



## Cattle Egret

### Veereier

#### *Bubulcus ibis*

Found in the warmer areas of the world, the Cattle Egret expanded its range tremendously during the 20th century, occurring now in the Mediterranean region, India and southern Asia, Japan, Australasia, North and South America (Cramp *et al.* 1977; Maddock & Geering 1994). It is also found throughout Africa except for desert areas. In southern Africa it is a breeding resident and partial migrant (Brown *et al.* 1982; Ginn *et al.* 1989) with a widespread distribution, being particularly abundant in the eastern and southern parts of the region. It avoids the Lesotho highlands and the xeric western parts. The atlas data are reliable and comprehensive for this conspicuous and readily identified species.

**Habitat:** It is primarily terrestrial and uses open, short grasslands, pastures and cultivated fields, usually in flocks accompanying cattle or large game. It requires water for drinking, and it roosts on the shorelines of inland waters and in trees. It nests in trees and reedbeds.

Highest reporting rates were in the intensively cultivated, moist grassland regions of the Transvaal, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal and southwestern Cape Province. It is also common in moist woodland, the Okavango basin and along the east coast, where it utilizes open areas. It is less frequent in drier woodland habitats and mountainous regions, and it is scarce in the dry southern Kalahari and Namib Desert.

**Movements:** In addition to nomadic movements to take advantage of seasonal rains, it disperses over long distances (Brown *et al.* 1982). The models confirm that it is a partial migrant, with a marked drop in reporting rates during winter when c. 90% of the Transvaal population departs (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Ringing recoveries indicate that southern African birds migrate to the tropics, mostly to Zaire and Zambia, tending to remain east of the equatorial forests. The furthest recovery was in the Central African Republic (4216 km) with other recoveries in Uganda and Tanzania (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The seasonal distribution maps indicate that the main exodus is from the inland areas, especially the highveld and the drier northwest.

**Breeding:** It breeds colonially, often in large numbers in mixed-species colonies. Most records were from Zones 4 and 6–8. Breeding was recorded mainly September–March, peaking November–January (a month earlier in the southwestern Cape Province). Egg-laying has been recorded mainly August–March in Zimbabwe, and September–January in the Transvaal (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

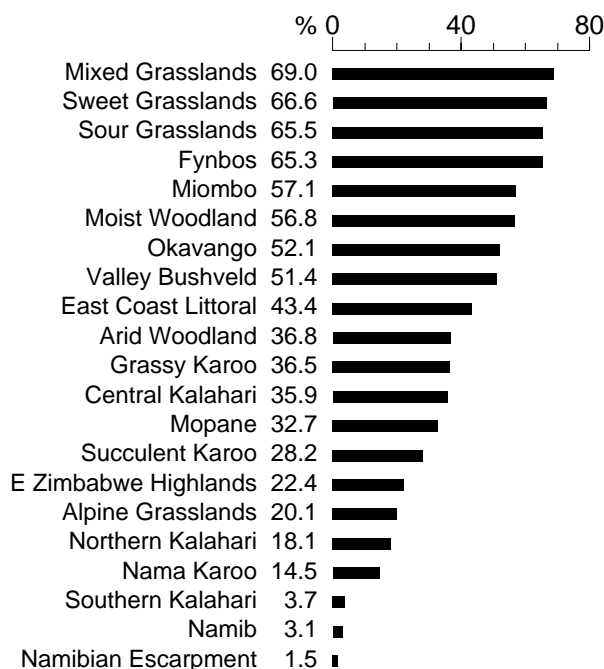
**Interspecific relationships:** It is placed in a monotypic genus and lacks close relatives. Its unique niche occupation has enabled it to take advantage of land-use changes without competition from other egrets (Snow 1978). It is commensal with ungulates, wild and domestic; these animals disturb insects which can then be caught more easily by the egret.

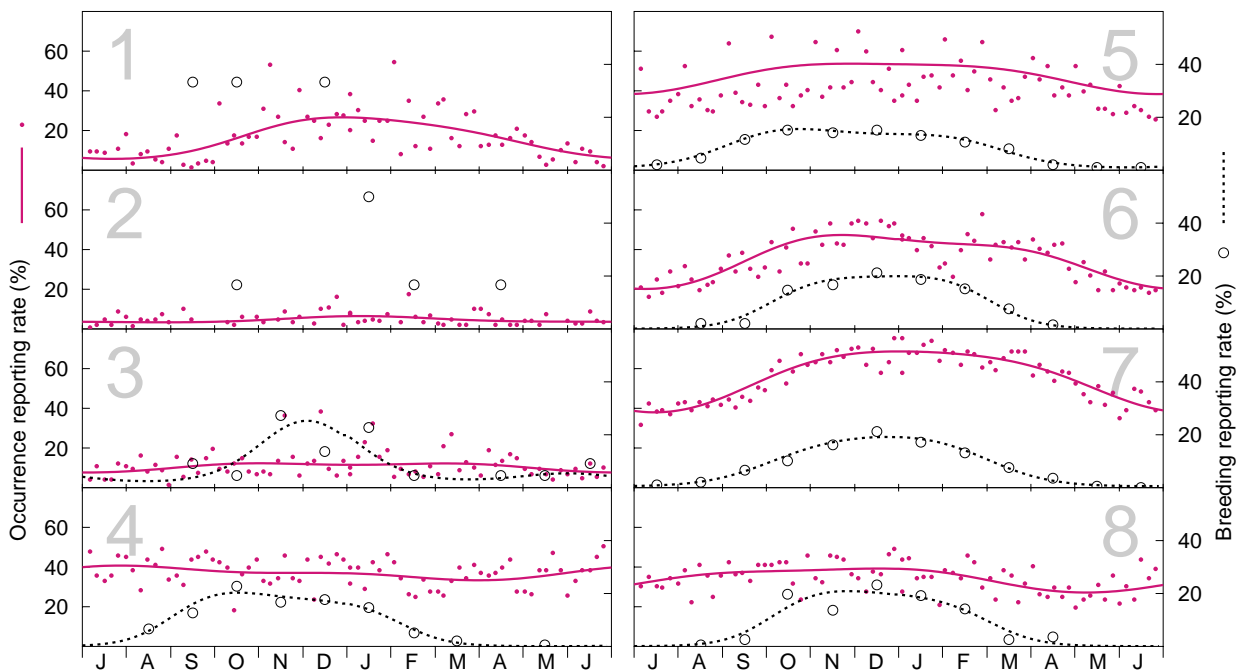
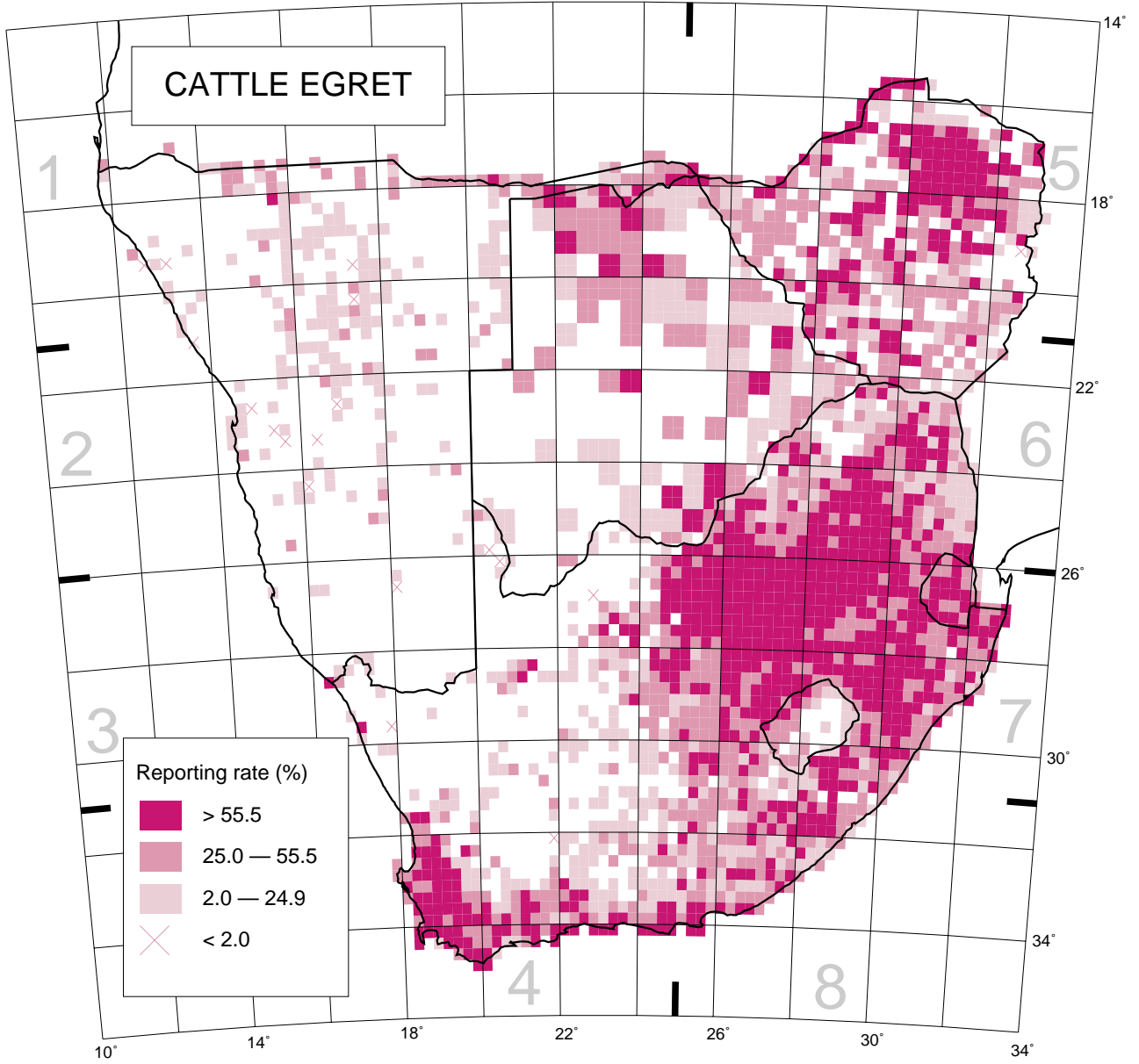
**Historical distribution and conservation:** An increase in cattle farming, coupled with high fecundity and a range of dispersal and migration strategies, have enabled it to undergo one of the most remarkable range expansions and population increases known in any bird (Siegfried 1971c; Maddock & Geering 1994). Extension of the range from tropical central Africa began before 1900, with significant expansion to most of the African continent between 1920 and 1940 (Maddock & Geering 1994). Colonies were established in the eastern Cape Province in the 1920s and in the southwestern Cape Province in 1934; the first breeding record in Zimbabwe was in 1953 (Siegfried 1965a; Snow 1978; Irwin 1981; Hockey *et al.* 1989). Southern Europe was colonized in the 1950s (Voisin 1991). African birds crossed the Atlantic Ocean to north-eastern South America early in the 20th century and were established by the early 1930s. Expansion continued throughout the Americas, reaching Patagonia in 1977 and Alaska by 1981 (Cramp *et al.* 1977; Maddock & Geering 1994). Silva *et al.* (1995) reviewed vagrants to subantarctic islands. Since the 1940s, the southern Asian subspecies *B. i. coromandus* has expanded its range southeast through Malaysia to Australia and New Zealand (Maddock & Geering 1994).

A.P. Martin

Recorded in 2423 grid cells, 53.4%  
Total number of records: 71 216  
Mean reporting rate for range: 52.8%

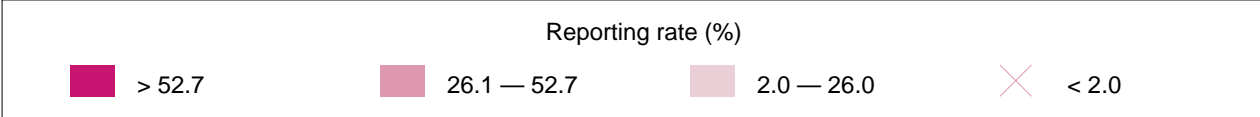
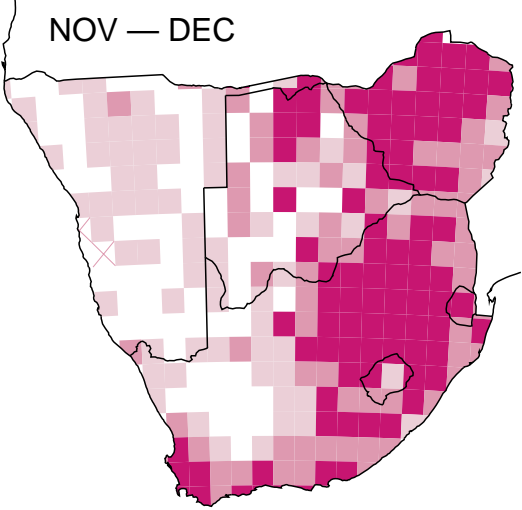
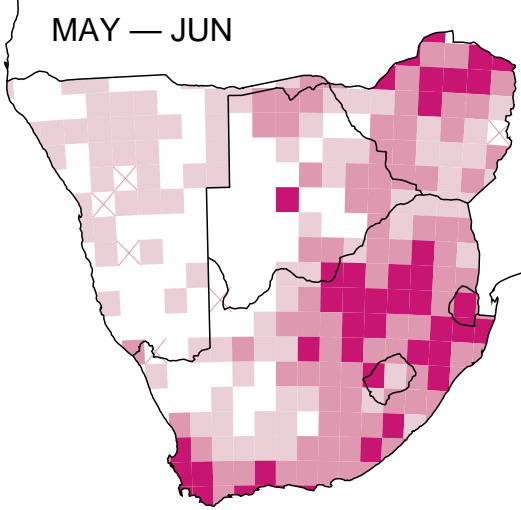
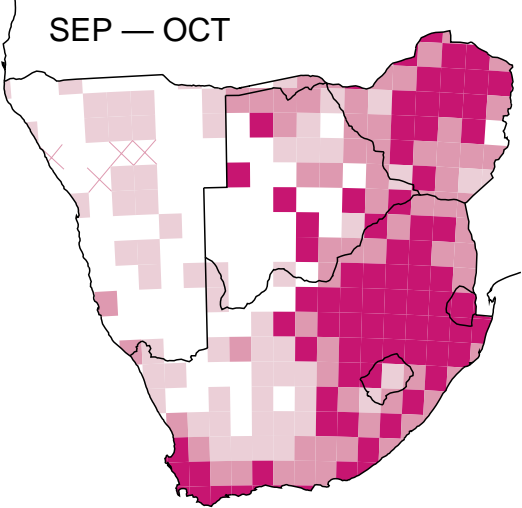
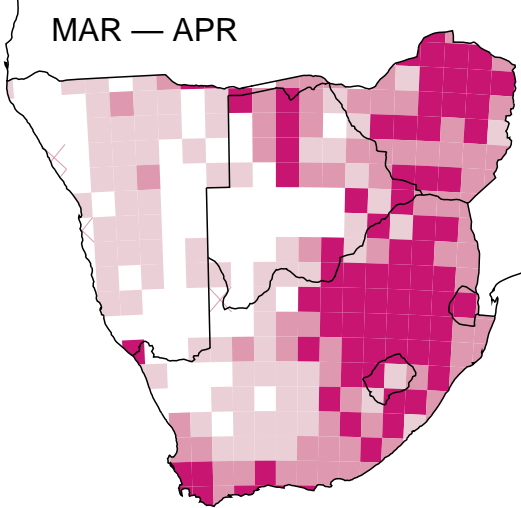
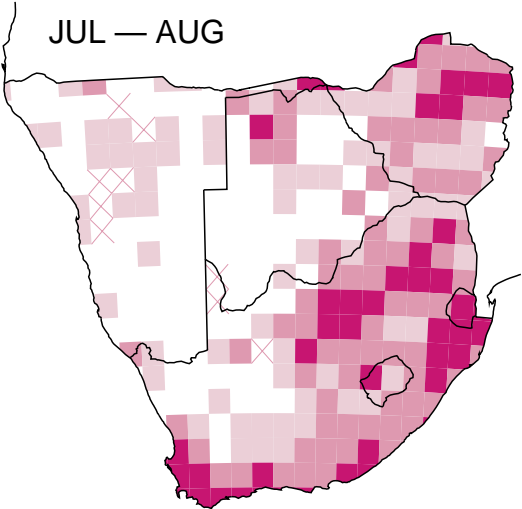
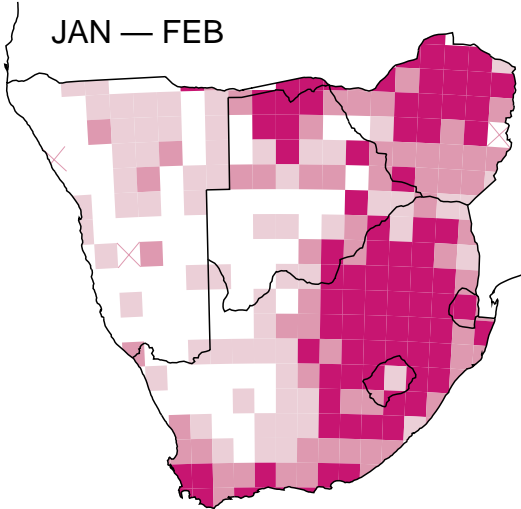
#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 491, 158, 579, 3226, 4174, 4101, 10979, 1887; Breeding: 3, 6, 22, 194, 85, 137, 759, 141.

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Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.