

Lesser Striped Swallow

Kleinstreepswael

Hirundo abyssinica

This common species is distributed along the coast and adjacent interior of the eastern Cape Province and Transkei, throughout much of KwaZulu-Natal, the Transvaal woodland areas, and most of Swaziland and Zimbabwe. In Botswana, it occurs in the east and commonly in the Okavango, and in Namibia is found along the Kunene and Kavango rivers, the Caprivi Strip, and scattered records further south. This is one of the most abundant African swallows; it ranges over the greater part of Africa south of the Sahara, with the exception of the open regions in the south and southwest. It is frequently confused with the similar Greater Striped Swallow *H. cucullata* in southern Africa.

Habitat: It occurs in a variety of woodland and savanna habitats, except for semi-arid Kalahari savannas. Within these regions it can also be found in cultivated and suburban areas. It is more common in lower-lying than higher-lying areas within its range. It is known to nest frequently on riverbanks and trees (Aspinwall 1980; Skinner 1995a).

Movements: This species shows complex patterns of movement in the region. It is largely a summer-breeding migrant in South Africa, but some birds are present throughout the year, especially in the lower-lying eastern areas along the KwaZulu-Natal coast and in the lowveld of the Transvaal and Swaziland (e.g. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). A winter exodus is also apparent in Zimbabwe but the presence of birds in this country during the winter is more frequent than in most of South Africa, and birds from the south may pass through or winter in Zimbabwe. It has been suggested that the Zimbabwean breeding population leaves that country and is replaced by South African migrants during the winter (Irwin 1981). In the Caprivi Strip, the Okavango region, Chobe and Linyanti rivers, and the Zambezi upstream from Victoria Falls, the distinct race *H. a. ampliformis* is primarily a winter-breeding visitor, mainly from March–October (Brewster 1991; Herremans *et al.* 1994b; Herremans 1994d; Skinner 1995a), but passage of the southern race *unitatis* through this area is likely in August–September and March–April (Herremans 1994d).

The models for Zones 5–8 suggest reduced overwintering, and later arrival and departure times with increas-

ing latitude for *unitatis*. The departure of birds from their breeding grounds is spread over several weeks and is probably influenced by the stage of breeding of individuals. Populations start to decline as early as February–March in most regions. Some nests in the northern Kruger National Park were occupied throughout the year but different individuals used the nests during the summer and winter months, indicating that ‘residency’ does not necessarily involve the same individuals (R.A.E. pers. obs.).

Breeding: A summer-breeding pattern is shown by the race *unitatis* in the eastern Cape Province (Zone 8), KwaZulu-Natal (Zone 7) and Transvaal (Zone 6), with most breeding recorded August–May and peaking November–December. Breeding starts earlier in the Transvaal than in the eastern Cape Province. In Zimbabwe breeding occurs throughout the year (Irwin 1981), but this contains records of *unitatis* on the plateau and *ampliformis* in the west, and the majority of records refers to *unitatis* whose breeding peaks August–December. In Namibia and northern Botswana (Zone 1), breeding was recorded March–October for *ampliformis*. Skinner (1995a) indicated peak egg-laying for this race in May.

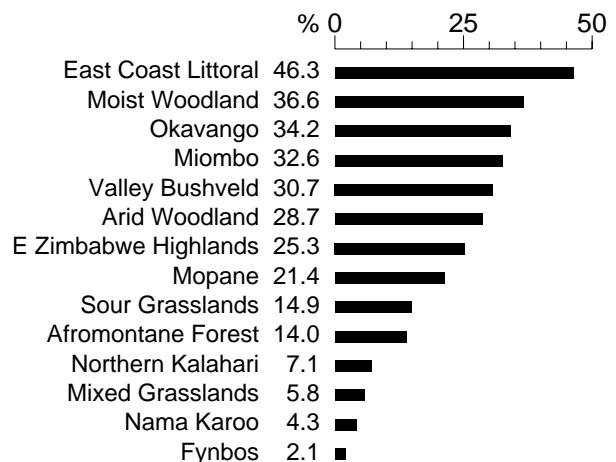
Interspecific relationships: It often occurs alongside the Greater Striped Swallow but usually one species tends to be much more common than the other in areas of overlap. Because both of these species use man-made structures for breeding, they may compete for nest sites and the smaller Lesser Striped Swallow may be at a disadvantage in such situations. There could also be competition with the much larger Redbreasted Swallow *H. semirufa* for nest sites, but that species usually nests in more constricted sites than the two striped swallows. Lesser Striped Swallow nests are regularly usurped by Whiterumped Swifts *Apus caffer* (Fry *et al.* 1988).

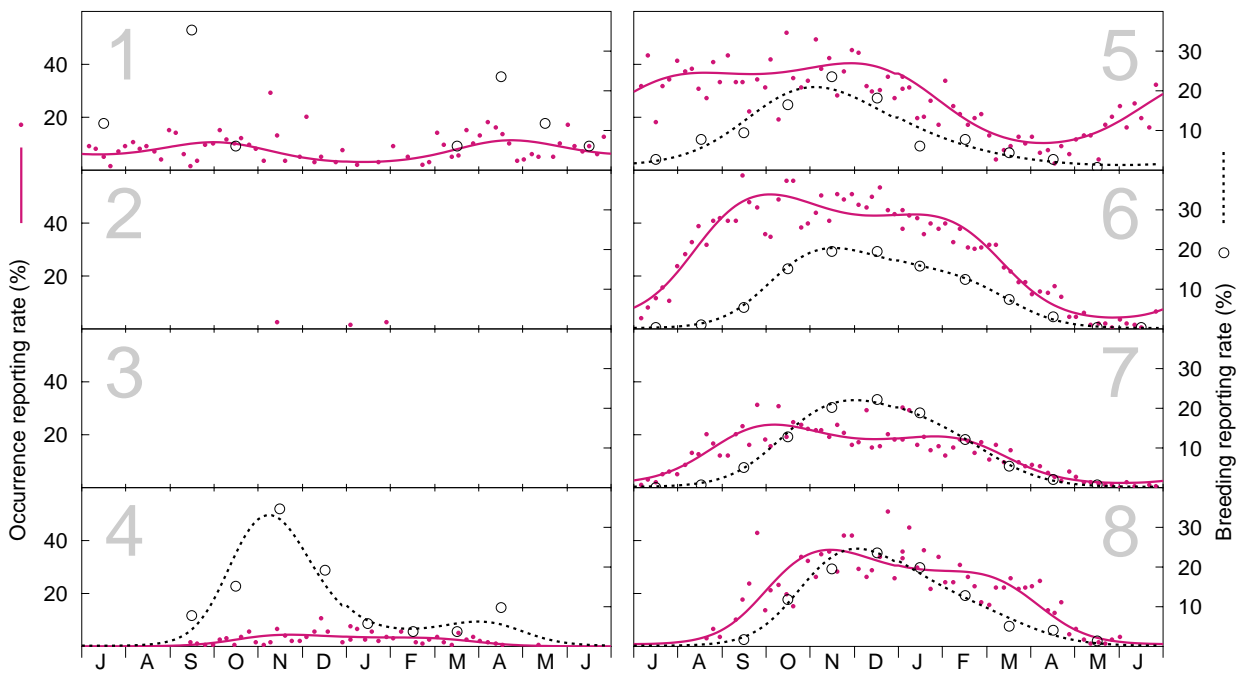
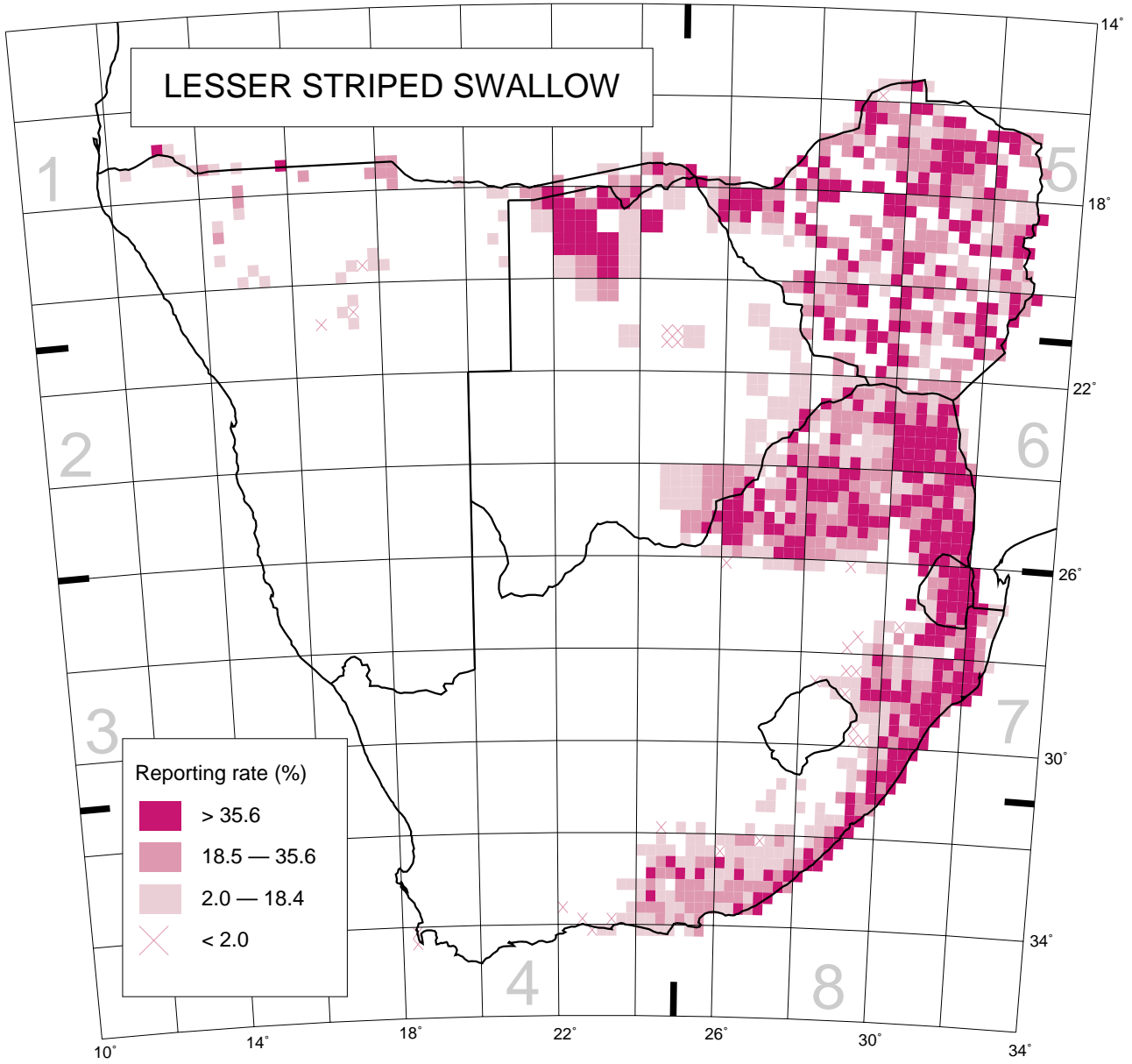
Historical distribution and conservation: Like many Hirundinidae, this species has benefited from nesting in man-made structures and has probably increased, at least in density, in many areas owing to this habit.

R.A. Earlé and M. Herremans

Recorded in 1243 grid cells, 27.4%
Total number of records: 23 708
Mean reporting rate for range: 30.0%

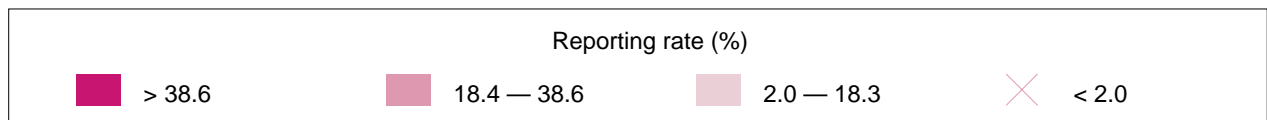
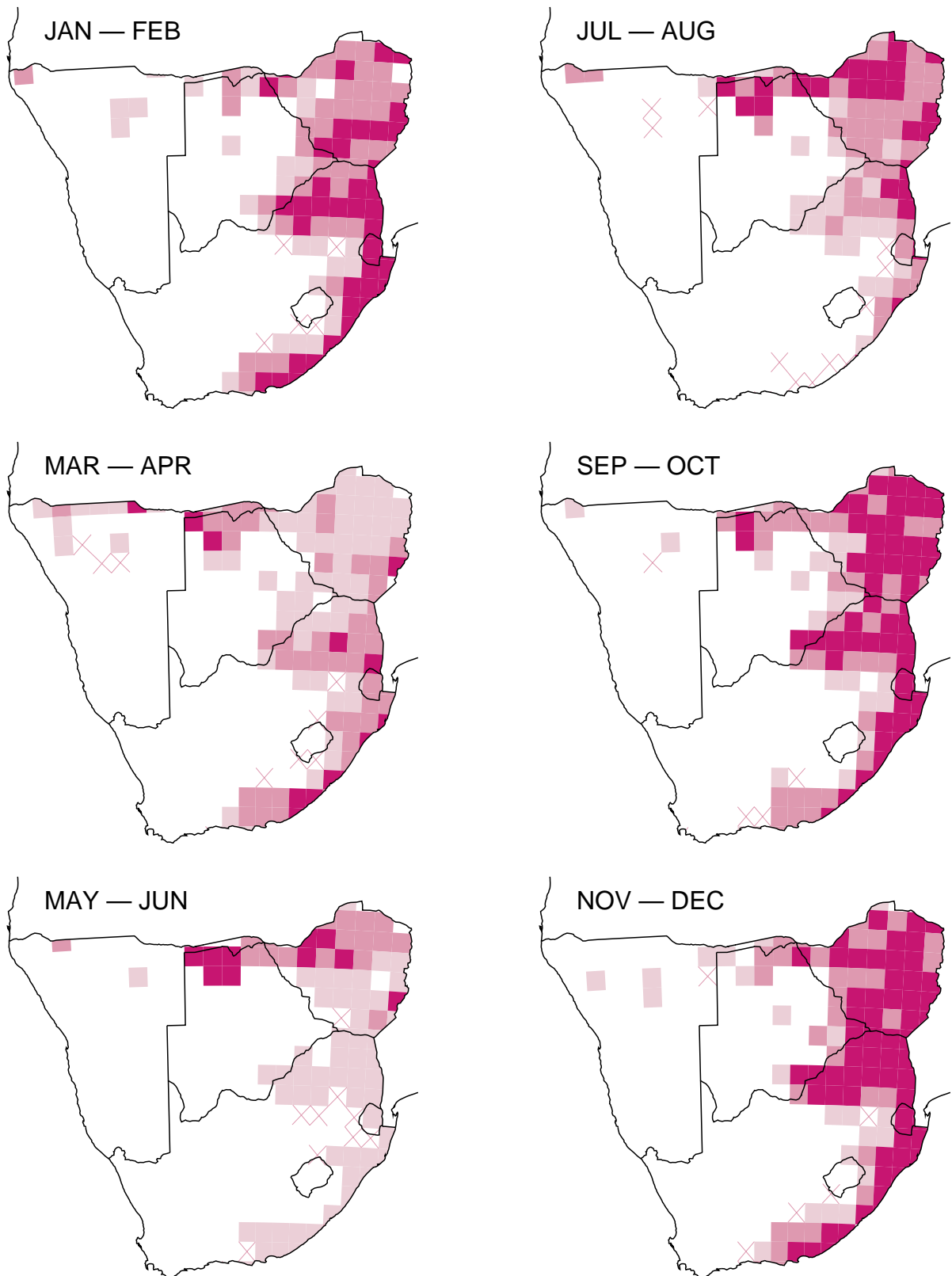
Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 262, 3, 0, 151, 2453, 3334, 2553, 988; Breeding: 17, 0, 0, 52, 115, 475, 418, 225.

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Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.