



Redbilled Hornbill

Rooibekneushoringvoël

Tockus erythrorhynchus

The Redbilled Hornbill is widespread over the savannas of sub-Saharan Africa (Fry *et al.* 1988). In southern Africa it occurs selectively in some of the denser wooded savannas, particularly in more tropical areas. It is common in central and northern Namibia (race *T. e. damarensis*), northern Botswana, the Caprivi and the lower areas of northwestern Zimbabwe (race *ngamiensis*), eastern Botswana, northwestern Transvaal and adjacent southwestern Zimbabwe (race *rufirostris*), lowveld of Swaziland and the Transvaal, and southeastern Zimbabwe (race *degens*). Areas with highest reporting rates seem to coincide with strongholds of the four subspecies (following Clancey 1980b) in northcentral Namibia, northern Botswana, the Limpopo drainage, and the lowveld, while bands with lower reporting rates separate subspecies. It is most common in areas with concentrations of large game (Irwin 1981; pers. obs).

It occurs in pairs in the breeding season, but forms small family parties or flocks in winter (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Maclean 1993b). It is tame and conspicuous and the atlas data are comprehensive. However, there might occasionally have been confusion with the rather similar Yellowbilled Hornbill *T. leucomelas*, particularly if identification was based on call.

Habitat: It prefers woodland with sparse ground cover. It is particularly common (and locally abundant) in tall Mopane: e.g. *c.* 1 pair/5 ha was recorded during the breeding season in transect-counts in this habitat along the Khwai River (1923) in northern Botswana (this also explains the very high association with the Okavango biome), while the average density in the breeding season was 1 pair/44 ha in six other woodlands (unpubl. data). An average density of 1 pair/10–50 ha was recorded in the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Fry *et al.* 1988). It is common in mixed woodlands in the Arid

and Moist Woodland biomes, and in the Northern Kalahari. Other than in broadleaved and mixed woodlands, it also occurs commonly in well-developed *Acacia* woodland, e.g. west (Brewster 1991) and southwest of the Okavango Delta, where 1 bird/20 ha was recorded north of Lake Ngami (2022B) (unpubl. data). It avoids the open *Acacia* woodlands and bushveld on well drained Kalahari sands. It is common in miombo woodland on Kalahari sands, but not on granite (Irwin 1981).

Movements: The models indicate higher reporting rates in the dry season, and this trend is certainly significant for Zone 6. It is not clear what causes these seasonal variations, but it might be that flocking, dispersal into different habitats, and congregations closer to human habitation (e.g. on farms and in gardens) during winter make it more conspicuous. Reduced reporting rates in the summer season might also be related to its breeding behaviour, in which the female remains 'sealed' into the nest hole for several weeks during the breeding period, mainly October–February (Kemp 1976a).

It ranges more widely in winter than during the breeding season; for example, during the dry season it was found in eight habitats outside tall Mopane woodlands in northern and eastern Botswana, but only in six while breeding. The average density in these non-Mopane habitats increased from 3.5 birds/100 ha to 10 birds/100 ha outside the breeding season (unpubl. data). A strong influx in the Okavango floodplains was noted during a drought period (Brewster 1991), and large numbers can invade open grasslands in woodland biomes (such as the Savuti Depression and the northern plains in Botswana) in winter (Herremans & Herremans-Tonnoeyr 1994f). In the Zambezi River valley, it concentrates on floodplains as the dry season progresses (A.J. Tree pers. comm.).

Breeding: All atlas records span November–June, with a peak December–March, confirming earlier reports that breeding is in the wet season, from spring throughout summer, with a peak in early to midsummer, October–February (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Ginn *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b; Kemp 1995).

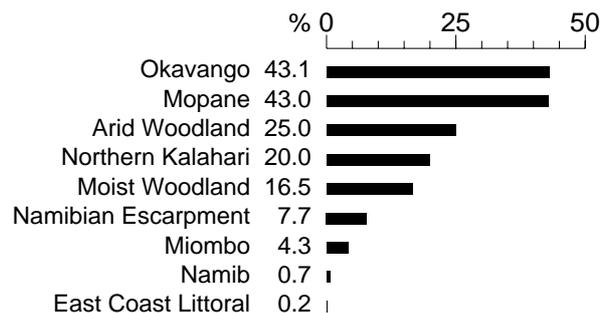
Interspecific relationships: See the text for Yellowbilled Hornbill. The Redbilled Hornbill is the least widespread of the three more common small hornbills and has the narrowest habitat tolerance.

Historical distribution and conservation: The Redbilled Hornbill is widespread and locally abundant; it is currently of no special conservation concern.

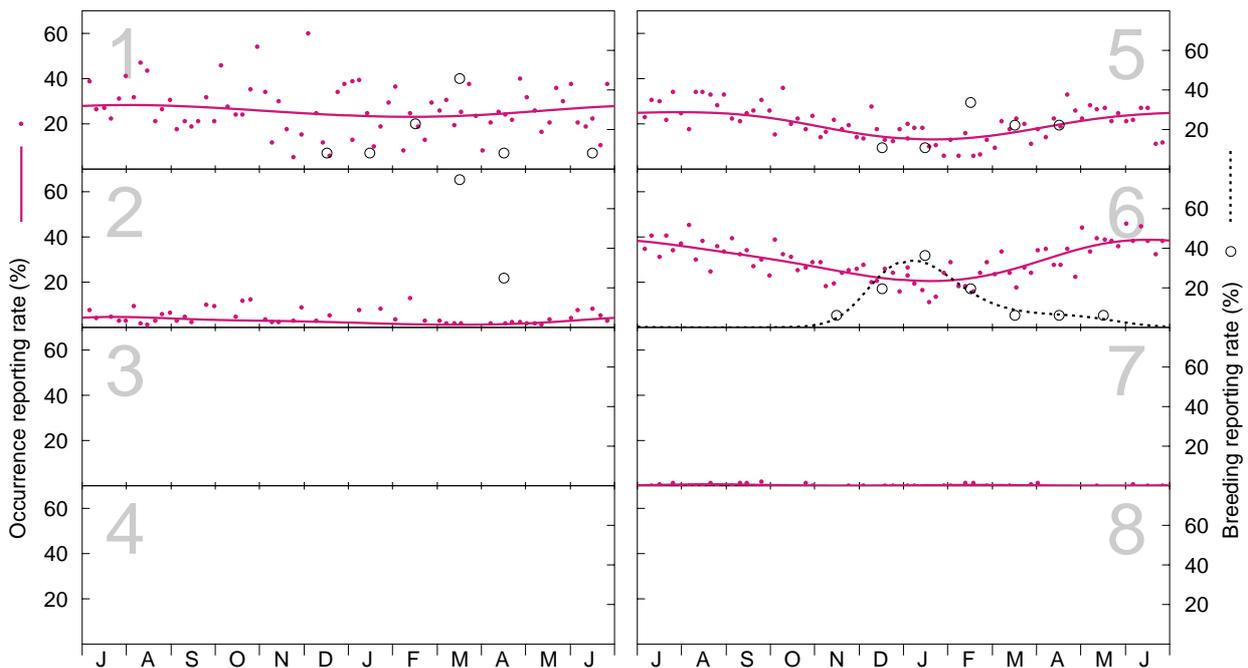
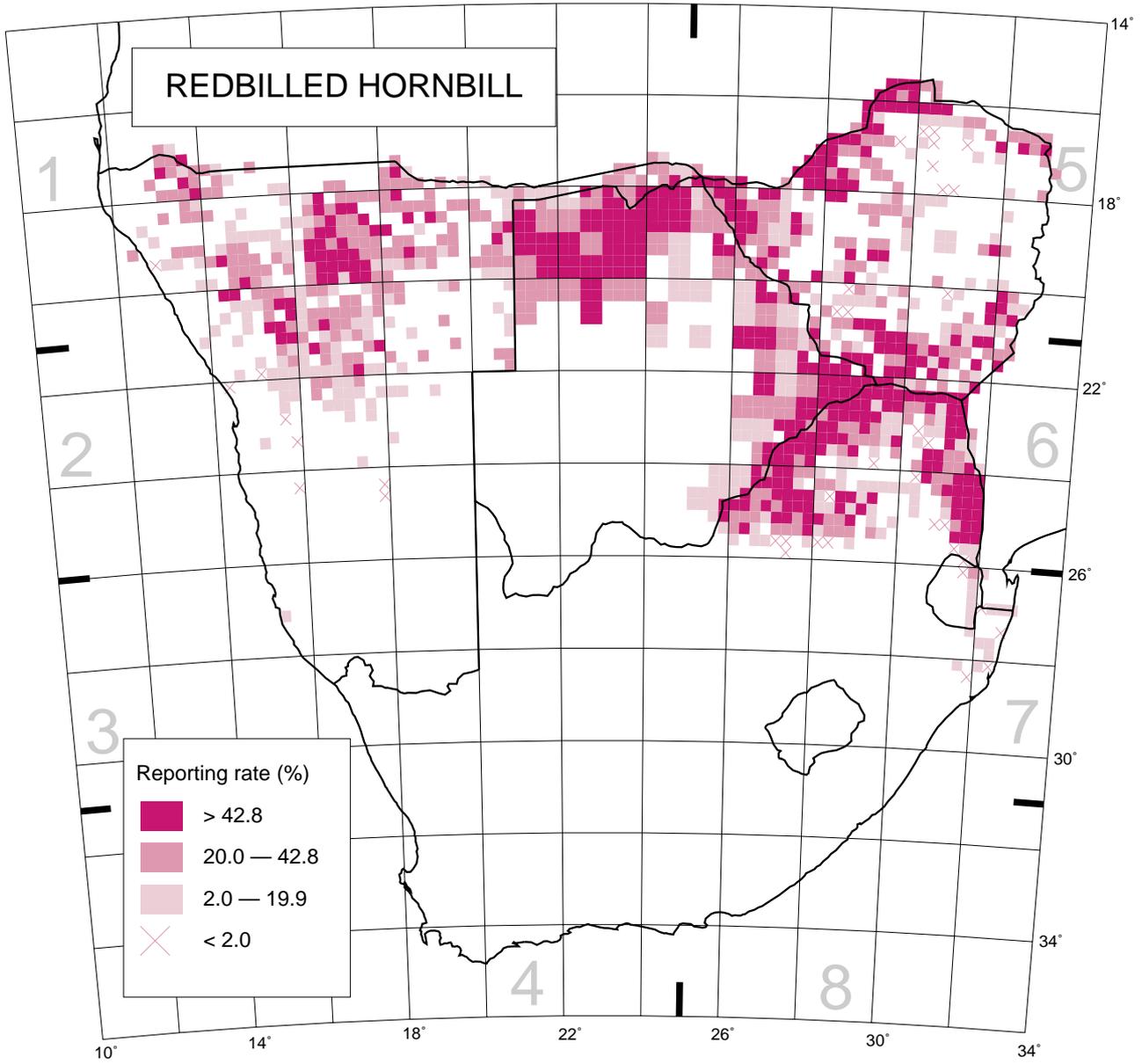
M. Herremans

Recorded in 1190 grid cells, 26.2%
Total number of records: 10 811
Mean reporting rate for range: 29.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in E. Zimbabwe Highlands.



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 858, 98, 0, 0, 1748, 3379, 51, 0; Breeding: 13, 4, 0, 0, 9, 47, 0, 0.