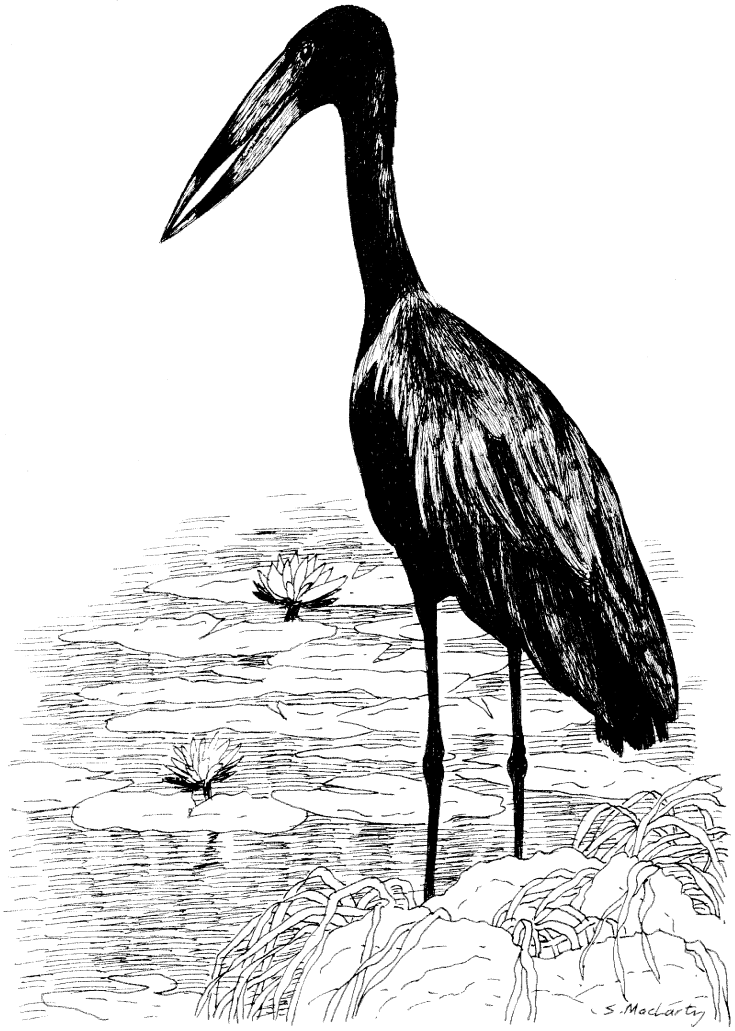


Openbilled Stork

Oopbekooievaar

Anastomus lamelligerus

Only the nominate race, endemic to tropical sub-Saharan Africa, of this locally common stork occurs in the region, while *A. l. madagascariensis* is restricted to western Madagascar. In southern Africa, the Openbilled Stork occurs in northern Namibia and northern Botswana, mainly in the Kunene region, Etosha Pan, the Caprivi Strip, the Okavango basin and Zambezi River valley. It is patchily distributed in most of Zimbabwe; further south, it occurs in the northeastern lowveld areas of the Transvaal, eastern Swaziland and far northeastern KwaZulu-Natal. It is a vagrant in the rest of KwaZulu-Natal, the eastern Cape Province and Free State (Brooke 1984b).

It is a medium-sized, all-black stork; adults have a conspicuous gap in the centre of the bill which makes this species unmistakable.

Habitat: Freshwater mussels and snails are its main prey (Kahl 1971a). Normally needing large wet or moist areas in which to forage, it is found in various open aquatic habitats, such as swamps, floodplains, ephemeral pans, rice fields, river shallows and lake edges (Brown *et al.* 1982). It was most frequently reported from the Okavango and it also occurs in other vegetation types with suitable wetlands.

Movements: It is a regular trans-equatorial migrant, but the movements are not well understood. Brown *et al.* (1982) stated that it breeds mainly south of the equator during and after the rainy season, moving north of the equator during the dry season (mainly May–November). The models reveal this seasonality in Zone 1 only, with a large influx September–February. The seasonal distribution maps show birds arriving in the Cuvelai–Etosha system and on the pans in the Bushmanland–Tsumkwe area in November–December; these large ephemeral wetlands flood December–March and the storks often breed during this period. They leave this region May–June, when the pans dry up, to be virtually absent during the late dry season. This species seems to remain throughout the year within its range in the remainder of southern Africa, but it is likely to move locally according to the availability of waterbodies with suitable water-levels. For example, in May–June, the large northern rivers reach their highest levels, and the associated floodplains are indundated; as a result, large dry-season concentrations occur in the Okavango Delta and on the Chobe River (Zone 1) where, for example, Larsen *et al.* (1991) reported a flock in excess of 3000 Openbilled Storks in July 1989.

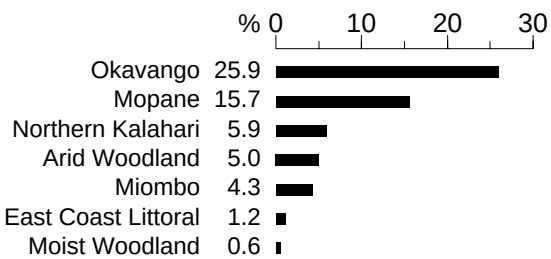
Breeding: It is a tree-nester, breeding in colonies of varying sizes, often with other storks, herons, ibises and cormorants (Braine 1974; Anthony & Sherry 1980). It breeds opportunistically in terms of time and place, at sites with suitable water-levels for feeding (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). Breeding was recorded throughout the year. Egg-laying has been reported August–May, with a January–March peak (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brown & Clinning in press; N.J. Skinner *in litt.*).

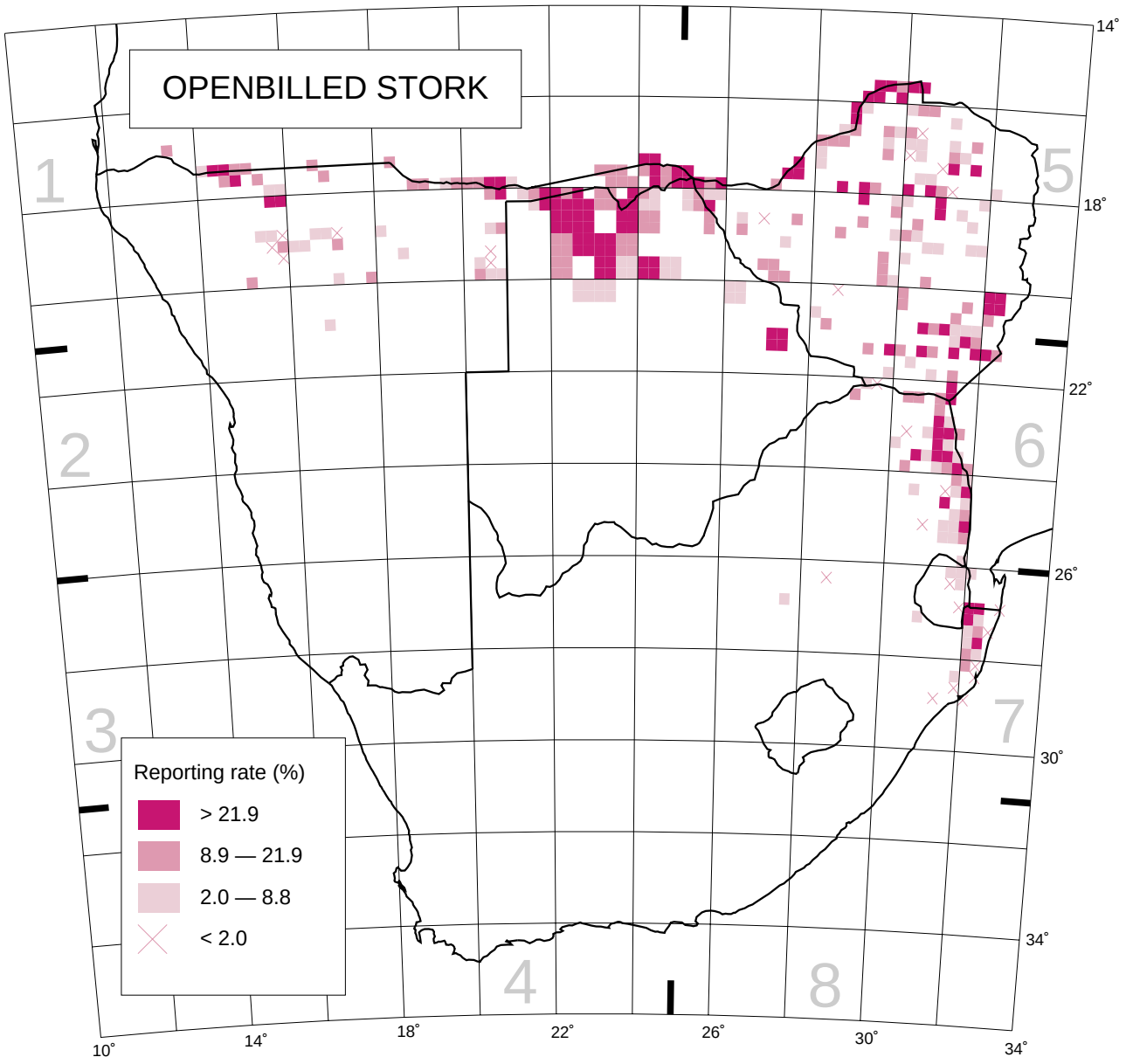
Historical distribution and conservation: The historical distribution has not been specifically documented, but available information indicates that it has remained unchanged. It was listed as 'rare' in South Africa (Brooke 1984b). Populations are considered stable or possibly increasing in East Africa, and it is probably the most abundant stork in Africa (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). The Openbilled Stork may be susceptible to pesticides applied to waterbodies for mosquito control (Macdonald *et al.* 1985). Throughout its range, the main concern is habitat loss from increasing human pressure on wetlands.

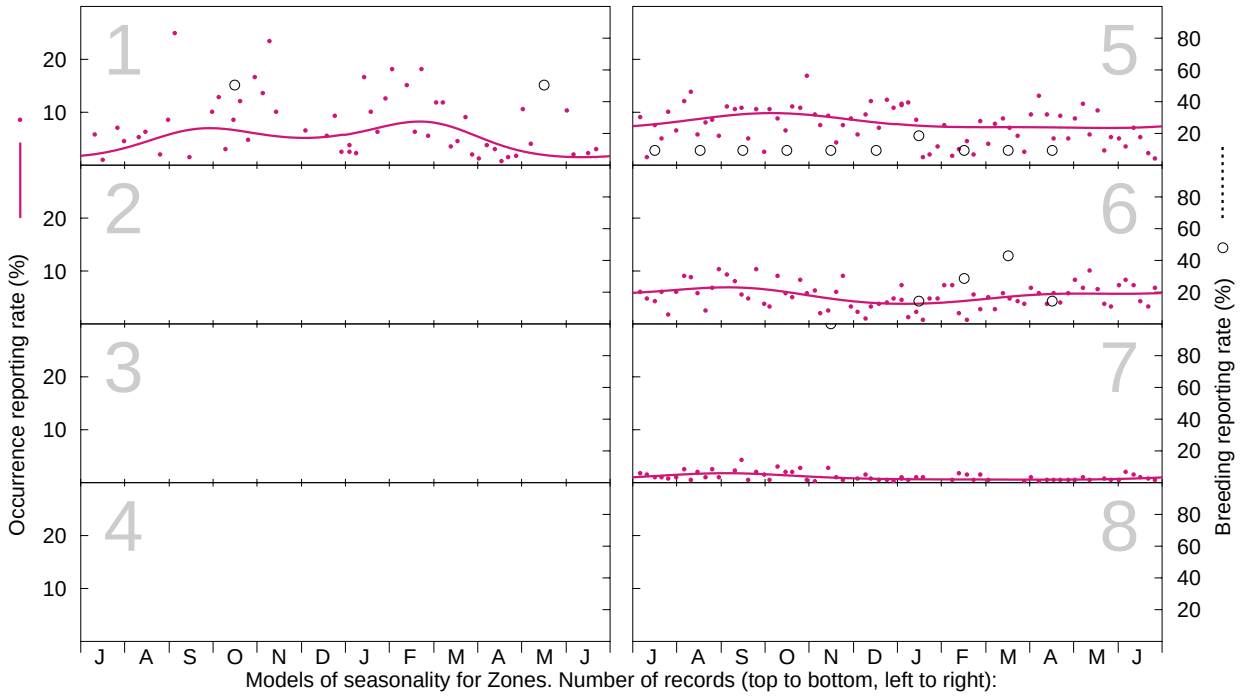
R.A. Navarro

Recorded in 370 grid cells, 8.2%
Total number of records: 2863
Mean reporting rate for range: 15.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

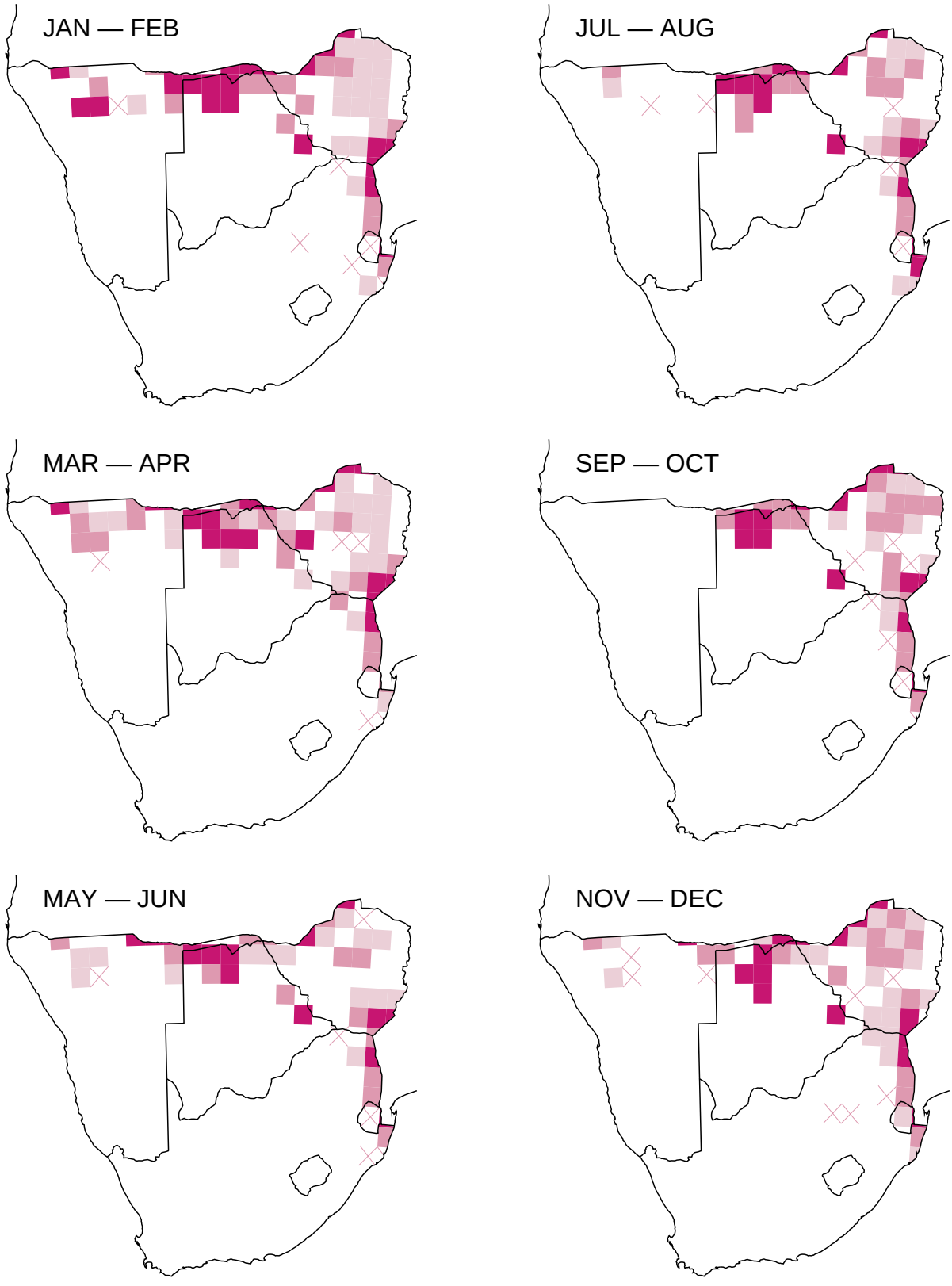






Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 156, 0, 0, 0, 707, 616, 188, 0; Breeding: 2, 0, 0, 0, 11, 7, 1, 0.

OPENBILLED STORK



Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.

Woollynecked Stork