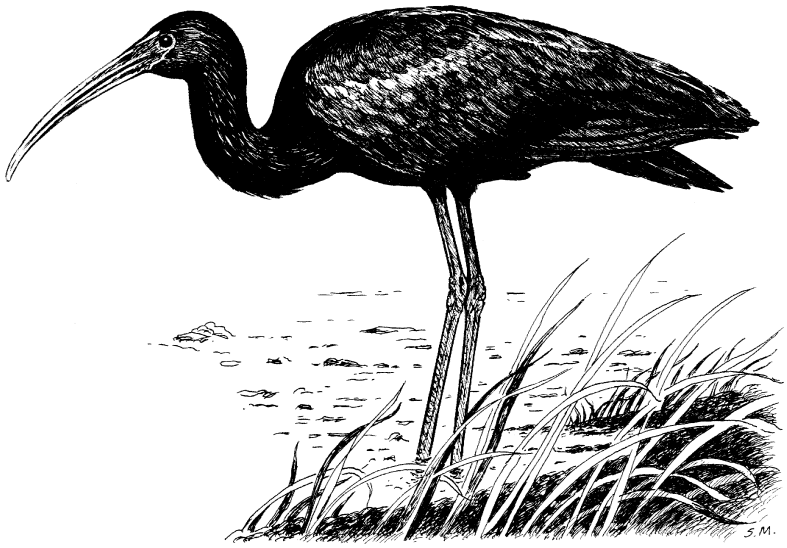


Glossy Ibis

Glansibis

Plegadis falcinellus

The Glossy Ibis is the most cosmopolitan ibis, occurring in most of the world's tropical and temperate zones (Hancock *et al.* 1992). It is nowhere abundant, and in most parts of its range it is rare or locally common. Nevertheless, the world population is considerable, probably in the 100 000s (Rose & Scott 1994). The core of its southern African distribution is the highveld of the southern Transvaal and Free State, with particularly high reporting rates on the Witwatersrand (2627, 2628) (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It is common in the Okavango Delta and other northern wetlands of Botswana (Penry 1994) and in northeastern KwaZulu-Natal. Elsewhere it occurs widely but sparsely, but it is absent west of 22°E, except for the southwestern Cape Province and northern Namibia.

It is gregarious, aggregating in small flocks of up to 30–40 birds, with flocks of more than 100 recorded in Zimbabwe during the 1990s (Brown *et al.* 1982; Maclean 1993b; A.J. Tree *in litt.*).

Habitat: The vegetation analysis shows highest reporting rates in grassland habitats; it is found predominantly at wetlands located in grasslands and in the floodplains of the Okavango basin. It is found almost exclusively in or near freshwater habitats, favouring the shallow inland waters of lake and river-edge marshes, seasonal pans, sewage works, flooded grasslands, irrigated farmlands, muddy substrates exposed by falling water-levels at wetlands, and increasingly in open grassland in parks and on farms. It occasionally occurs on saltmarsh and intertidal estuaries (Brown *et al.* 1982; Hancock *et al.* 1992). It nests colonially in dense reeds, bushes or trees, near its preferred feeding areas. It changes breeding sites regularly and nests in fairly inaccessible areas. These ephemeral colony sites can easily be overlooked, and as a result, only a small proportion of its breeding sites have been documented over its range (Hancock *et al.* 1992).

Movements: It is dispersive and nomadic (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). In southern Africa there is evidence for partial migration, both within the atlas region and to areas to the north. On the Witwatersrand, the population ranged from 1800–2000 birds in summer to 370–400 birds in winter (Tarboton 1977b). In Swaziland it is present only during summer (Parker 1994). The winter decline has been attributed to seasonal movement to the tropics; this is supported by a nestling ringed at Benoni (2628AB) in November 1970 being recovered in western Zambia in August 1973 (Tarboton 1977b). A bird ringed at Gedult Dam (2628AB), near Springs, was recovered at Volksrust (2729BD) (SAFRING), providing evidence for movements within South Africa. The models also show a winter exodus from the central highveld of South Africa, the area where most breeding takes place, and this may be related to post-breeding dispersion of adult and immature birds.

Breeding: In any one year it probably nests at more sites and over a wider area than realized (Hancock *et al.* 1992). Breeding has been recorded from many localities in the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). During the atlas period breeding was mainly reported from the south-western Cape Province (Zone 4) and the highveld (Zone 7). In both Zones, timing of breeding was similar, peaking during summer, in spite of the fact that rainfall is in winter in Zone 4 and in summer in Zone 7; this concurs with previous reports (Brown *et al.* 1982; Maclean 1993b).

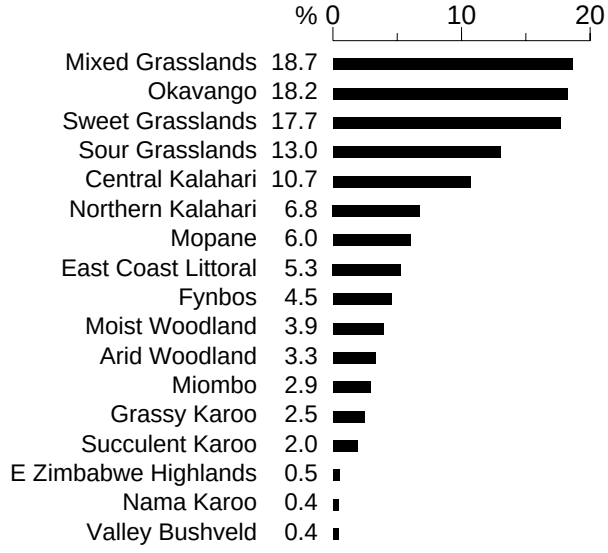
Interspecific relationships: It nests in mixed heronries and often feeds in mixed-species aggregations of wading birds.

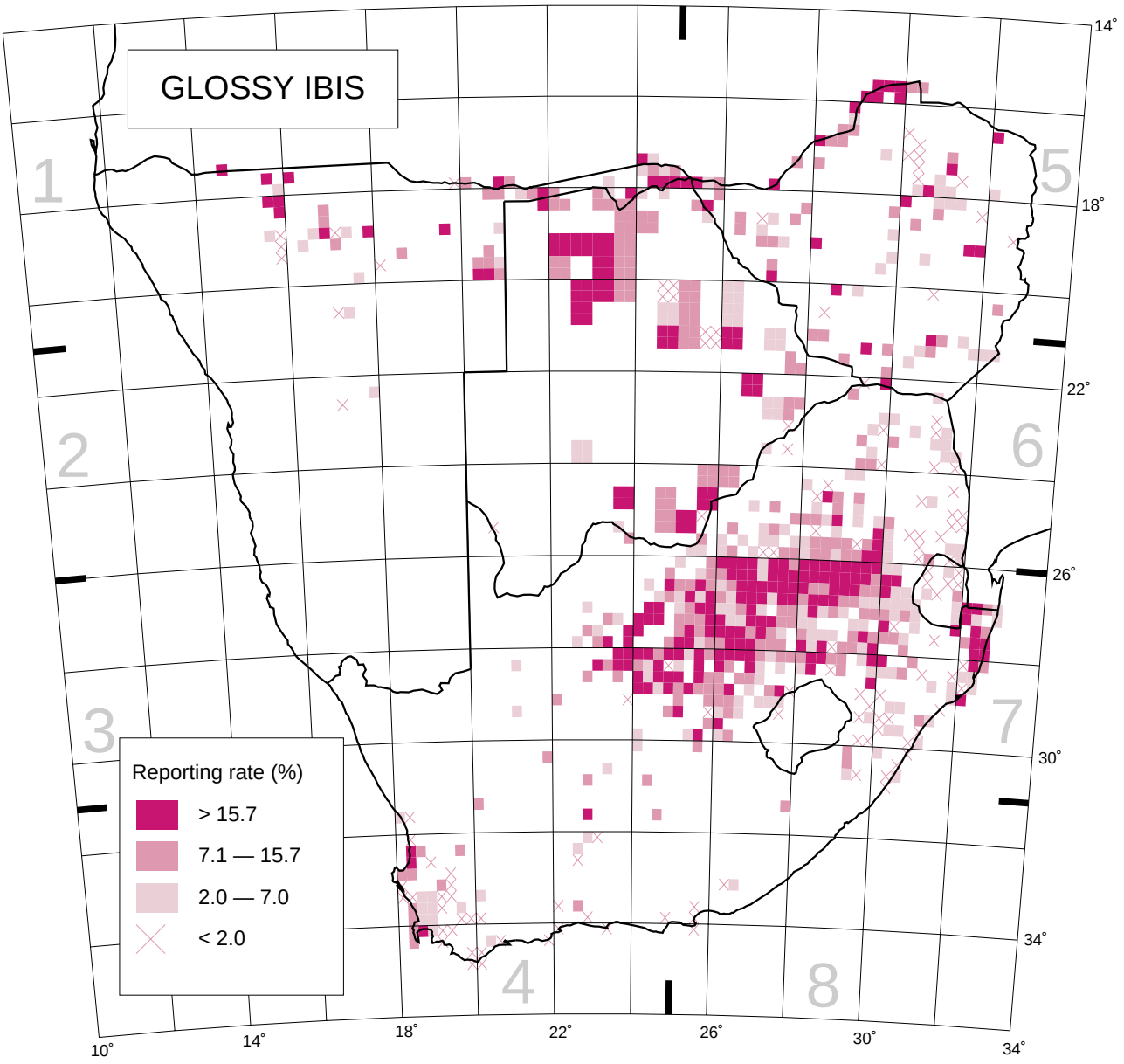
Historical distribution and conservation: Until the 1950s the Glossy Ibis was considered to be a Palearctic vagrant to southern Africa (e.g. Stark & Sclater 1906). Breeding in southern Africa was first recorded on the Witwatersrand, with 1950 the probable year of successful colonization (Anon. 1951; Neall 1952; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In the south-western Cape Province, the first recorded breeding attempts were in 1955 and 1967 (Middlemiss 1955; Hartley *et al.* 1968); numbers recorded breeding have increased steadily since then. In southern Africa it is increasing in range and numbers (Irwin 1981; Maclean 1993b; Penry 1994), probably through adaptation to artificial wetland habitats. The overall status of the Glossy Ibis remains poorly known because of its tendency to shift nesting sites frequently.

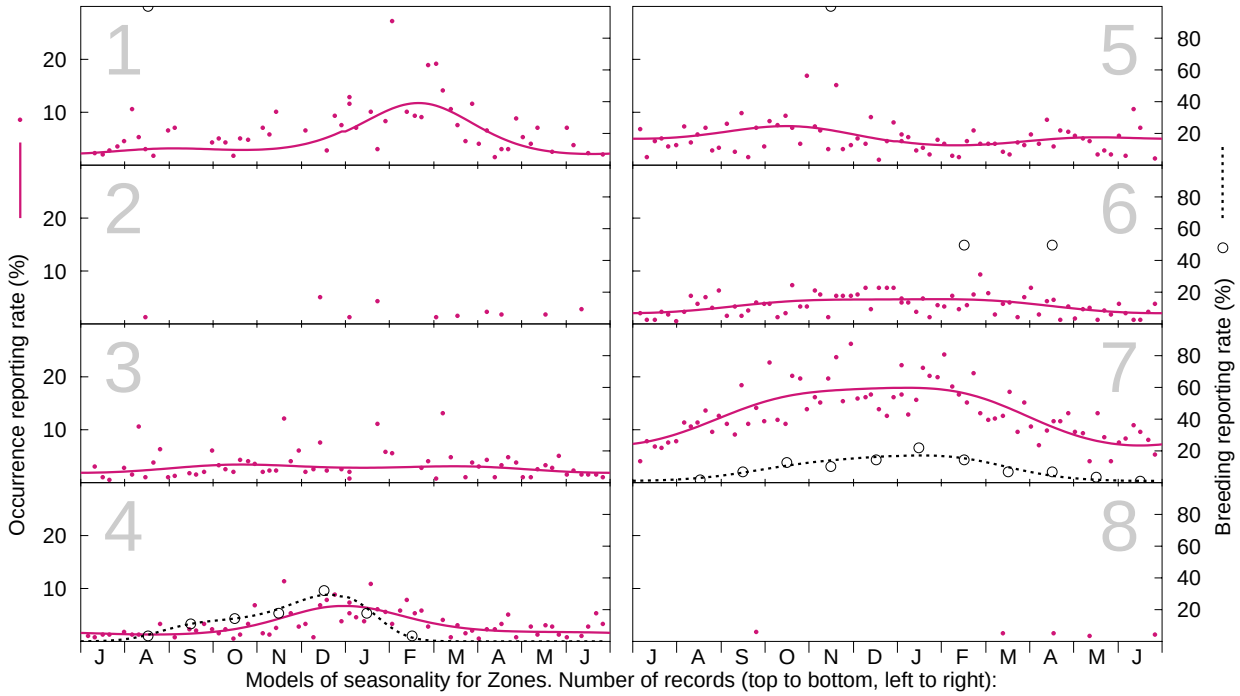
M.D. Anderson

Recorded in 844 grid cells, 18.6%
Total number of records: 10 169
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.1%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 156, 12, 149, 250, 471, 411, 2595, 5; Breeding: 1, 0, 0, 28, 1, 2, 96, 0.