higher than in other vegetation types. Nests are in cavities in trees, especially in holes at the ends of broken branches. Nest boxes are sometimes used (Brown *et al.* 1987b) in central Namibia, although the frequency of nesting in boxes in this area has declined in recent years (pers. obs).

**Movements:** In some areas it is evidently migratory or nomadic. Aggregations are reported to appear in some places (Irwin 1981). In the city of Durban (2931CD), where it is not resident, dead birds are often found (pers. obs), suggesting that they move through the area. A bird found in Zimbabwe was reported as belonging to the subspecies *O. s. latipennis* which occurs further south in Swaziland, KwaZulu-Natal and the eastern Cape Province (Clancey 1980b). The seasonal changes in reporting rates nevertheless probably largely reflect changes in the frequency of calling. While the spring peak is doubtless associated with increased calling at the onset of breeding, the consistent second peak in autumn is peculiar.

**Breeding:** Atlas records span July–December. Egglaying has been reported June–November, mainly September–October, in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981), a single Transvaal nest with eggs was from November (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), two KwaZulu-Natal egglaying records

were from August and October (Dean 1971), and seven records for Botswana came from September–November (Skinner 1996a).

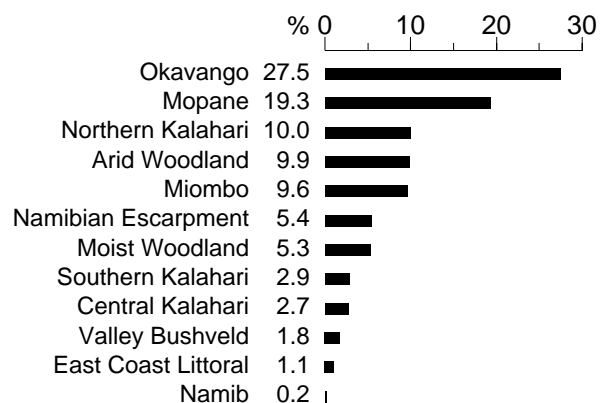
**Interspecific relationships:** It is often sympatric with Pearlspotted *G. perlatum* and Barred Owls, these three species making up a suite of diminutive, mainly insectivorous owls in southern Africa. No evidence is available to suggest that its distribution or abundance is affected by the presence of these other two species. Hornbills, prospecting the use of nest boxes, may kill nestlings and adults (Riekert 1986; pers. obs).

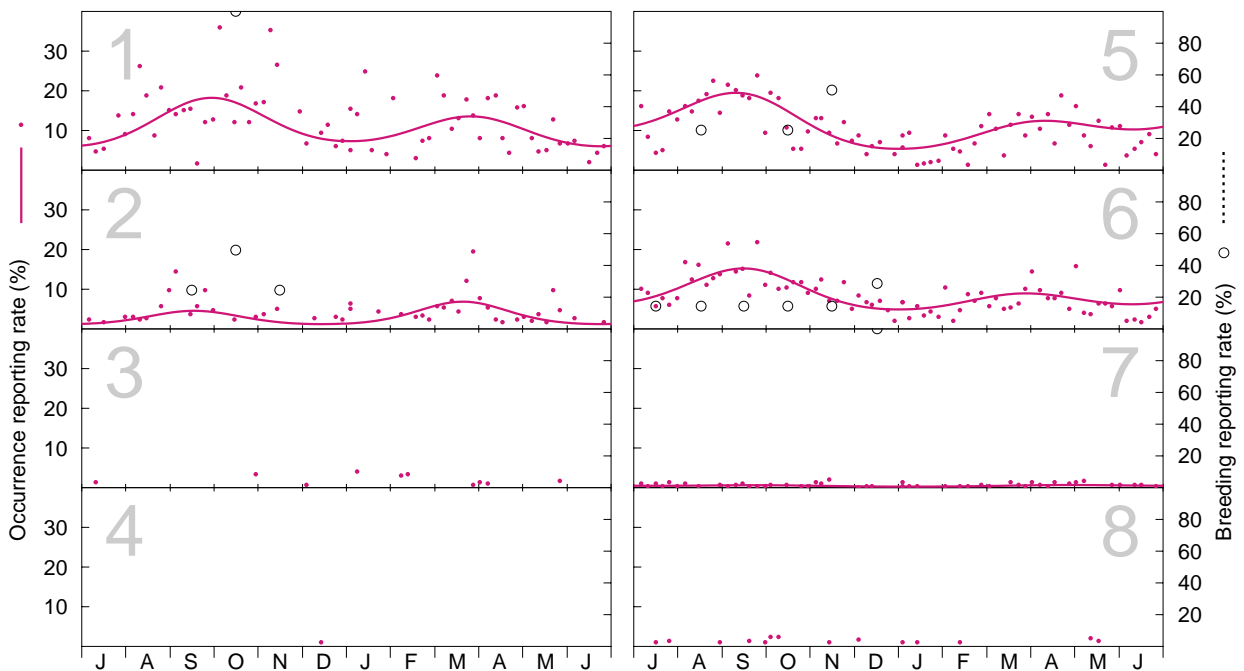
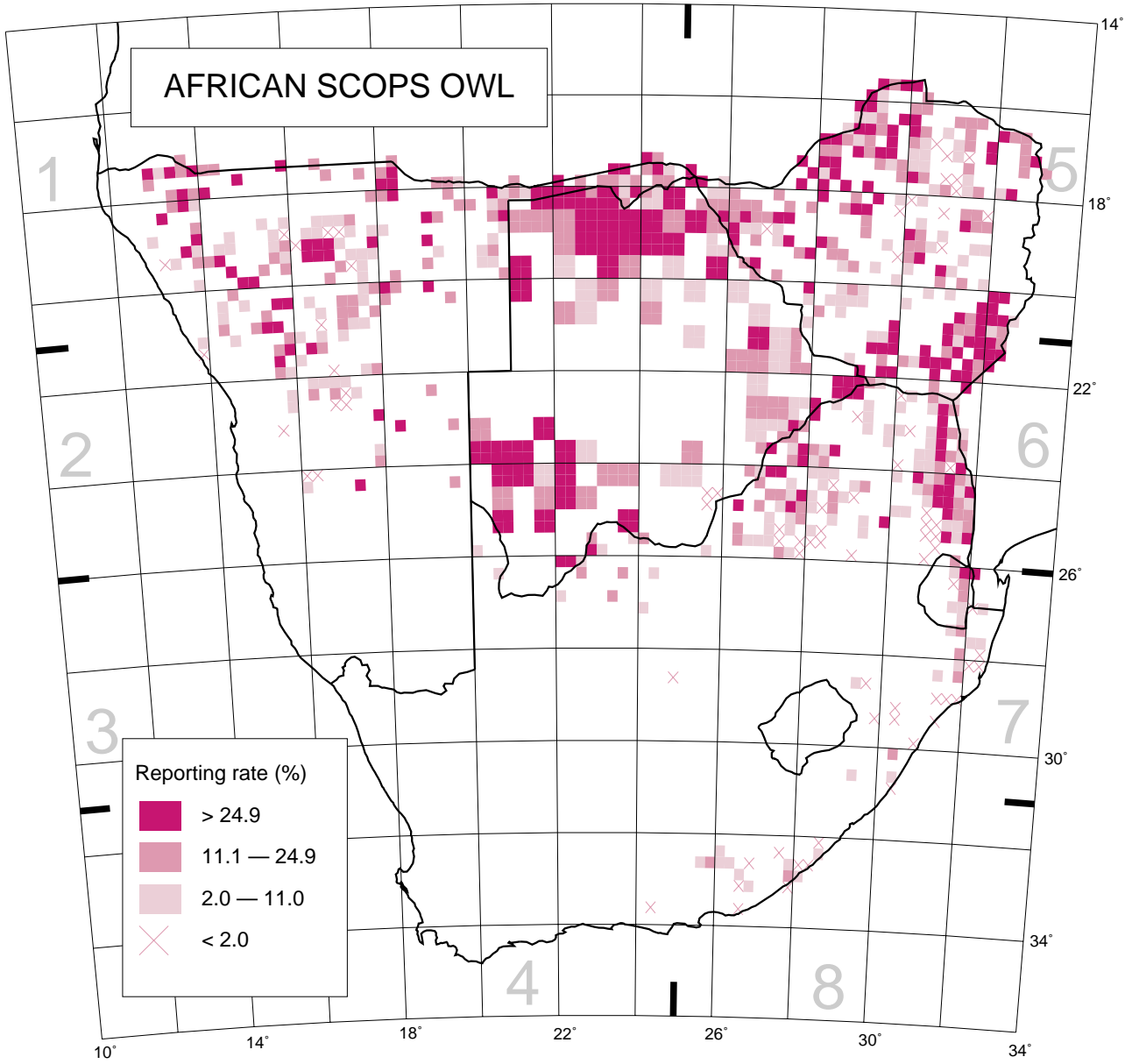
**Historical distribution and conservation:** As a widely distributed and relatively abundant species occupying a range of woodlands, the African Scops Owl is unlikely to face conservation problems. Its distribution is not known to have changed in recent times.

*J.M. Mendelsohn*

Recorded in 977 grid cells, 21.5%  
Total number of records: 5463  
Mean reporting rate for range: 12.0%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 370, 119, 11, 1, 1037, 980, 94, 17; Breeding: 1, 4, 0, 0, 4, 7, 1, 0.