

## Peregrine Falcon

### Swerfvalk

#### *Falco peregrinus*

Two races of this cosmopolitan species occur in the atlas region: *F. p. minor* is a scarce but widely distributed breeding resident and *calidus* is a rare nonbreeding summer migrant from the Palearctic. These two forms are difficult to distinguish in the field and they were not treated separately for the atlas. It seems likely that the influx of migrants is small because there is no consistent large-scale change in range or reporting rates for the period October–March, when the migrants are most likely to be present (Jenkins 1994). Migrant birds have been collected as far south as Port Elizabeth (3325DA) (Boshoff *et al.* 1983), and recently a *calidus* bird, fitted with a satellite-tracking device in Europe, was recorded close to Cape Town (3318CD) (B.U. Meyburg pers. comm.). Known areas of relatively high abundance of resident birds include parts of Zimbabwe (Hartley 1992), the Waterberg Plateau in Namibia (Brown & Cooper 1987), the Transvaal escarpment (Tarboton & Allan 1984), the southwestern Cape Province (Pepler *et al.* 1991) and the lower Orange River (pers. obs). In Zimbabwe the breeding population has been estimated at 350–400 pairs, in the Transvaal at 20–40 pairs (Tarboton & Allan 1984) and in the southwestern Cape Province at 48–95 pairs (Pepler *et al.* 1991).

Throughout its southern African range the Peregrine is sympatric with the superficially similar Lanner Falcon *F. biarmicus*, and observers occasionally confused them, especially juvenile birds.

**Habitat:** Residents are largely restricted to areas where sheer cliffs are available as breeding and roosting sites, and as vantage points for hunting birds, their principal prey (Ratcliffe 1980; Jenkins 1991). Closed habitats are preferred, notably woodlands and fynbos (Hustler 1983b; Jenkins 1994). Cliffs overlooking river valleys and gorges are often used (Mendelsohn 1988b; Hartley 1992), as well as high-rise buildings in urban centres. The vegetation analysis reflects the wide range and variety of biomes used, but the relative reporting rates in the various vegetation types do not entirely conform with known patterns of abundance (Jenkins 1994), probably because cliff and prey availability are more important than vegetation type.

**Movements:** The atlas data do not show a clear-cut pattern of seasonal movements. Resident pairs in South Africa are known to remain in the general vicinity of their breeding cliffs throughout the year. However, individuals belonging to the resident race, probably nonbreeding birds, may be encountered far from suitable breeding areas (Jenkins 1994). The pattern in Zone 1 could suggest an influx of migrants.

**Breeding:** Atlas records were August–December. Egg-laying takes place in Zimbabwe in mid- to late August (Thomson 1984), in late August–early September in the Transvaal (Tarboton & Allan 1984; pers. obs), and September–October on the Cape Peninsula (pers. obs), i.e. later with increasing latitude.

**Interspecific relationships:** Its distribution completely overlaps that of the more common Lanner Falcon in the atlas region. The two species may compete for food and nest sites, although their habitat preferences are subtly different, and Peregrines are restricted by resource availability

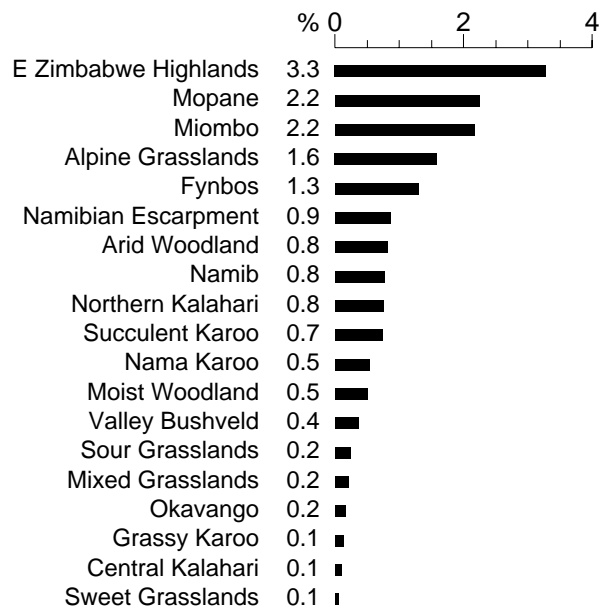
to a greater extent than are Lanners (Jenkins 1992). The Peregrine may also compete with the Taita Falcon *F. fasciimucha* in areas where they co-occur (Hustler 1989b; Jenkins *et al.* 1991).

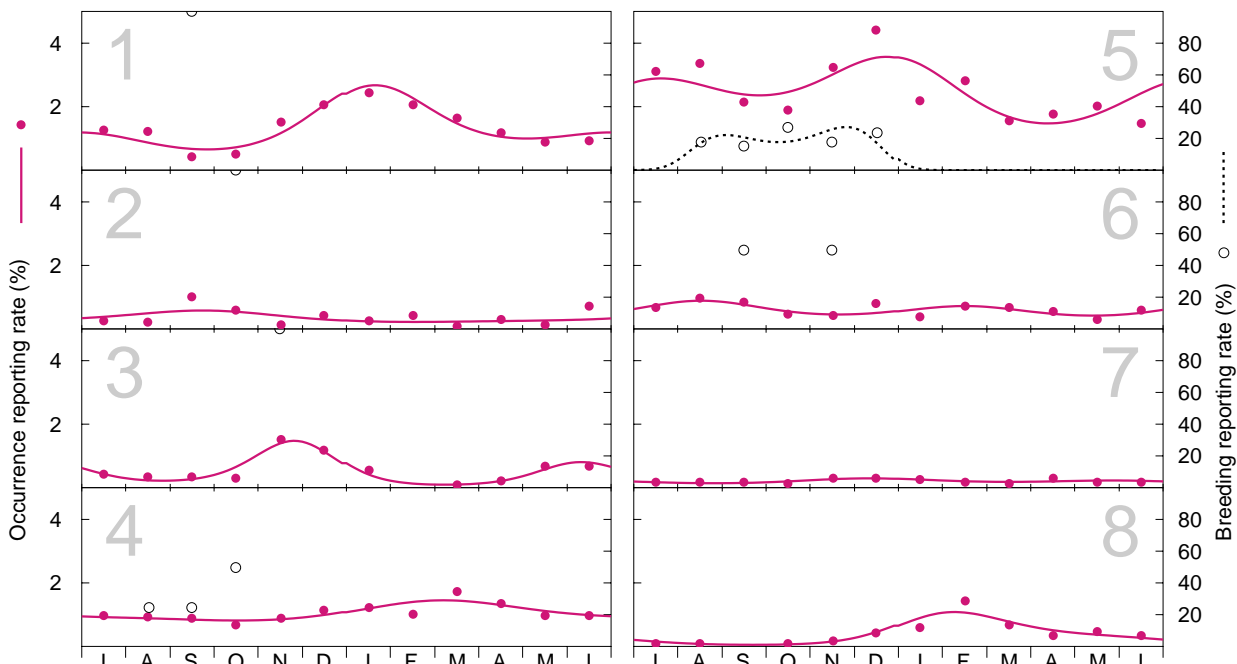
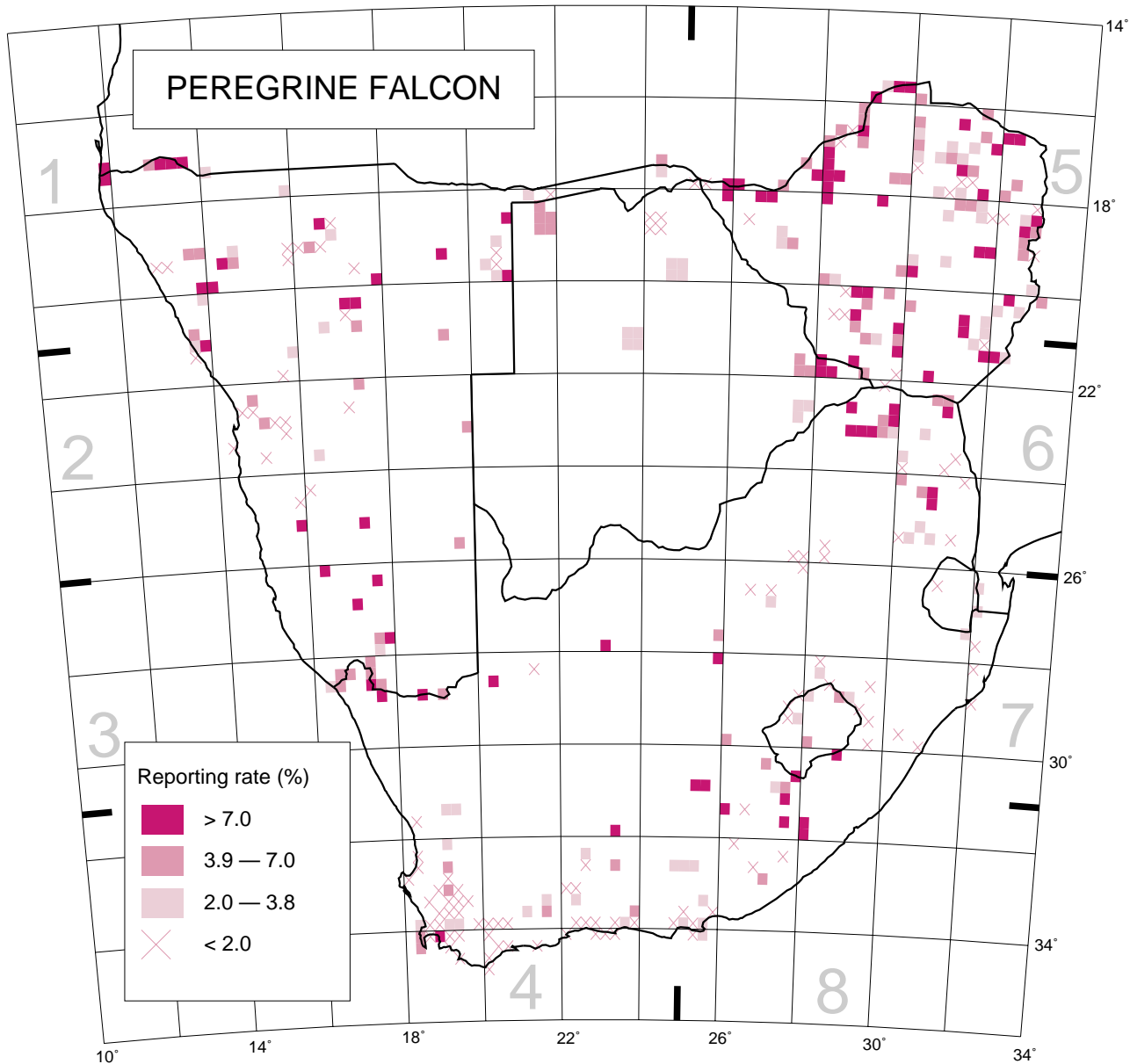
**Historical distribution and conservation:** It is classed as 'rare' in South Africa (Brooke 1984b). Preferred mountainous areas are probably not under threat. In lower-lying areas, the species may be threatened by the destruction of woodlands and the spread of agriculture (Thomson 1984; Hartley 1995), and in riparian habitats, dams may submerge breeding cliffs (Hartley 1993). Pesticide contamination may reduce breeding performance (Mendelsohn 1988b; Hartley 1995). The Peregrine Falcon is naturally scarce in the Afrotropics but probably not immediately threatened.

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Recorded in 386 grid cells, 8.5%  
Total number of records: 1057  
Mean reporting rate for range: 2.6%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 116, 37, 49, 269, 288, 148, 93, 46; Breeding: 1, 1, 1, 4, 34, 2, 0, 0.