

## Whitenecked Raven

### Withalskraai

#### *Corvus albicollis*

The Whitenecked Raven is a locally common resident, found patchily throughout the eastern half of Africa as far north as Kenya (Madge & Burns 1994). It is possibly more common in southern Africa than further north in its range (Wilson 1993). An omnivorous species, generally seen foraging in pairs or family groups, it may occur in large flocks of over a hundred birds at communal roosts or at a good food source. The size, white nape patch, heavy bill and distinctive flight outline of this species make it readily distinguishable from other southern African corvids, although it may be confused with the Black Crow *C. capensis* if seen in flight from below. It is a conspicuous, aerial and vocal species which is unlikely to be overlooked. The Whitenecked Raven is fairly common in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, the Soutpansberg and the eastern escarpment of the Transvaal, western Swaziland and the Lebombo range, the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg and rocky areas along the east coast, and in the mountains of the southern and southwestern Cape Province (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Hockey *et al.* 1989). It is absent from the northern and western Karoo, the Kalahari, Botswana and Namibia.

**Habitat:** Whitenecked Ravens are almost exclusively cliff-nesters, and therefore are mostly restricted to hilly and mountainous country where nest and roost sites are plentiful. The distribution of this species in South Africa corresponds closely with the distribution of cliffs (Jenkins 1994). The vegetation analysis suggests a preference for moist habitats, notably the Eastern Zimbabwe Highlands and Alpine Grasslands. This might explain why this species

does not occur in the arid west of the atlas region, despite the suitability of the topography in many areas. It is not restricted by altitude, and occurs as a breeding resident from sea-level in the southwestern Cape Province to 2500–3000 m in Lesotho.

**Movements:** The models suggest some seasonality in the occurrence of this species in Zone 8 (eastern Cape Province). There is no corresponding pattern in any of the other zones however, and the winter rise in reporting rate along the south coast possibly reflects local altitudinal movements with more birds occurring lower down nearer to observers in winter.

**Breeding:** Most of the rather few breeding records occurred August–December, with little evidence of geographical variation, in agreement with published breeding records (Winterbottom 1975; Irwin 1981).

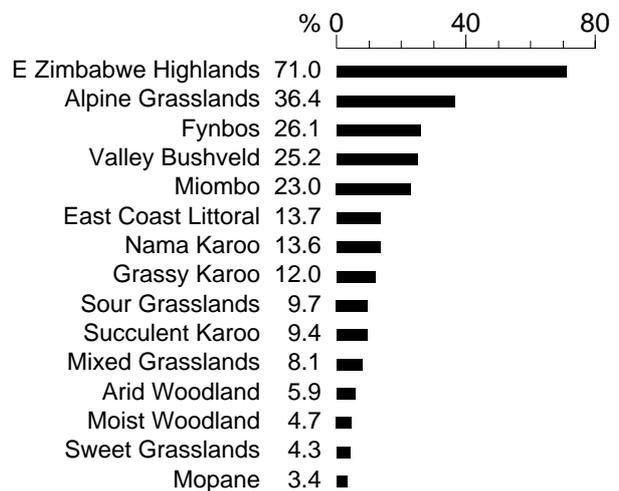
**Interspecific relationships:** Ravens are aggressive birds which often dispute territorial rights to nest sites with other cliff-nesting species. Stick-nests built by ravens may be used by other species, especially Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* and Lanner *F. biarmicus* Falcons.

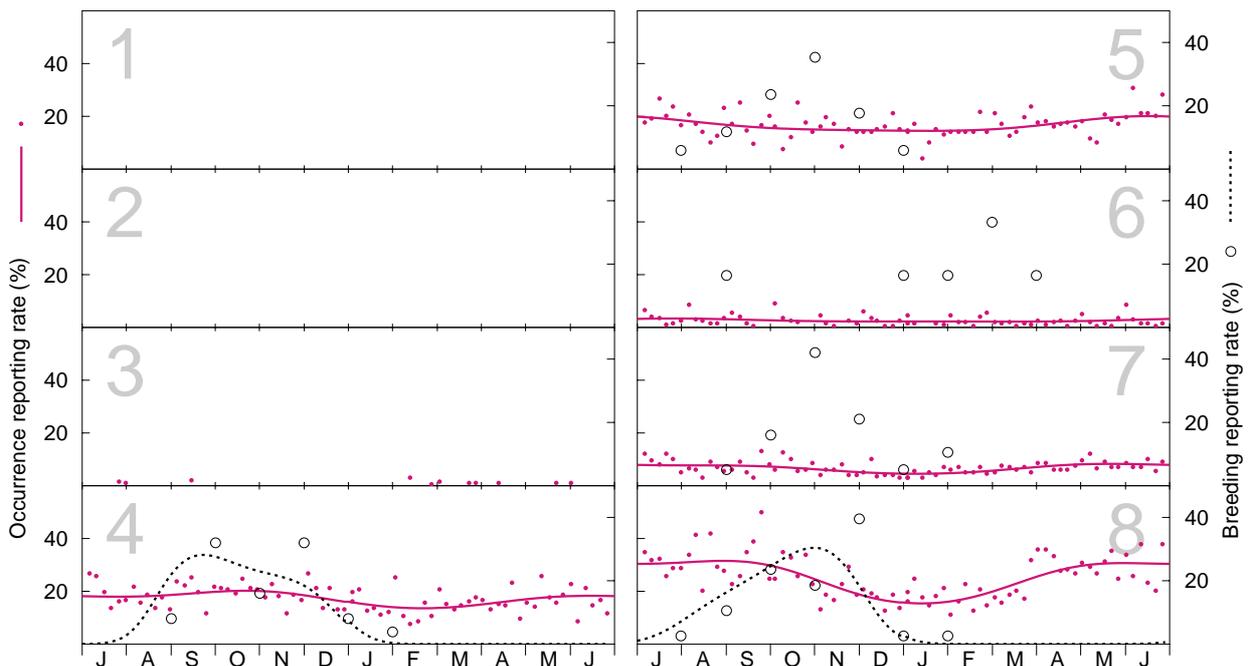
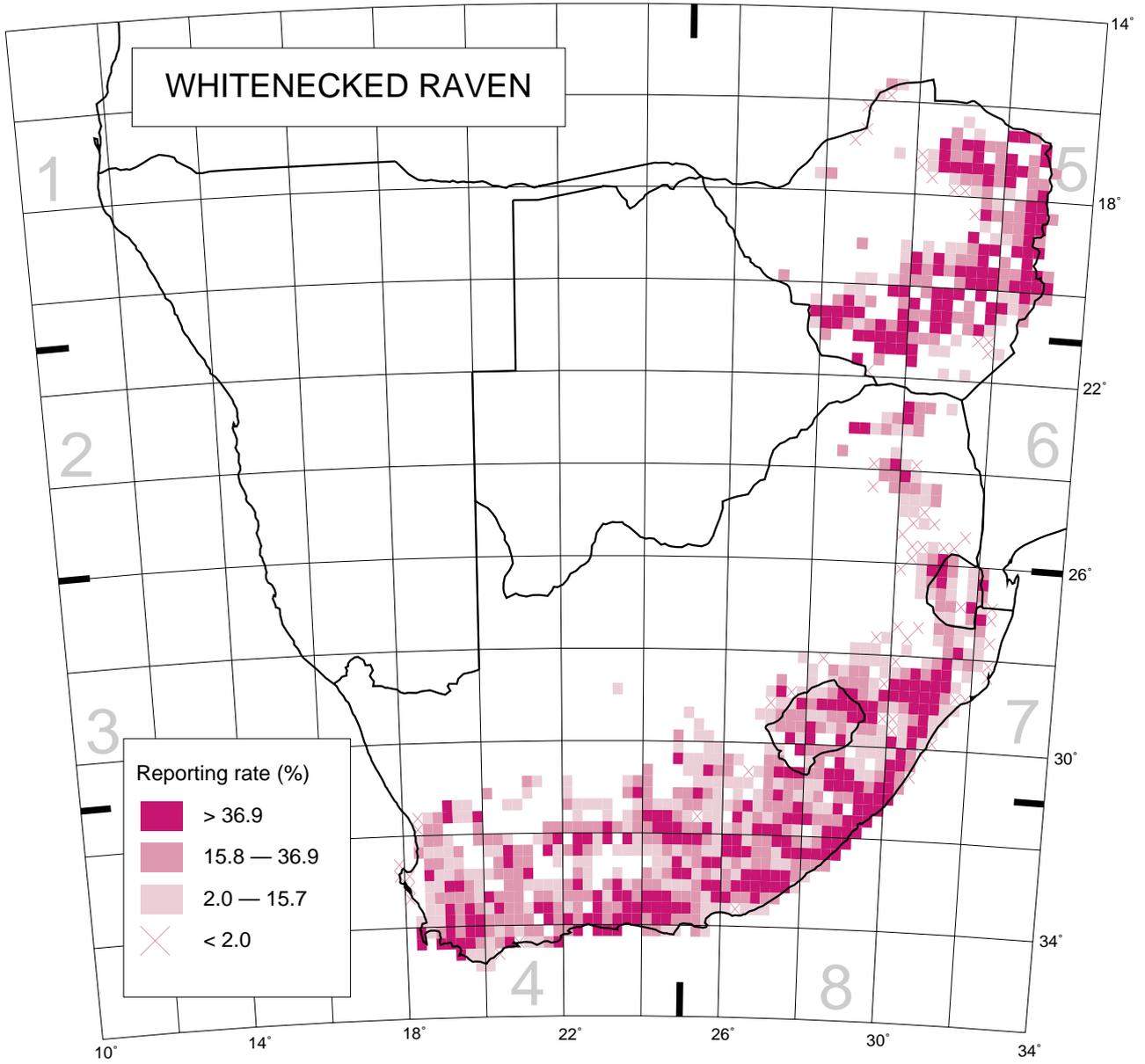
**Historical distribution and conservation:** Of the four crow species which occur in the atlas region, the White-necked Raven is the least commensal with humans. It generally does not frequent towns and cities, and tends not to aggregate in crop-farming areas. In small-stock farming areas, it is directly persecuted because of an alleged tendency to molest and even kill young or sick sheep. It is also susceptible to poisoning as a non-target scavenger. It does not benefit from the erection of electricity pylons and telephone poles which provide nesting opportunities for other southern African corvids. There is concern in Zimbabwe that it has disappeared from localities where it was formerly common (Tree 1995a), although the distribution shows the same overall pattern as that of Marshall (1979). Deserted quarries provide nest sites in otherwise unsuitable terrain. The Whitenecked Raven persists in good numbers throughout its present southern African range, and it is not threatened.

A.R. Jenkins

Recorded in 990 grid cells, 21.8%  
Total number of records: 16 928  
Mean reporting rate for range: 24.0%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 12, 1511, 1454, 296, 1308, 1394; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 25, 17, 6, 19, 38.