



## Giant Eagle Owl

### Reuse Ooruil

#### *Bubo lacteus*

Of the three *Bubo* eagle owls in southern Africa, the Giant Eagle Owl is the largest. Elsewhere in Africa it is widely distributed in Mozambique, Angola, Zambia, Malawi, southern Zaire, and eastern and northeastern Africa (Fry *et al.* 1988). Isolated populations are reported from various West African countries. Its distribution in southern Africa is centred on dry savanna woodlands at low altitudes in northeastern KwaZulu-Natal, the Transvaal, Zimbabwe, Botswana, the northern and eastern Cape Province and in Namibia. There are strongholds in the Okavango, the Transvaal lowveld and western Zimbabwe. The population in the eastern Cape Province is isolated from those in KwaZulu-Natal, and perhaps also from those in the northern Cape Province. If so, the isolation of this population would resemble that of populations of Scops *Otus senegalensis* and Barred Owls *Glaucidium capense* in the same dry thornveld of the eastern Cape Province.

Although largely sedentary, it is regularly found outside its normal range and habitat, remaining and even breeding as isolated pairs in such places (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Atlas records in the southern Cape Province are probably examples of such range extensions.

Five pairs were found in 350 km<sup>2</sup> of open woodland at Nylsvlei (2428CB) (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Along the dry Nossob and Auob rivers in the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (2520) adjacent pairs were usually about 10–20 km apart (Herholdt 1993a). The closest neighbouring pairs were 4.1 km apart, and a minimum of 29 pairs were found in the park.

**Habitat:** It roosts and nests in large trees, especially in open savanna woodlands or riparian woodland adjacent to flood-

plains. In arid areas it is usually found in large riparian trees. It was most frequently recorded in Okavango and Mopane woodlands.

**Movements:** No evidence is available to suggest regular or nomadic movements, nor do the models indicate any obvious seasonal change in reporting rates, except in Zone 3 where it was recorded more frequently December–April. Local, irregular movements are suggested by the fact that territories are not always occupied each year (Herholdt 1993a) and that birds are often found in areas where they do not normally occur (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

**Breeding:** Eggs are laid in winter and early spring, June–September, in the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and March–September, mainly June–August, in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981). The atlas data show a wider breeding period, largely spanning March–January, but atlas data include records of chicks and fledged young. There is much variation in the frequency of breeding, some pairs nesting consistently in successive years while others breed only erratically (Kemp & Calburn 1987; Herholdt 1993a).

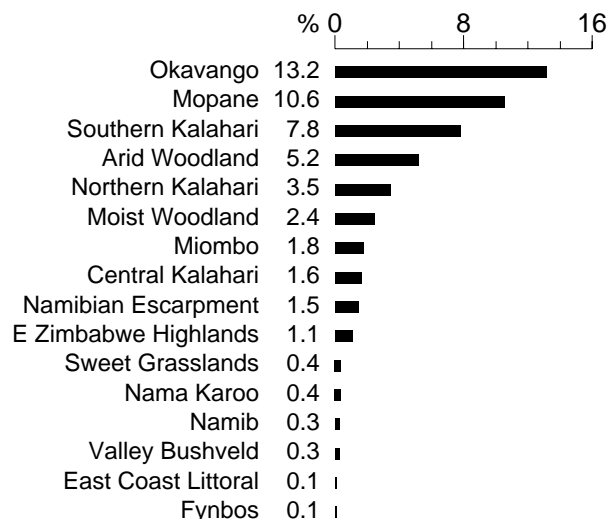
**Interspecific relationships:** It frequently preys upon other large birds, including other *Bubo* owls and diurnal raptors. The stick nests of eagles, vultures, Hamerkops *Scopus umbretta*, Redbilled Buffalo Weavers *Bubalornis niger* and Sociable Weavers *Philetairus socius* in large trees, are most frequently used for nesting.

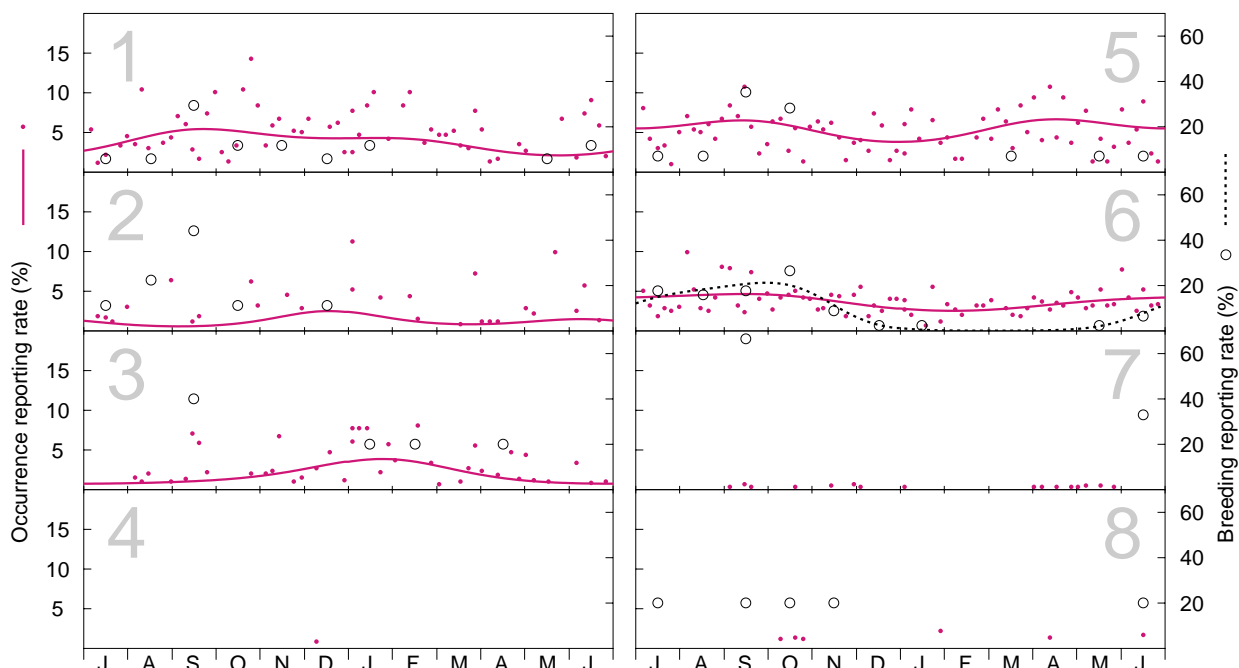
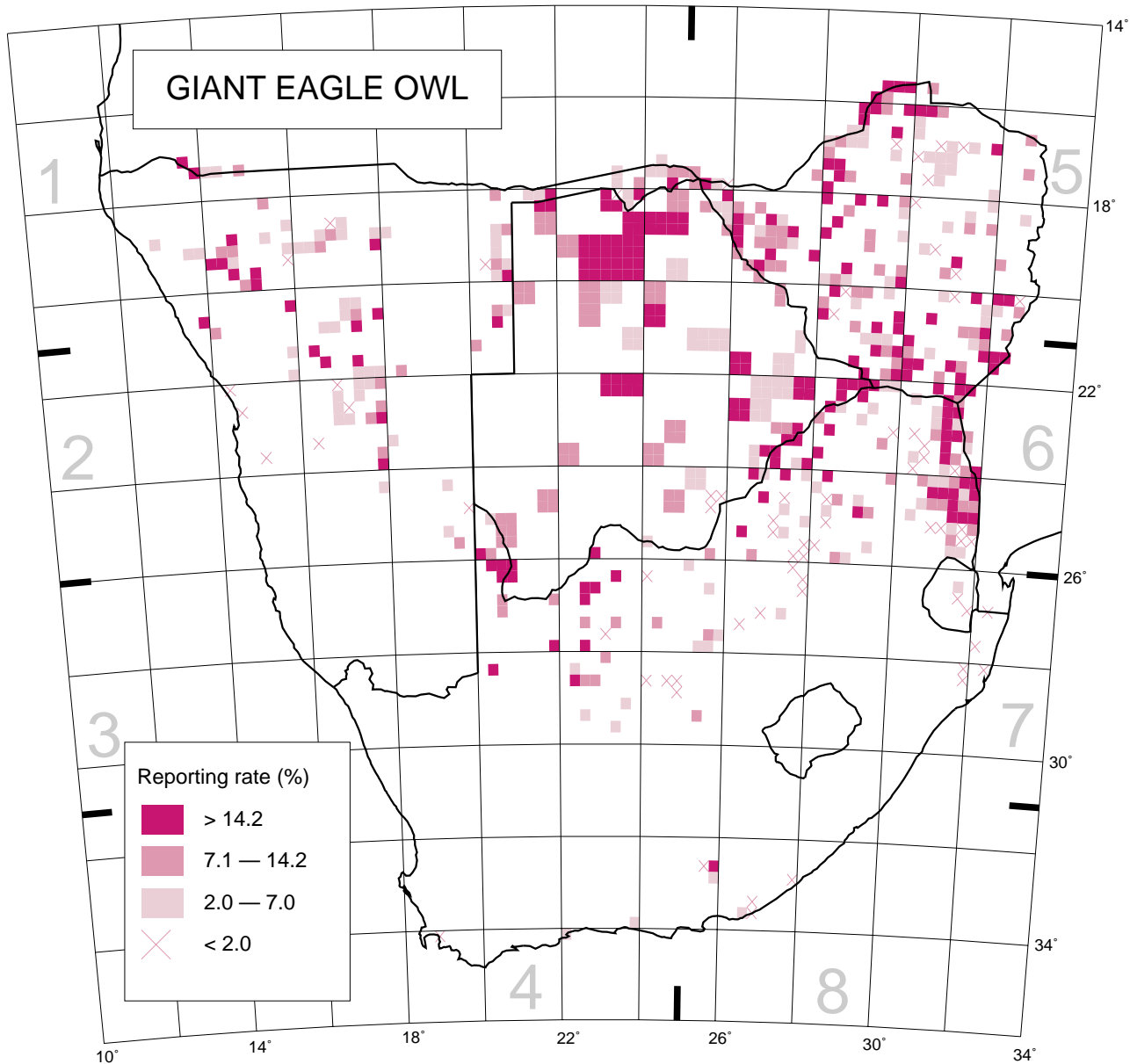
**Historical distribution and conservation:** Populations are not known to have changed in historical times, although local declines are likely to have occurred as a result of woodlands being cleared. As a large raptor, populations are always smaller than those of other birds and thus merit monitoring. The map shows higher reporting in the larger conservation and wilderness areas of the region: Okavango basin, Moremi Game Reserve, Chobe, Hwange, Kruger, Gemsbok and Etosha National Parks. Despite the widespread availability of suitable habitat, especially in the more arid areas of southern Africa, the map suggests that Giant Eagle Owls are becoming increasingly dependent on large conservation areas and are likely to become a conservation priority in the future.

J.M. Mendelsohn

Recorded in 636 grid cells, 14.0%  
Total number of records: 2697  
Mean reporting rate for range: 7.4%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 122, 44, 94, 1, 488, 418, 18, 6; Breeding: 17, 9, 5, 0, 14, 45, 3, 5.