

## Whiterumped Swift

### Witkruiswindswael

#### *Apus caffer*

The Whiterumped Swift is found throughout Africa south of the Sahara, with small populations breeding in Morocco and southern Spain. In southern Africa it is largely summer-visiting and much commoner in the more humid areas; it is perhaps most abundant in Mozambique (pers. obs). Its avoidance of the Kalahari is probably related to the lack of nest sites, rather than of food, since the European Swift *A. apus* is abundant there in summer. It is also not common in Namibia where European Swifts and Bradfield's Swifts *A. bradfieldi* are common, probably also due to a lack of nest sites. This, however, does not explain its absence from the Okavango region where nests of the Lesser Striped Swallow *Hirundo abyssinica* are plentiful. As swifts go, it is not difficult to identify, and the atlas data may be regarded as reliable.

**Habitat:** Like all swifts, it is a forager on aerial invertebrates and may be found anywhere. However, it is only regular to common in the more humid areas of the south and east. This is probably because its favoured nest site is the mud-pellet, inverted-igloo (retort-shaped) nests of swallows of the subgenus *Cecropis*. These nests can only be made where mud is available, and this is less regular in the more arid areas. Halfcup nests of swallows are occasionally used (with the mud walls raised to the roof with feathers and windblown vegetable matter). A similar modification occurs with nests in holes in buildings (Brooke 1971g).

**Movements:** The Whiterumped Swift is predominantly a summer visitor arriving August–September and leaving April–May. The models show a clear trend of shortening periods of residency with increasing latitude, despite the fact that abundance is greatest in the south (Zones 4, 7 and 8). There is a large number of overwintering records from throughout the summer range, a matter to which Cumming (1952) first drew attention. (The only migratory swifts in southern Africa to have no records during the austral winter are the European Swift and the little-known Scarce Swift *Schoutedenapus myoptilus*.) The nonbreeding quarters are unknown but presumably lie in the inner equatorial belt of

Africa (Brooke 1971c). Tree (1973c) drew attention to southward passage through Namibia; regular passage movements may well be the explanation for the two minor peaks in northern Namibia (Zone 1) in spring and autumn.

**Breeding:** Egg-laying has been recorded August–March in the Transvaal, August–April in Zimbabwe, and November–February in Namibia (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brown & Clinning in press). The atlas data confirm this pattern and suggest an October–January peak

**Interspecific relationships:** The Whiterumped Swift is a 'predator' of the building work of swallows, particularly those with retort-shaped nests. The swift does not hesitate to take over a newly built nest when it has reached a stage of construction sufficient for its purposes. It does this by moving into the nest and refusing to budge since, unlike swallows, swifts can fast for several days. The entrance is then lined with feathers and windblown vegetable matter, a lining which inhibits further entry by swallows

(Brooke 1971g, 1974e).

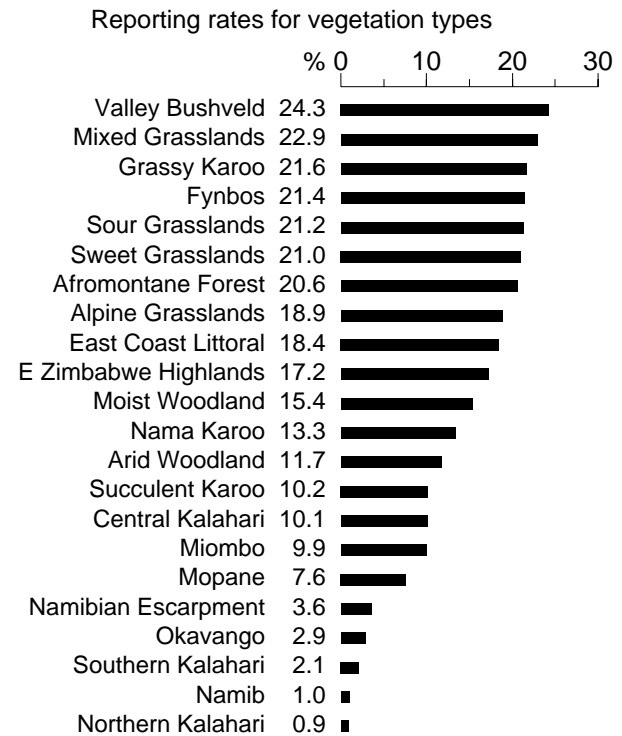
**Historical distribution and conservation:** This is not known to have differed from the present distribution. However, numbers have increased since bridge construction (primarily) has greatly multiplied the sites at which swallows can build nests which, in turn, can be taken over by swifts (Brooke 1974e). There are no known threats to the Whiterumped Swift, other than consumption of insects impaired by pesticides.

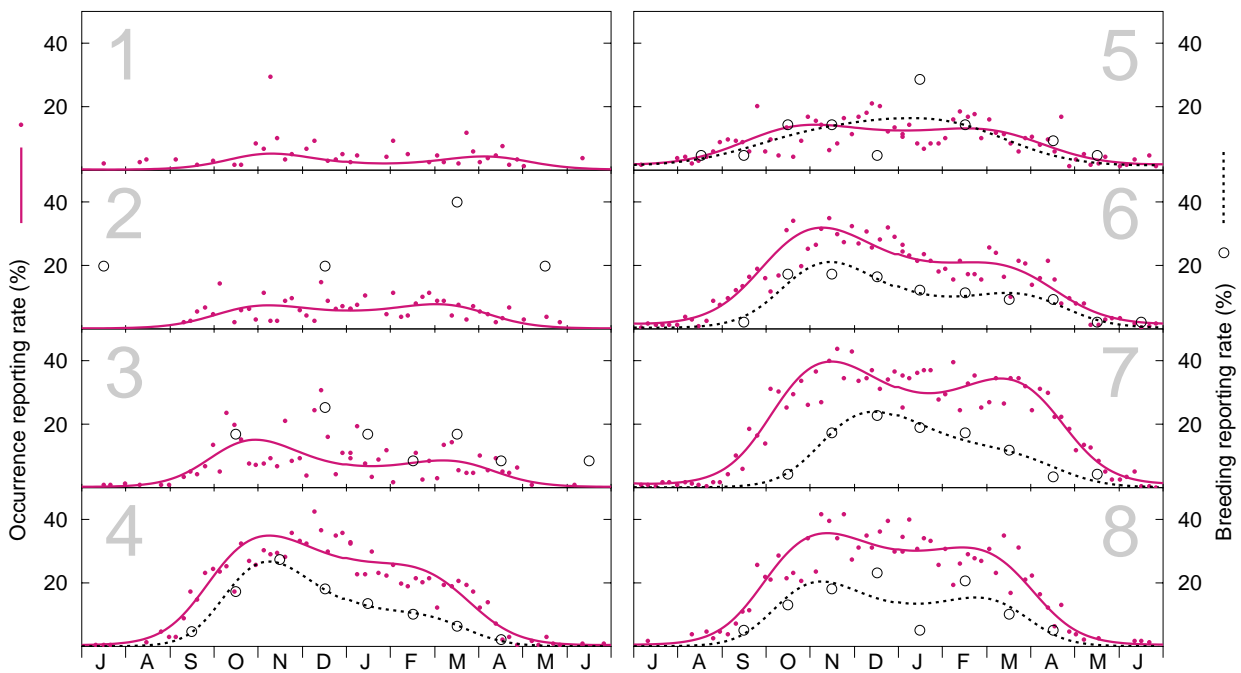
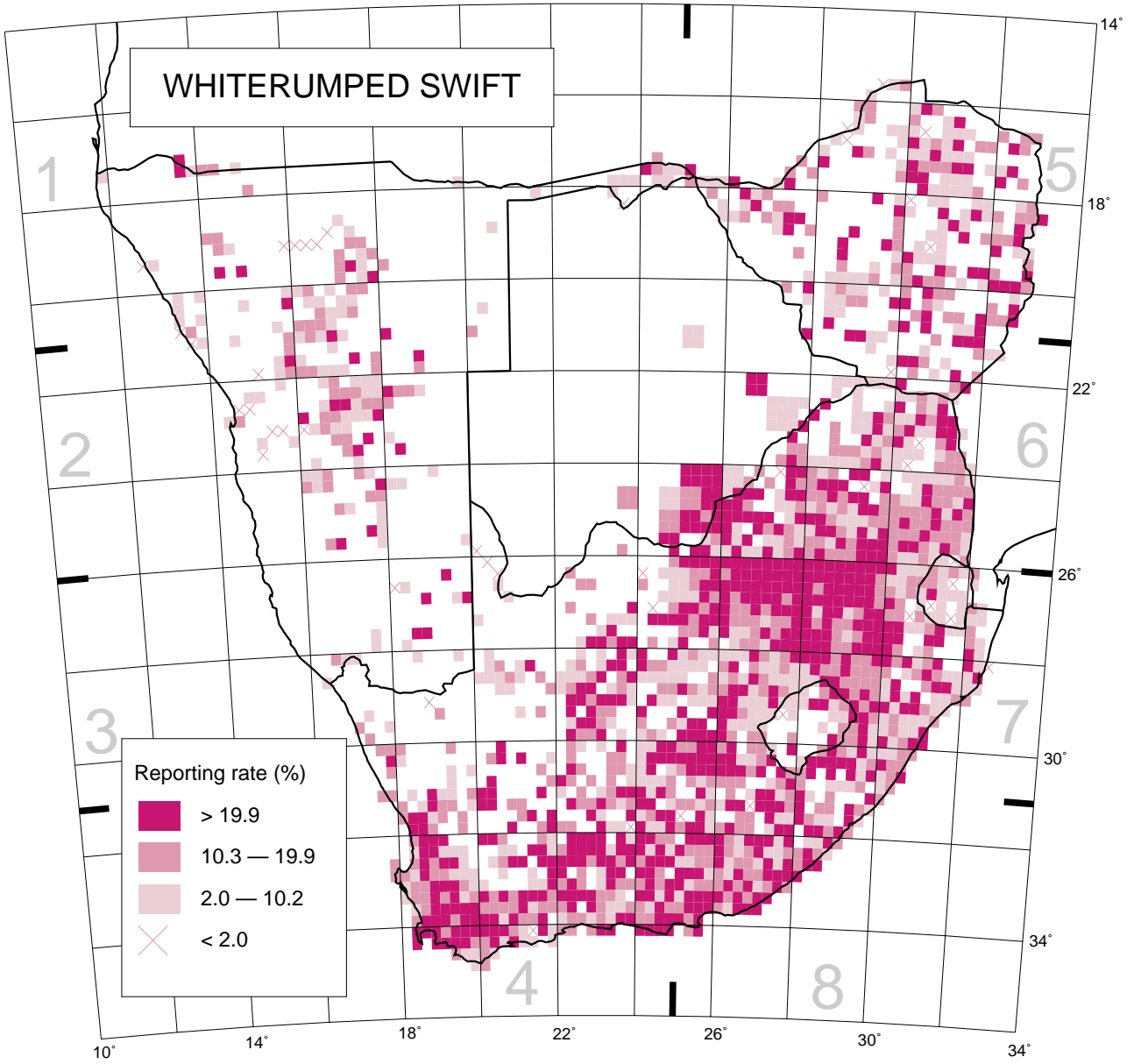
R.K. Brooke

Recorded in 1899 grid cells, 41.9%

Total number of records: 24 121

Mean reporting rate for range: 18.9%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 78, 133, 299, 1312, 763, 1774, 4130, 994; Breeding: 0, 5, 12, 127, 21, 97, 138, 39.