Halfcollared Kingfisher

Blouvisvanger

Alcedo semitorquata

The Halfcollared Kingfisher is a riverine species restricted to northeastern, eastern and southern Africa, from Angola in the west, Ethiopia and East Africa in the east, southward to the eastern and southern Cape Province.

It is currently seen as a species of Indo-Malayan origin and part of a triad of small blue piscivorous kingfishers, along with the Shining-blue Kingfisher *A. quadribrachys*, found in central and western Africa, and the Great Blue Kingfisher *A. hercules* of Indo-Malaya (Snow 1978). It is the southern African counterpart of, and congeneric with, the European Kingfisher *A. atthis*.

The nominate subspecies is endemic to southern Africa and occurs from the southwestern Cape Province to the Save River in southern Mozambique. Birds in the Caprivi, Zimbabwe and further north, belong to the race *A. s. tephria* (Clancey 1980b), though not recognized by Fry *et al.* (1992), and there is a considerable gap between the distributions of the two subspecies in southern Zimbabwe. It is strikingly absent from the upper and middle Limpopo drainage and from the Okavango Delta, though it occurs on the Okavango River in the Caprivi, and on the Chobe River near its confluence with the Zambezi.

The Halfcollared Kingfisher (race *semitorquata*) is most regular along the Transkei and southern coastal regions. There is another stronghold in the southern part of the eastern Transvaal escarpment and adjacent uplands of Swaziland, but it has been reported as nowhere common there (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Parker 1994). The race *tephria* occurs sparsely on the Okavango River in the Caprivi, becoming more regular towards the Chobe–Zambezi confluence (e.g. Randall 1993) and is more widespread in central and northeastern Zimbabwe.

It is shy and inconspicuous, and may have been underrecorded in the atlas. Despite the difference in size, some observers regularly confuse juvenile Malachite Kingfishers *A. cristata* – which also have a dark bill – with this species, but the atlas data have been carefully vetted to avoid the effects of such mistakes.

Habitat: It is most typically found along fast-flowing streams with clear water and well-wooded banks, often near rapids. It is most frequent in broken escarpment terrain. It requires at least 1 km of river territory while breeding (Clancey 1992b). It occurs from sea-level to as high as 2000 m in southern Africa, but even higher in the case of the Ethiopian population. This kingfisher usually perches low down (cf. Monadjem *et al.* 1994a) on the banks of streams, often on exposed roots. It requires riverbanks in which to excavate nest tunnels.

Movements: It is largely sedentary, but perhaps with some local movement off the central plateau in association with the decline of river run-off in the dry winter months. There is some evidence for seasonal and irregular local occurrences in southern Africa (Fry *et al.* 1988). The models do not show any obvious patterns of seasonality.

Breeding: The few atlas records span August–January; Maclean (1993b) gives the southern African breeding season as July–March.

Interspecific relationships: It is widely sympatric with the smaller Malachite Kingfisher. While the latter prefers more open areas of standing water with emergent vegetation, rather than flowing streams with woody cover, they occur regularly alongside each other.

Historical distribution and conservation: The Halfcollared Kingfisher has declined in recent times, especially along the developed coast of KwaZulu-Natal, through pollution, siltation and habitat loss. The distribution map shows patchy distribution and relatively low reporting rates in KwaZulu-Natal compared with regions to the north and south. Riparian deforestation in the Caprivi poses a threat to the species (C.J. Brown pers. comm.). The situation warrants close monitoring.

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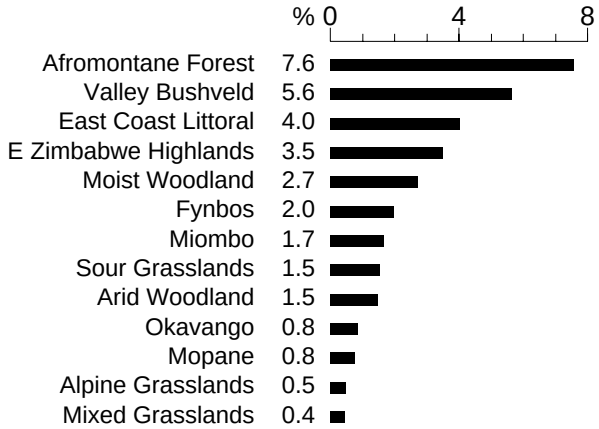
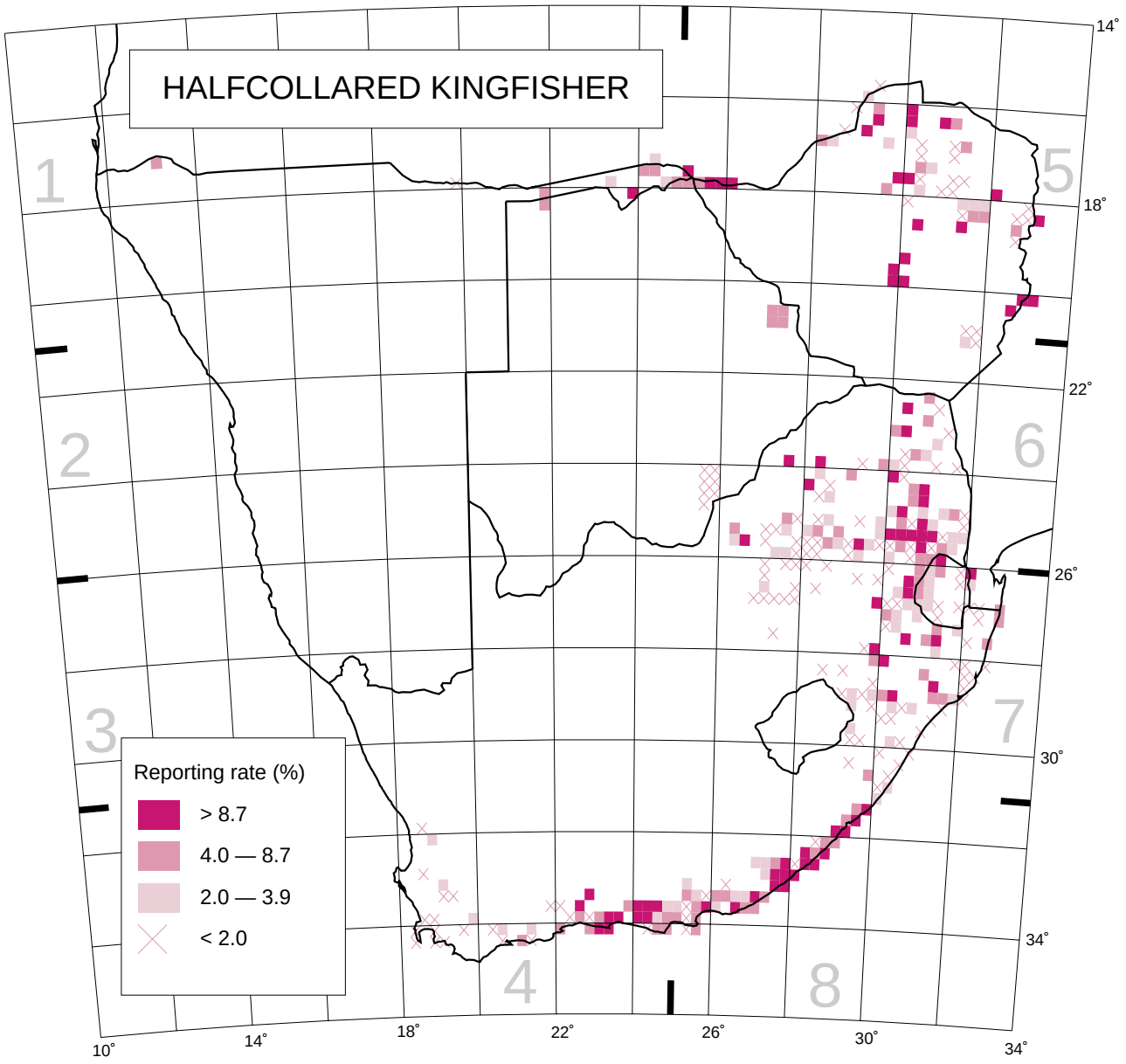
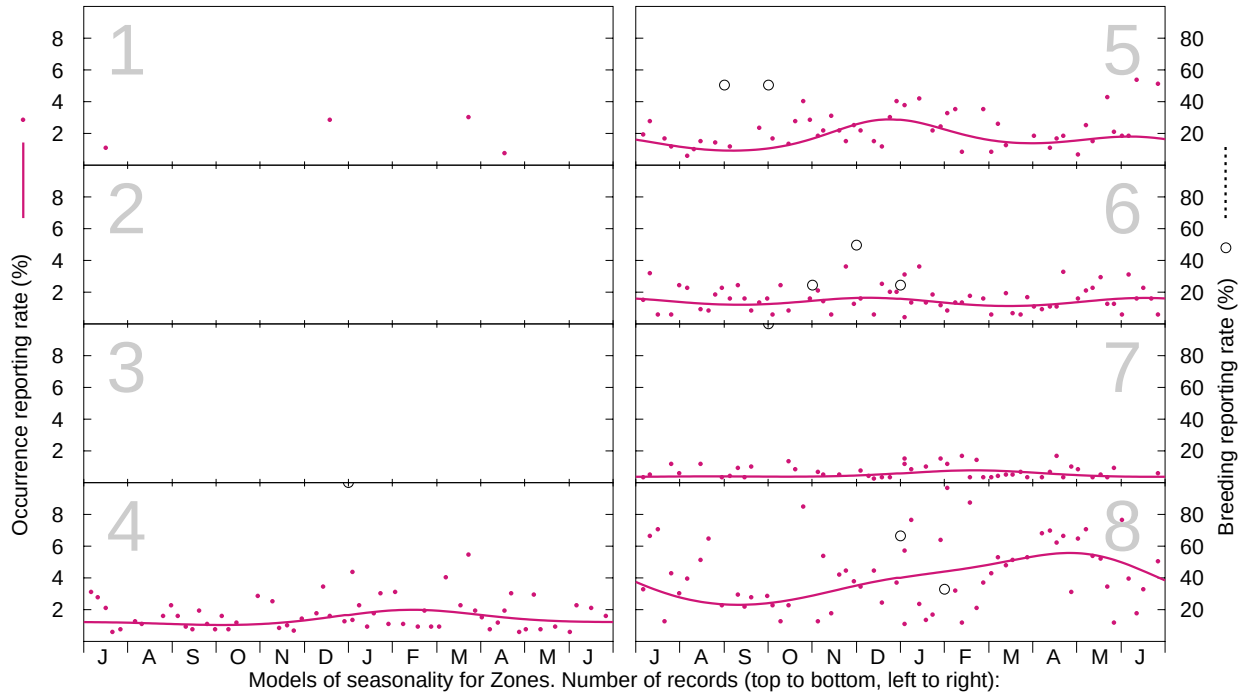
Recorded in 382 grid cells, 8.4%
Total number of records: 2287
Mean reporting rate for range: 4.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 5, 0, 0, 121, 144, 159, 97, 215; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 2, 2, 4, 1, 3.