



Redbilled Woodhoopoe

Gewone Kakelaar

Phoeniculus purpureus

The Redbilled Woodhoopoe (or Green Woodhoopoe) is endemic to sub-Saharan Africa, occurring from Senegal to the Sudan southwards, avoiding both tropical forests and deserts. In southern Africa it is widespread and common throughout much of the mesic east. There are isolated populations in riverine thornveld along sections of the Vaal and Modder rivers, and there is a gap in the distribution coinciding with the treeless grassland of the southeastern Transvaal highveld. The ranges of the four subspecies recognized in the region by Clancey (1980b) appear to be continuous on the present map.

It is usually seen in groups of 2–12 individuals. In the eastern Cape Province, mean group size in valley bushveld was 4.0 (standard deviation SD = 1.5, sample size $n = 138$), whereas in coastal riverine forest it was 3.1 (SD = 1.2, $n = 177$) (unpubl. data). Territory sizes vary between various habitats. For example, in *Acacia xanthophloea* woodland along Lake Naivasha, Kenya, mean territory size is 51 ha (SD = 28 ha, $n = 33$), and in the eastern Cape Province, South Africa, it is 35 ha (SD = 8 ha, $n = 24$) in valley bushveld, and 17 ha (SD = 3 ha, $n = 31$) in riverine forest (unpubl. data). Individual woodhoopoes use the natal territory as a stepping stone to breeding status. They either replace breeders on the natal territory, or disperse to a nearby territory in which a breeding vacancy becomes available (Du Plessis 1989b). The risk of mortality during prospective dispersal movements between territories is a critical factor in determining group size (Neuert *et al.* 1995).

It is a distinctive species and frequently attracts attention through its raucous cackling and bowing inter-territorial displays (Ligon & Ligon 1978). Identification problems arise only in the central northwestern parts of Namibia where the Violet Woodhoopoe *P. damarensis* occurs sympatrically in places. The most reliable feature for separating the two species in the field is the presence of a green iridescent gloss on the mantle of Redbilled Woodhoopoes – in the Violet Woodhoopoe the mantle is a dull black. These species can thus be separated with confidence only in good light; the atlas data may contain a number of records that are inaccurate.

Habitat: It is almost exclusively arboreal and thus its distribution tracks that of most woodland types, excluding the

montane forests of the east. It generally prefers moister woodlands than the Violet Woodhoopoe. In evergreen forest it occurs mainly on the edges. It occupies woodland permanently only when it comprises trees that either allow cavity-excavating species to make holes, or contains natural cavities that are suitable as roosting sites (Du Plessis 1989a). The availability and dispersion of tree holes can markedly influence group size, as well as have implications for the levels of inbreeding (Du Plessis 1992).

Movements: It is a sedentary, group-territorial bird. The models vary little, and do not suggest any evidence for migration.

Breeding: Breeding occurs throughout the year in Zones 5–7, with a spring peak in the two northern Zones; published egg-laying months suggest a weak peak in late summer as well (Irwin 1981). In Zone 8, breeding is strongly seasonal, with an early-summer October–January peak.

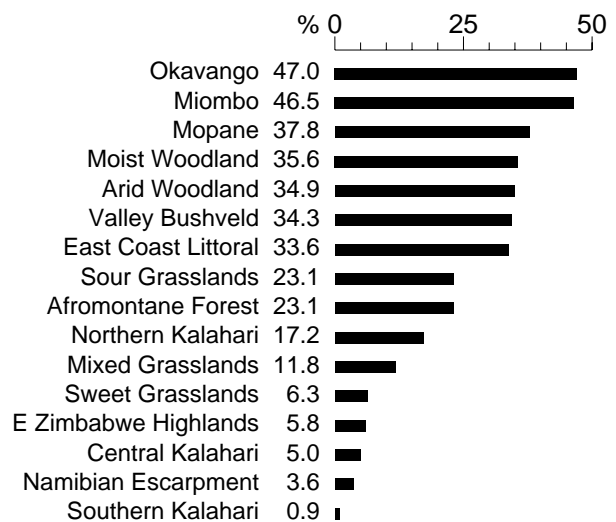
Interspecific relationships: It is unable to excavate the cavities on which it is dependent for both breeding and roosting, and thus has to rely on cavity-excavating species such as woodpeckers and barbets. Although usually found foraging in monospecific groups, it sometimes joins bird parties, particularly where they occur in open woodland. Greater Honeyguides *Indicator indicator* parasitize their nests in 6–8% of instances in the eastern Cape Province (Du Plessis 1994a).

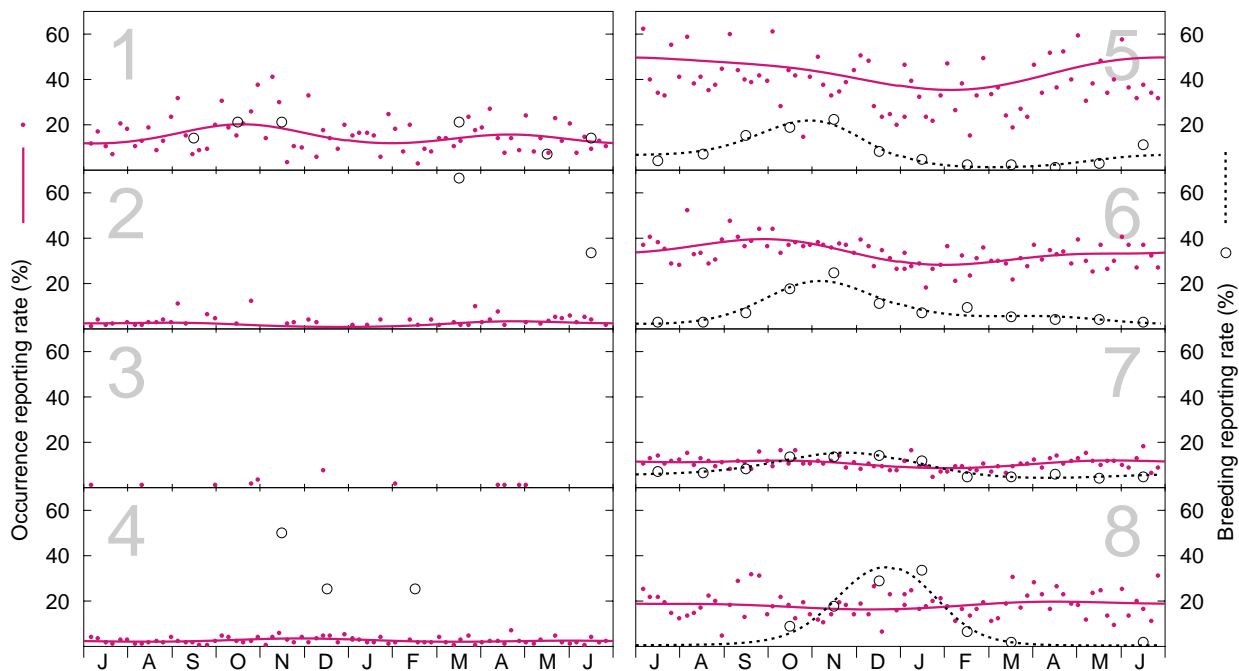
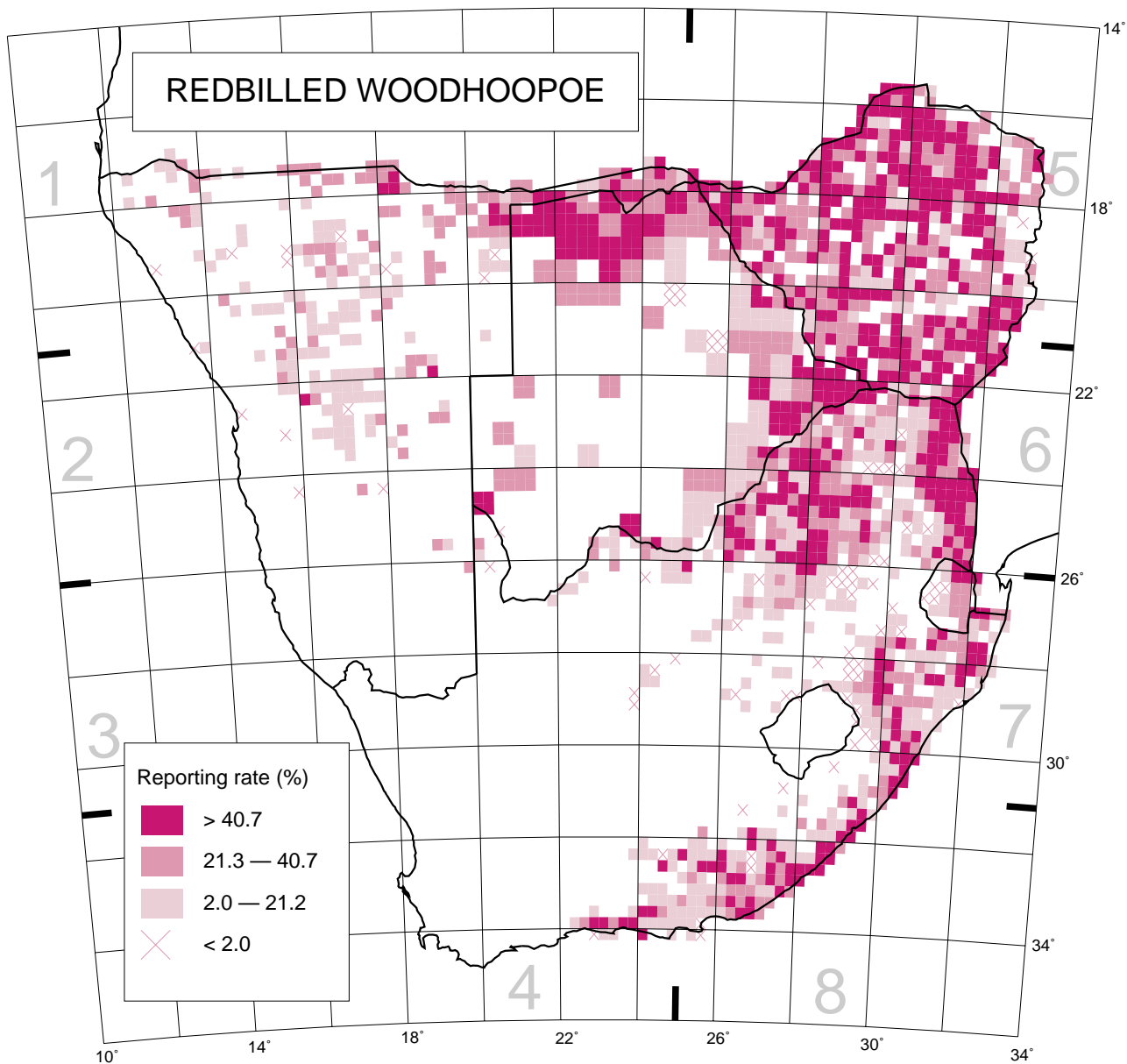
Historical distribution and conservation: The Redbilled Woodhoopoe is not seriously threatened in any part of its range, although clearing of woodland for agriculture and urbanization may result in severe impacts locally. Its obligate dependence on tree holes for breeding and roosting makes it sensitive to the removal of cavity-bearing dead wood, a common source of energy for a substantial proportion of the human population within its distribution.

M.A. du Plessis

Recorded in 1704 grid cells, 37.6%
Total number of records: 29 486
Mean reporting rate for range: 31.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 495, 84, 11, 221, 3814, 3830, 2103, 1001; Breeding: 14, 3, 0, 4, 99, 157, 124, 45.