

Whitethroated Swallow

Witkeelswael

Hirundo albigularis

This species is restricted to Africa south of the equator. It is common in the wetter parts of South Africa but its distribution is more patchy in the rest of the subcontinent and most of the records from the more arid western areas probably represent birds on passage. Even in areas where it is common, this species can be very localized around suitable breeding sites. Reporting rates indicate centres of particularly high abundance in the Transvaal highveld, eastern Free State, western KwaZulu-Natal, and the south-western Cape Province.

It is a conspicuous bird in its habitat but can be easily overlooked amongst European Swallows *H. rustica*. It is superficially similar to the Wiretailed Swallow *H. smithii* in appearance and, as both species occur in similar aquatic habitats, they are confused by some observers.

Habitat: This swallow is usually found in the vicinity of wetlands, especially rivers and other expanses of open water, where suitable nesting sites are available. It is more common in open habitats, such as grassland and fynbos, than in woodland regions. It is often found around man-made structures, such as culverts, where nests are built. During migration it can be seen over any habitat and it will traverse the Kalahari and Namib Desert (M. Herremans pers. comm.).

Movements: These birds are intra-African migrants, arriving as early as late July in the Transvaal, KwaZulu-

Natal and Cape Province, but most birds reach their breeding grounds in August or September. Most birds depart by mid-April, but some stay on until mid-May. It is primarily a passage migrant in Botswana, with peak passage in August–October and March–April (Herremans 1994d; Penry 1994). Some winter records exist for all the Zones but overwintering occurs more often in the northern parts of their breeding range, such as in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981).

Southern African populations migrate to Angola, Zambia and southern Zaire and the species also breeds in the first two of these countries and in Malawi (Turner & Rose 1989). There are no recoveries of ringed birds from their winter quarters (Earlé 1987c). Breeding site-fidelity is common and individual birds return to the same nesting site for many years.

Breeding: Breeding was recorded August–April with a peak October–December throughout its range. Multiple broods are raised (Turner & Rose 1989).

Interspecific relationships: This swallow is rare in the Transvaal lowveld, northern Zululand and most of Zimbabwe, where the Wiretailed Swallow occupies a similar niche and is common.

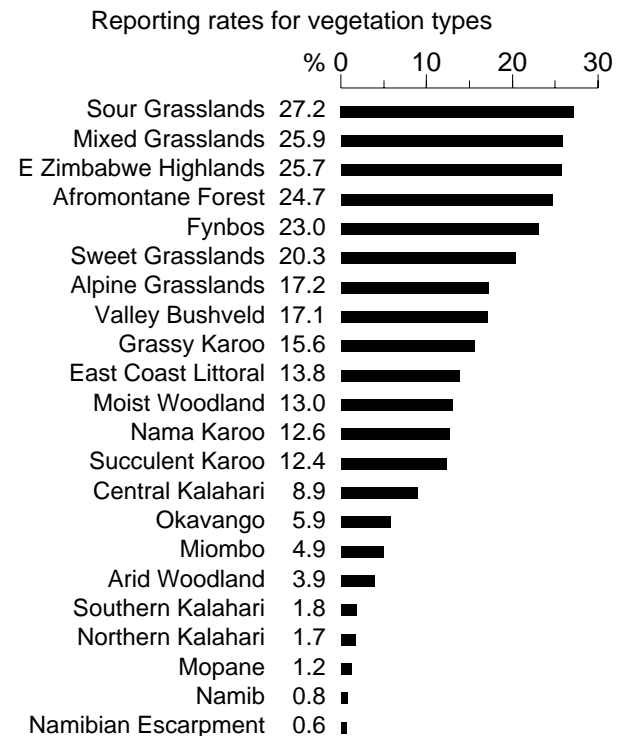
Historical distribution and conservation: The White-throated Swallow has expanded in numbers and range in many areas owing to the construction of artificial impoundments and the numerous man-made structures which have become available as nesting sites (Hockey *et al.* 1989; Turner & Rose 1989).

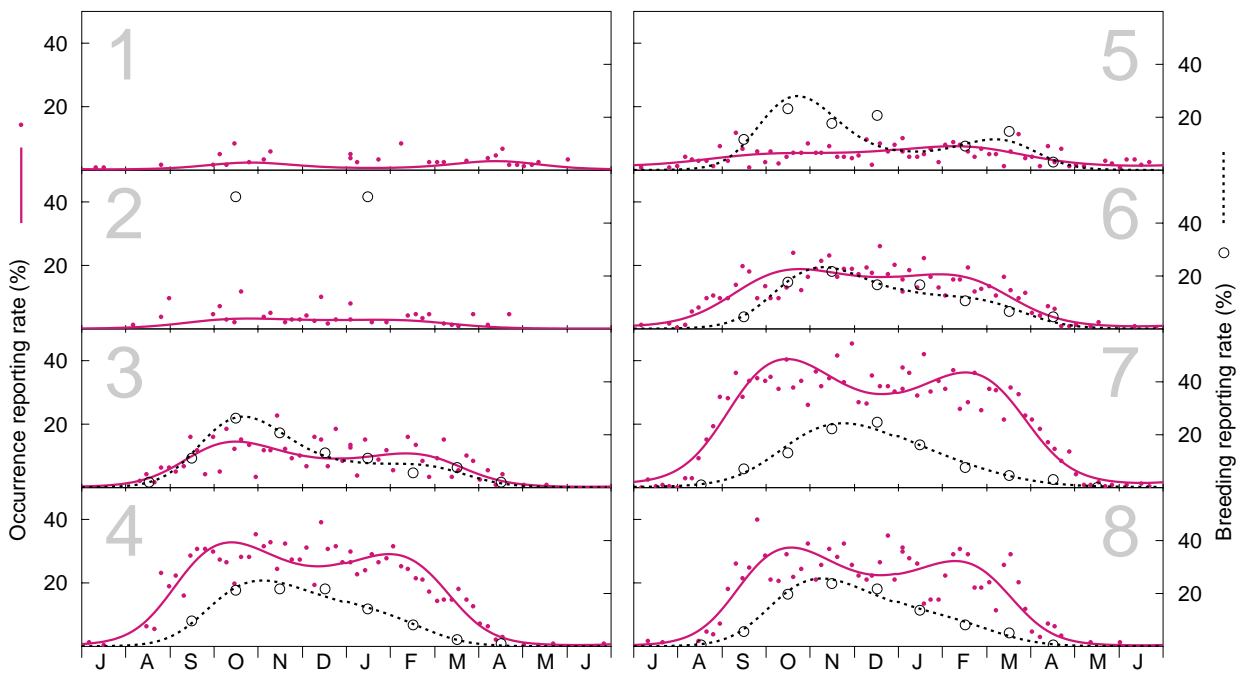
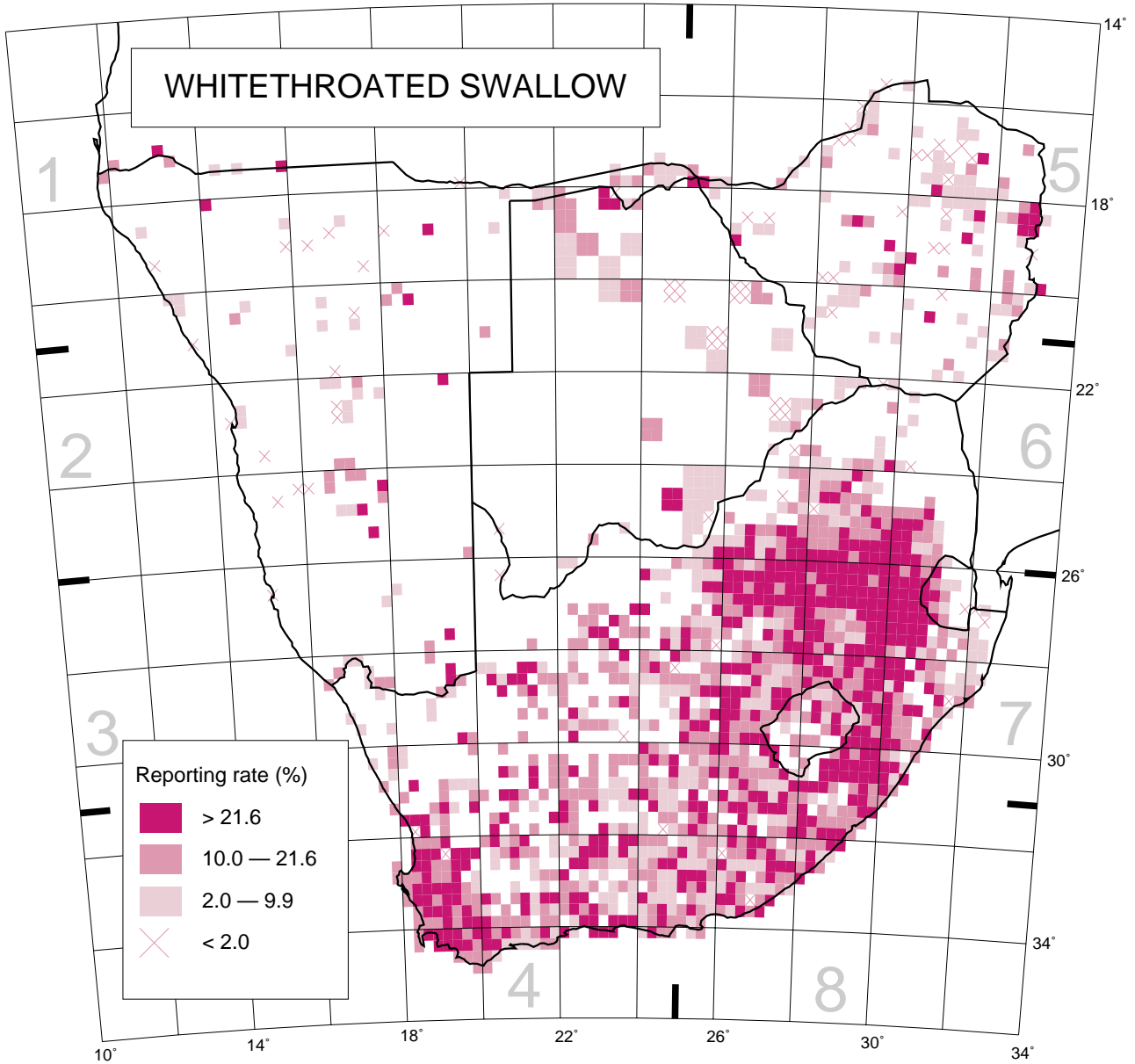
R.A. Earlé

Recorded in 1580 grid cells, 34.8%

Total number of records: 22 647

Mean reporting rate for range: 20.0%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 47, 50, 323, 1362, 386, 1154, 4277, 844; Breeding: 0, 2, 53, 213, 34, 124, 388, 137.