



European Swallow

Europese Swael

Hirundo rustica

This abundant nonbreeding Palearctic migrant occurs throughout southern Africa. It and the Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* are the most widespread Hirundinidae species in the world, and the former is ubiquitous in both the Old and New Worlds (Turner & Rose 1989). The total number of European Swallows from western Europe entering Africa every year has been estimated at 22–44 million and possibly twice that many come from eastern Europe and Asia (Keith *et al.* 1992). This swallow is conspicuous and is not likely to be confused with any other swallow species. The fast, late-afternoon flights towards their roosts, usually in reedbeds (Rudebeck 1955), are a common sight in many areas. Some of the reedbed roosts have been in use for at least 50 years (Hewitt 1966) and over one million individuals may be present at such sites (e.g. Bing 1993; Bijlsma *et al.* 1994).

Habitat: It occurs over virtually every habitat found in southern Africa. It is far more common, however, in the higher-rainfall eastern half of the subcontinent than in the drier west. This is reflected in the vegetation analysis, which shows it to have substantially higher reporting rates in the moister grassland, woodland and fynbos vegetation types, compared with the semi-arid and desert biomes. It may be less abundant on the higher-lying escarpment regions of South Africa than in the adjacent lower-lying regions, and is less common in Alpine Grasslands.

Movements: Although some arrive as early as the beginning of September, the majority only reach southern Africa by late October or early November. They arrive in the most southerly parts of their range a little later than in the north. Departure dates for all areas are early April, with a small number of birds recorded in May, especially in Zimbabwe. Overwintering has been recorded but is rare (e.g. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Herremans 1994d), though more common in the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989).

Most European Swallows which reach southern Africa originate from the northern parts of Asia and Europe (Rowan 1968). Western continental and central European birds mostly visit central Africa, while northern and eastern European birds come to central and eastern Africa, and eastern South Africa (Zink 1970). In southern Africa as a whole, however, west, central and east European birds are found together (Loske

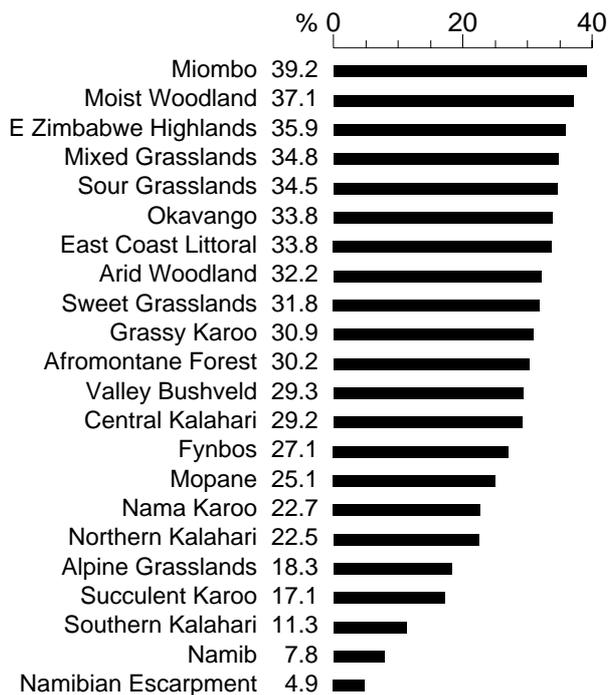
1986; Oatley in press). Ringing recoveries show that British and Irish swallows tend to travel to western and southern South Africa, that those present in the Transvaal come largely from west of the Urals, and those found in the eastern Cape Province and KwaZulu-Natal originate largely from east of the Urals (Rowan 1968; Mead 1970; Oatley in press). The race *gutteralis*, which breeds from the eastern Himalayas to Japan, has also been reported in southeastern Africa in small numbers (Clancey 1970) but this has been questioned by Moreau (1972). Recoveries from further north in Africa suggest that Asian and eastern European birds travel through East Africa, while those from western Europe fly through West Africa (Van den Brink & Van der Have 1993). The latter reach southern Africa in smaller numbers than birds originating from eastern Europe and Asia. Ringed birds from most European countries, as well as Russia, the Ukraine and Siberia, however, have been recovered in southern Africa. The greatest distance between ringing and recovery sites was a bird ringed at Mossel Bay (3422AA) and recovered at Petrovsk in Russia 11 358 km away. The furthest northward movement was a bird ringed at Pretoria and recovered at Juorkuna in Finland 10 096 km to the north. Most fly a Great Circle distance of 7500–11 500 km between their breeding and nonbreeding grounds.

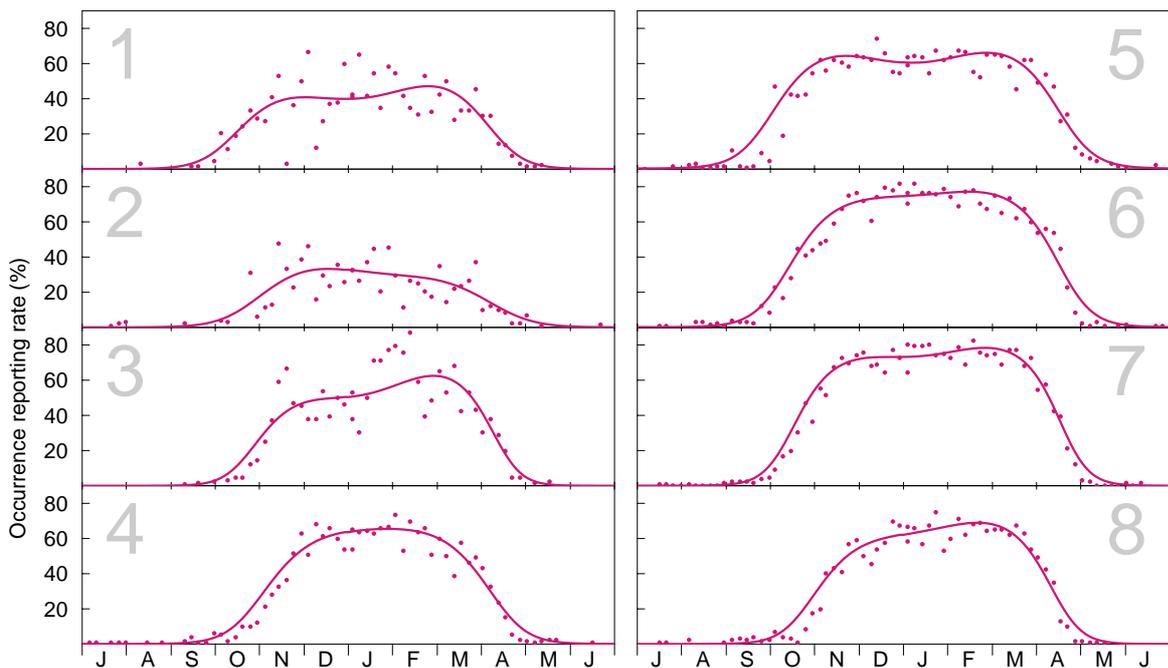
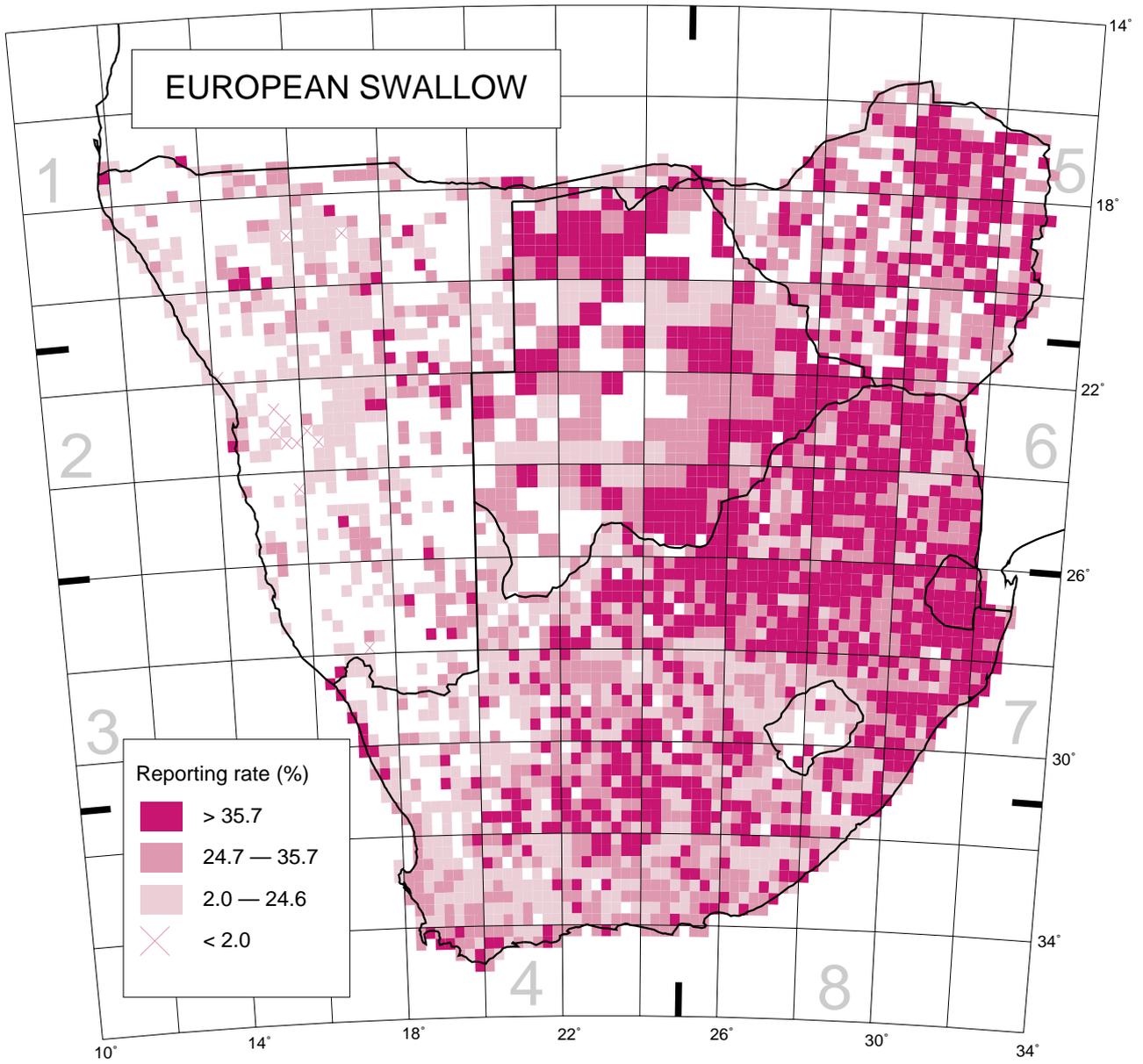
Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution seems not to have changed in southern Africa but it is undergoing a slow, steady decrease in many European countries (Cramp *et al.* 1988). Large-scale communal roosting in reedbeds renders it vulnerable to accidental poisoning during the aerial spraying of avicides against problem seedeaters (Van den Brink & Van der Have 1993). Reedbeds and other wetland habitats should not be subject to such spraying, because of the potential for mass mortality of this species and other non-target animals.

R.A. Earlé

Recorded in 3385 grid cells, 74.6%
Total number of records: 44 475
Mean reporting rate for range: 31.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 579, 455, 1209, 2156, 2945, 4291, 7332, 1534.