



## Wiretailed Swallow

### Draadstertswael

#### *Hirundo smithii*

This species is a locally common breeding resident in the lowland areas of Zululand in KwaZulu-Natal, and in the lowveld of the Transvaal and Swaziland. It extends to the west in the Transvaal up the Limpopo River and its tributaries. It is resident but patchily distributed in the southern parts of Zimbabwe but is a common resident in the east and north of the country. It is common in northern Botswana and Namibia along large rivers and floodplains. In the rest of Africa this species is widespread in moist woodland south of the Sahara, but avoids the equatorial forest belt. In Asia it occurs from Afghanistan eastwards to Tibet and southeastwards to Indo-China (Turner & Rose 1989). It is a conspicuous bird but, owing to its similarity to the Whitethroated Swallow *H. albigularis* in both appearance and habitat, the two are frequently confused by observers.

**Habitat:** This is an aquatic species associated with large rivers, streams, floodplains, dams and canals. The foraging habitat can vary, depending on the vegetation surrounding the water, and includes grassland, open woodland and forest edges.

**Movements:** The movements of this species are poorly known and the literature contains several contradictory statements. It is present in KwaZulu-Natal mainly during March–October (Clancey 1964b; Cyrus & Robson 1979). Tarboton *et al.* (1987b) stated it to be resident in the Transvaal, with perhaps some winter movement into some areas. In Swaziland it is apparently resident (Parker 1994). In Zimbabwe it is reputedly scarce April–July (Keith *et al.* 1992). The models show that the species is present throughout its range in southern Africa in all months of the year, but that it has higher reporting rates during the winter months in the eastern Zones (Zones 5, 6 and 7).

**Breeding:** The models show that, although breeding occurs in every month of the year, there are two peak breeding periods corresponding with the spring and autumn. In addition, there is a slight shift in the timing of breeding from north to south. In Zimbabwe (Zone 5) peak breeding occurs during March and September–October, while the Transvaal (Zone 6) peaks occur March–April and September–October, and in KwaZulu-Natal (Zone 7) in April–May and October–November. This bimodal breeding pattern is also clear from egg-laying data from Zimbabwe (Irwin

1981) and the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In the rest of Africa there are also two annual breeding peaks and in East Africa these peaks are even earlier than in Zimbabwe (Earlé 1988b). In the Okavango where floods peak in the dry season, egg-laying starts in August (Skinner 1995a).

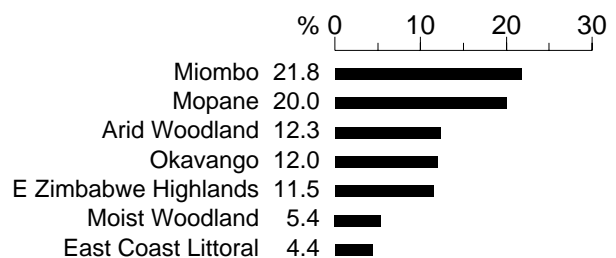
**Interspecific relationships:** This species largely replaces the Whitethroated Swallow in the eastern part of the atlas region. These two species have similar habitats and possibly compete for the same resources. They are largely allopatric during breeding, however, and show interesting differences in their breeding seasonality and movements.

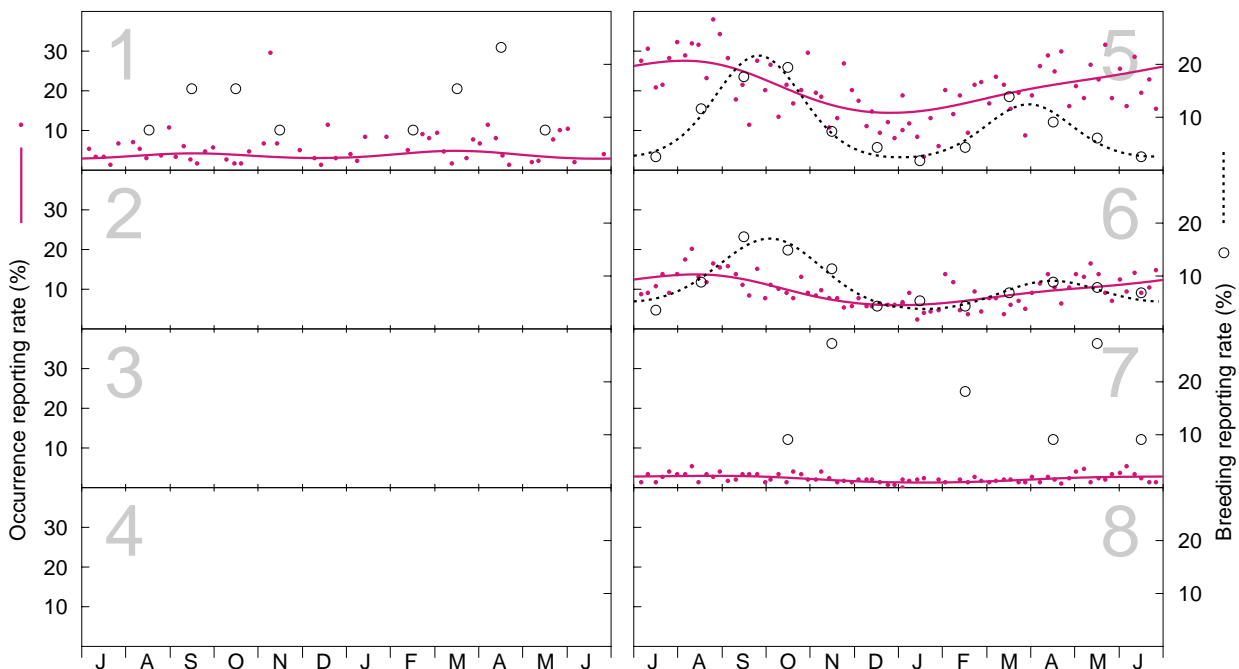
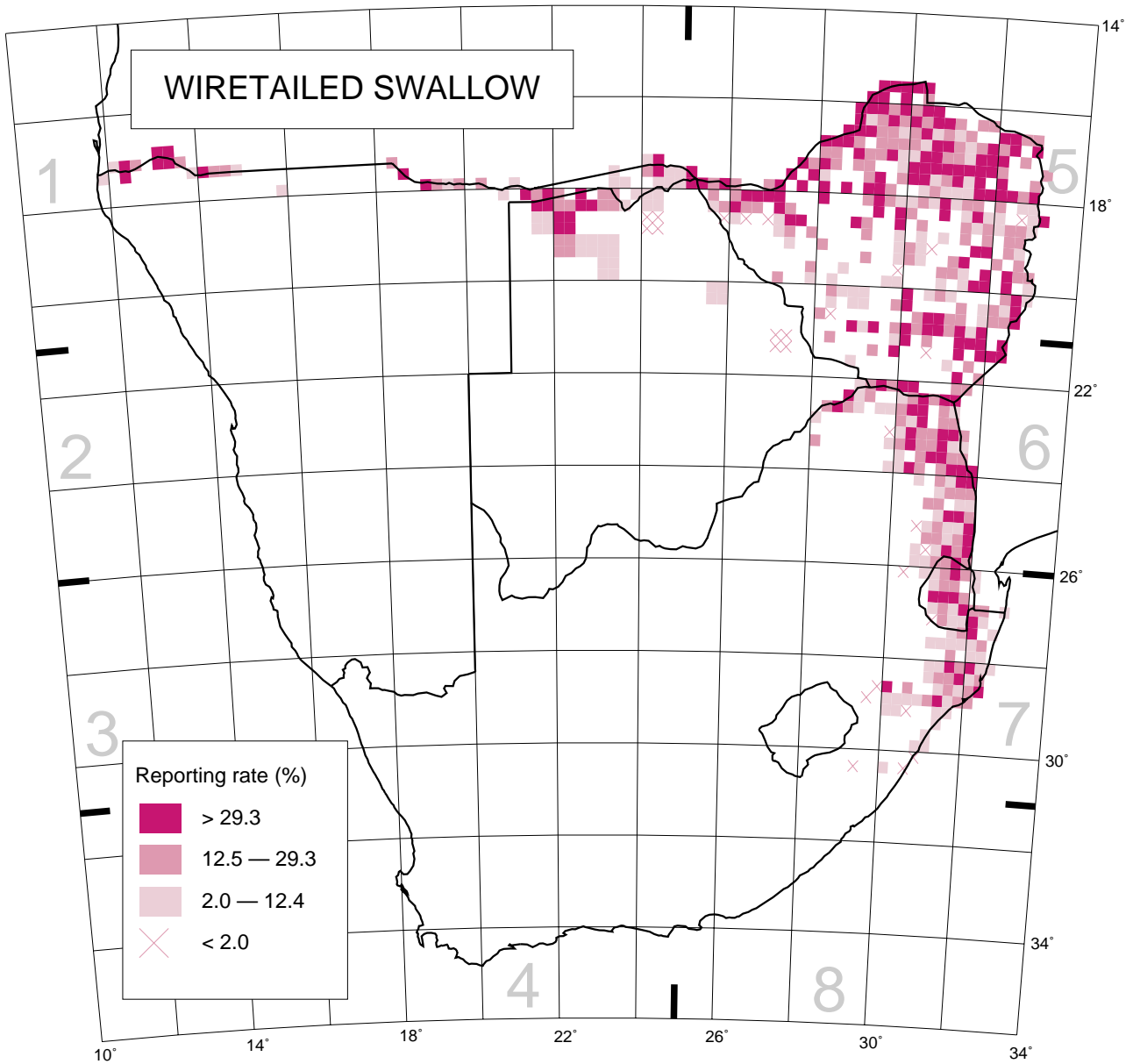
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The Wiretailed Swallow has benefited from man-made structures used for nesting and the construction of artificial impoundments, and has expanding its range beyond its historical limits. During the 20th century, it has expanded its distribution in Zimbabwe from the lower-lying valleys to include the Mashonaland Plateau and Chipinga Highlands (Irwin 1981). This has also happened in other African countries, such as The Gambia (Gore 1981).

R.A. Earlé

Recorded in 593 grid cells, 13.1%  
Total number of records: 6601  
Mean reporting rate for range: 20.2%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):  
 Occurrence: 126, 0, 0, 0, 1857, 1103, 435, 0; Breeding: 13, 0, 0, 0, 165, 115, 11, 0.