

## Painted Snipe

### Goudsnip

#### *Rostratula benghalensis*

The Painted Snipe is widespread but uncommon, occurring in Africa, southern Asia and Australia. In Africa it is found in the Nile Delta of Egypt and most of the area south of the Sahara, except in the rainforest and eastern Somalia (Brown *et al.* 1982). The atlas data show that it has a widespread and patchy distribution in southern Africa. Noticeable gaps are in the arid areas of southern Namibia, central and southwestern Botswana, the western Cape Province and most of the Karoo. The population in the southern and southwestern Cape Province appears well isolated from northern populations.

It usually occurs singly or in pairs, but may form small flocks after the breeding season (Cramp *et al.* 1977). The low reporting rates reflect its skulking, crepuscular habits which cause it to be easily overlooked. When seen, it often freezes; when flushed, it flies for a short distance, rail-like with heavy wingbeats, typically showing dangling feet.

**Habitat:** It inhabits various aquatic habitats, preferring exposed mud adjacent to cover. It is found in marshes, muddy edges of swamps, lake edges and riverbanks with thick vegetation cover (Johnsgard 1981; Brown *et al.* 1982). Highest reporting rates were in the Mopane, Okavango, Miombo and Northern Kalahari vegetation types; its presence in these and other vegetation types is conditional on the presence of suitable wetlands.

**Movements:** Its movements are poorly understood. Regular seasonal movements in some areas relate to dry and wet seasons, while it is resident or somewhat nomadic in other areas (Brown *et al.* 1982). The variations in reporting rates in Zone 5 seem to be consistent with Irwin's (1981) suggestion that birds may move out of Zimbabwe during the wettest part of summer, after December. Further west (Zone 1) and south (Zone 6) peak occurrence is December–February.

**Breeding:** The timing of the breeding season is highly variable, but is usually immediately after the rainy season (Brown *et al.* 1982). Egg-laying was recorded almost throughout the year in Zimbabwe, but, though based on limited records, the general pattern in the region may be

one of peak breeding in the second part of summer, January–March, with a secondary peak in spring (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Hockey *et al.* 1989; Brown & Clinning in press; N.J. Skinner *in litt.*). In the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4), however, breeding appears restricted to the early summer, with atlas records for September and November, and ten historical records spanning August–October (Winterbottom 1968a).

**Interspecific relationships:** It is occasionally seen alongside the Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*; both have similar habits and habitat requirements (Taylor 1988). It is also often found alongside the Ethiopian Snipe *Gallinago nigripennis*, but the two species differ widely in overall behaviour and ecology (Hockey & Douie 1995).

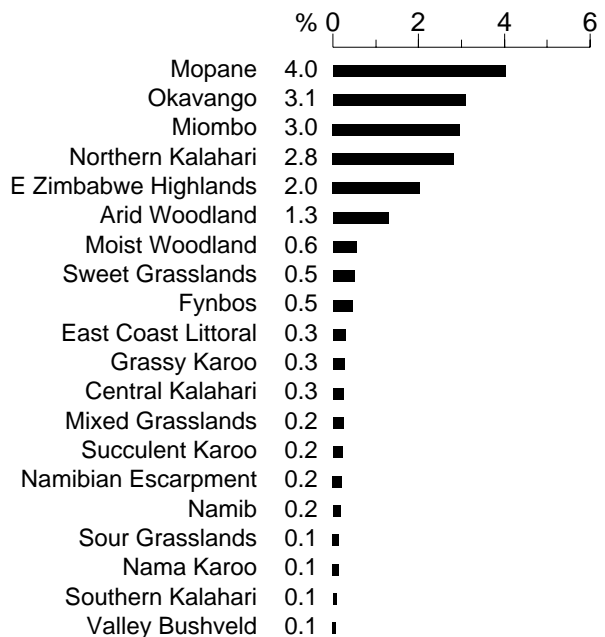
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The historical distribution has not been specifically documented; the available

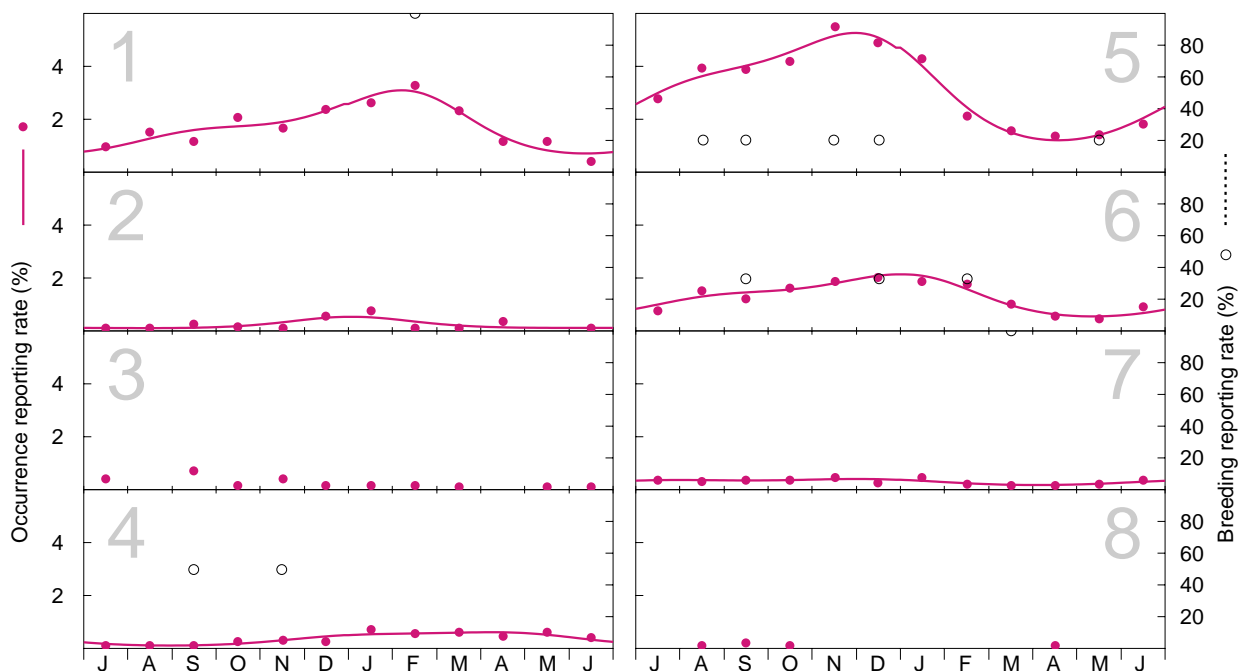
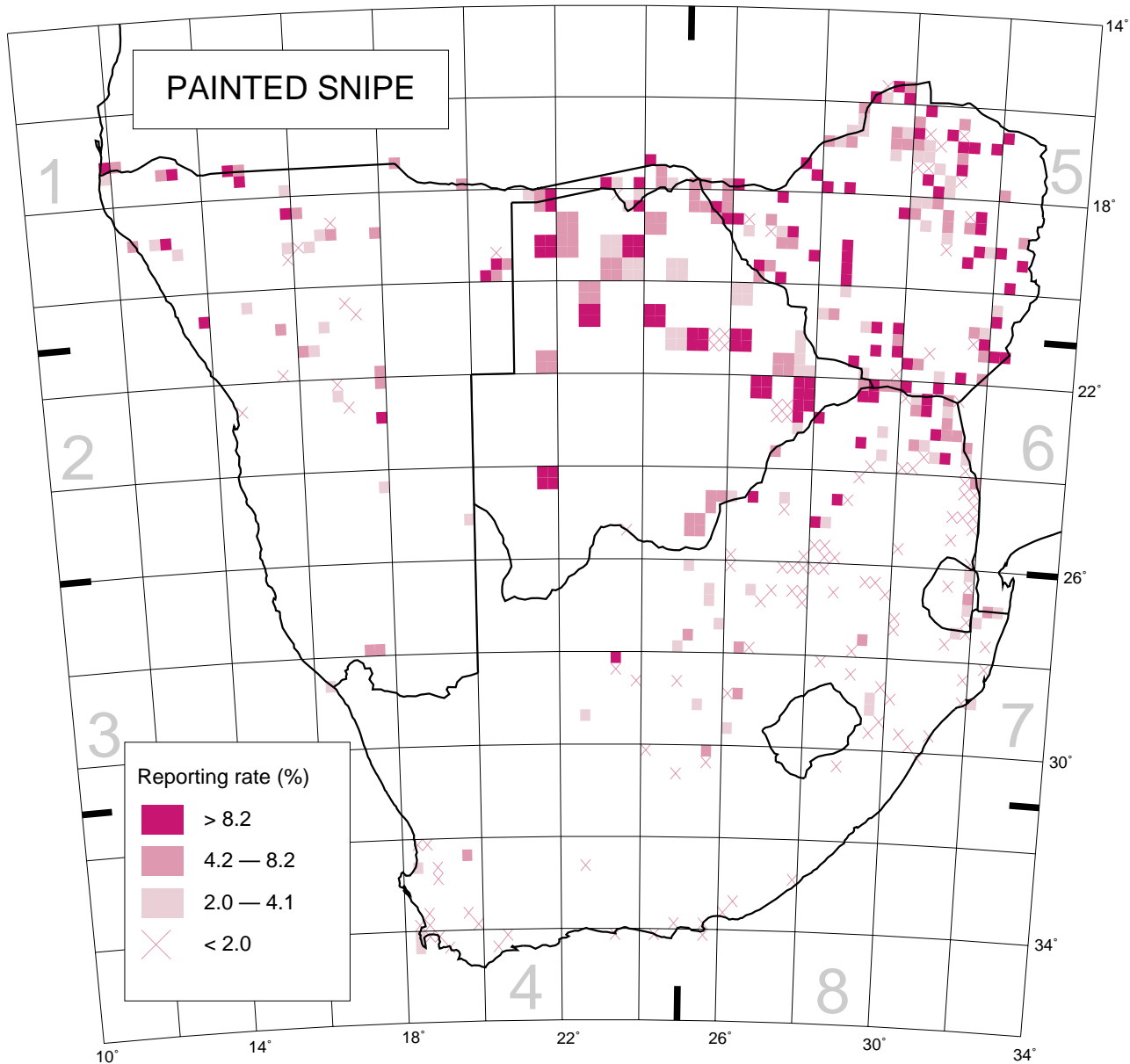
information suggests that the present distribution has remained basically unchanged, but with local extinctions (e.g. Hockey *et al.* 1989). Particular concern has been expressed as to the potential imminent extinction of the isolated southwestern Cape Province population (Hockey & Douie 1995). There is no information on population sizes; the status of the Painted Snipe varies from rare to locally common, and it is nowhere abundant in the atlas region. The main conservation concern is habitat loss due to the increasing human pressure on the wetlands on which it depends, and the species certainly merits monitoring.

R. A. Navarro

Recorded in 464 grid cells, 10.2%  
Total number of records: 1121  
Mean reporting rate for range: 2.5%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 149, 23, 20, 93, 369, 316, 138, 5; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 2, 5, 3, 1, 0.