

## Brownthroated Martin

### Afrikaanse Oewerswael

#### *Riparia paludicola*

The Brownthroated Martin is widespread throughout the moister eastern and southern parts of South Africa but is less common in the woodland regions in the Transvaal and Zimbabwe. It is uncommon or absent in large parts of the more arid regions but is abundant along the Orange and Vaal rivers. It is also common in the wetland areas of northern Botswana and the Caprivi Strip in Namibia. It is locally abundant in suitable habitat throughout its range. It is particularly widespread and abundant in the southwestern Cape Province. This swallow has an extensive breeding range throughout Africa and Madagascar, through southern Asia and as far east as Taiwan and the Philippines (Turner & Rose 1989).

It is a conspicuous species, owing to its colonial breeding habits and occurrence in flocks sometimes numbering in the hundreds. It is unlikely to be confused with other similar species, although the all-brown morph can be mistaken for the Rock Martin *Hirundo fuligula*.

**Habitat:** It is usually associated with water, occurring near streams, large rivers, dams, estuaries, sewage works and other wetlands. It also regularly forages some distance from water over dryland habitats, including desert scrub. It occurs over a wide altitudinal range and appears to prefer wetlands in relatively open habitats.

**Movements:** It is present throughout its range at all times of year, but its local occurrence depends on the availability of suitable wetland habitats and nesting sites. In all areas, reporting rates were highest in August–September. In the Transvaal, it has been reported as occurring throughout the year on the highveld, but mainly as a winter visitor to the bushveld and lowveld (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In Swaziland it is mainly a winter visitor. It apparently decreases in numbers in parts of the Free State in the winter (Tree & Earlé 1984). Two populations are present on the Mashonaland Plateau in Zimbabwe, one possibly from the larger lowveld rivers, such as the Zambezi, during summer, and another, possibly from South Africa, during winter (Tree & Earlé 1984). Massive passage has been reported from northern Botswana in June (Randall 1994b). The three longest-distance

ringing recoveries indicate movements of 92 and 181 km from a ringing site in the southwestern Cape Province (Tree & Earlé 1984), and 180 km from Pietermaritzburg (2930CB) in winter to Richards Bay (2832CC) in summer (SAFRING). Its movement patterns require further investigation. Seasonal changes in reporting rates may be influenced by the dispersal of birds from breeding colonies outside the breeding season.

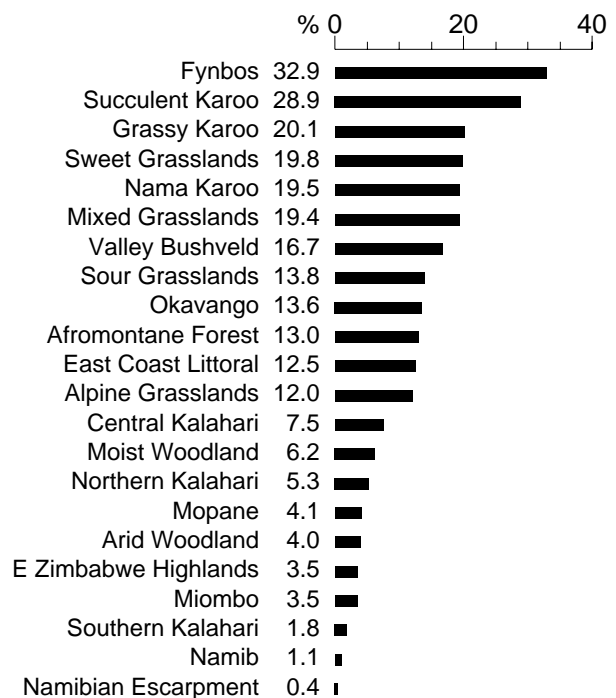
**Breeding:** The season varies regionally, probably depending on a combination of rainfall, abundance of food and availability and risk of its sandbank nests being flooded (Turner & Rose 1989). In the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4) breeding occurs mostly after the winter-rainfall season, with a September–December peak, although there are records for most months of the year. In the eastern Cape Province (Zone 8) the breeding peak is later, November–January. In the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal (Zone 7), and Transvaal (Zone 6), breeding was recorded over a longer period with more records in the drier winter and spring. A winter and spring (June–September) egg-laying peak is reported for Zimbabwe and the Transvaal (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). The small number of records from Zones 1 and 5 in the far north also came from the winter/spring period. Burrow-nesting habits render the confirmation of active breeding difficult, and some of the atlas data may not have been reliable for this reason.

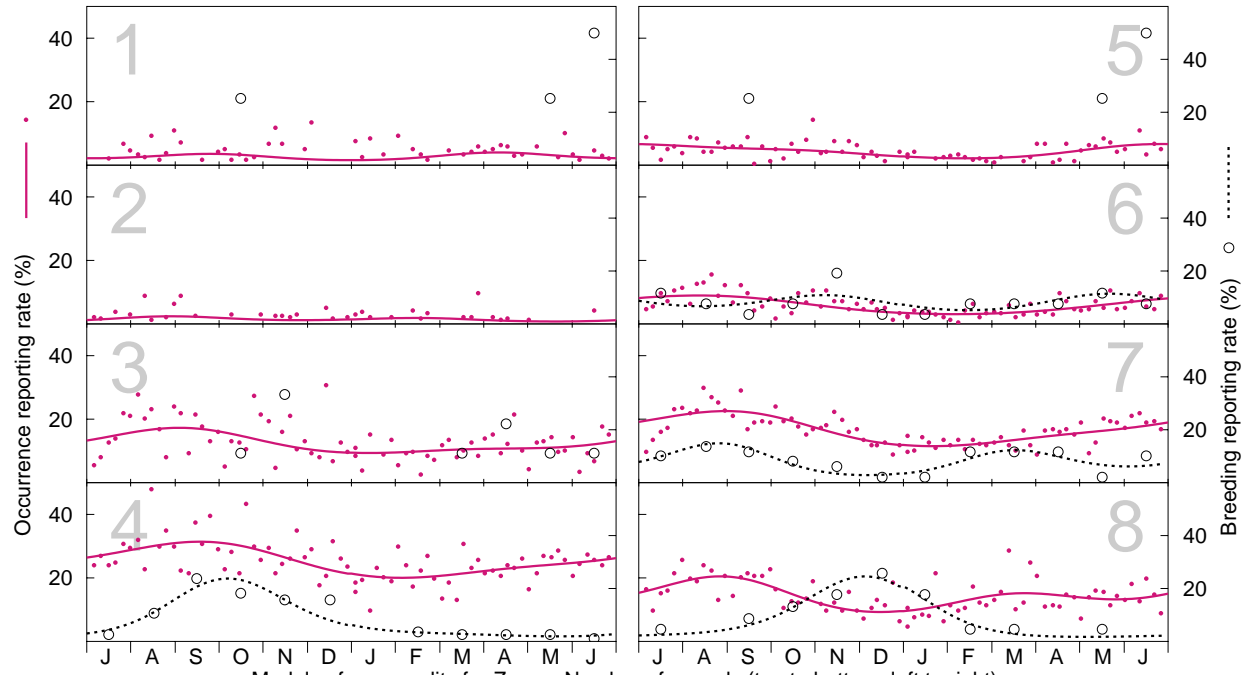
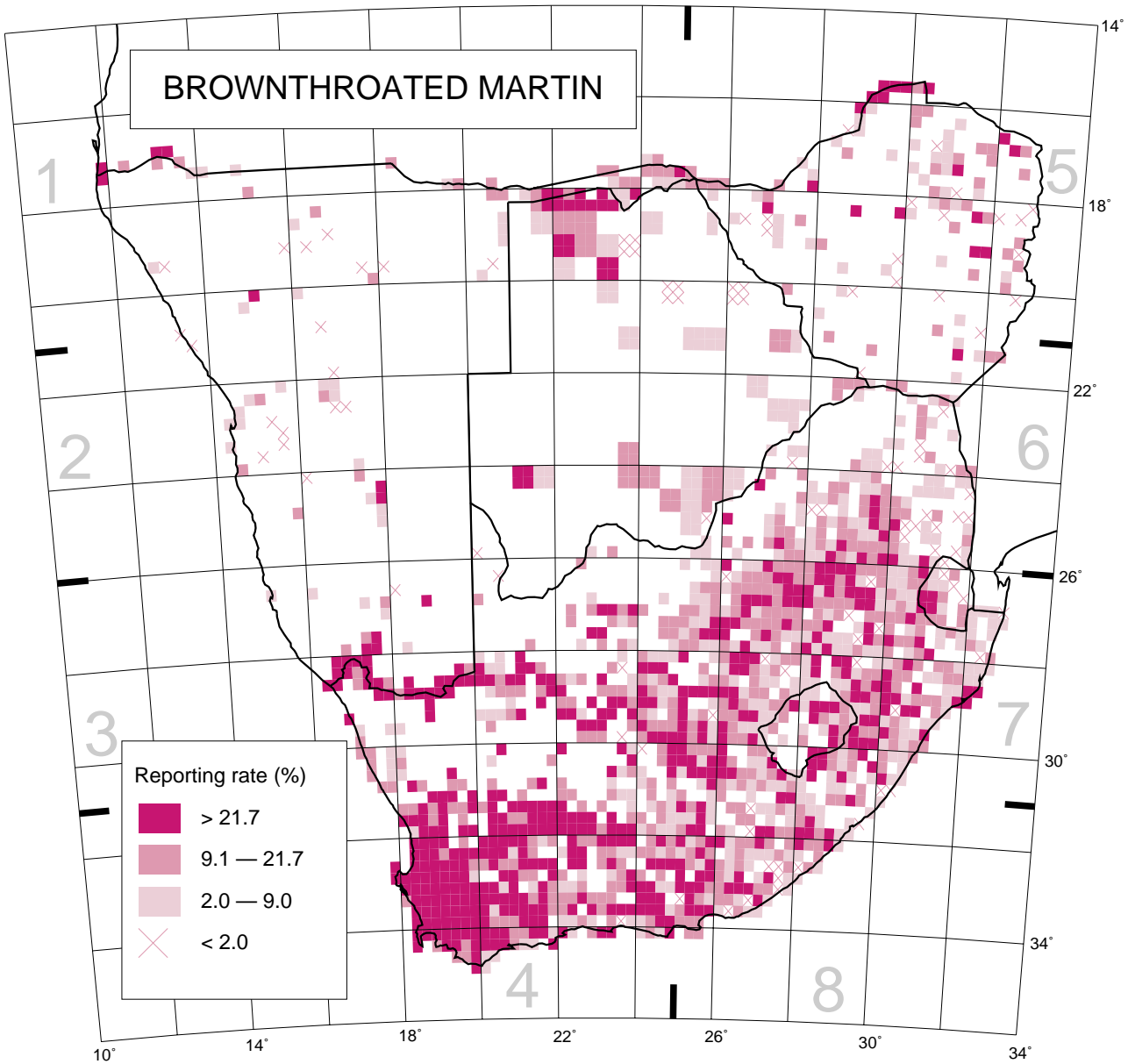
**Historical distribution and conservation:** It may have benefited from erosion, road cuttings and sandpits, which have provided new breeding sites. Artificial sites such as drainage pipes have also been used (Tree & Earlé 1984) but are probably of limited value. The widespread manipulation of natural wetlands by humans is likely to have had significant effects: artificial impoundments, wetland drainage, and the regulation of river flow are all likely to have had substantially positive or negative impacts on local populations.

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Recorded in 1649 grid cells, 36.3%  
Total number of records: 21 040  
Mean reporting rate for range: 18.2%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right): Occurrence: 97, 53, 694, 2214, 387, 658, 3219, 784; Breeding: 4, 0, 9, 104, 4, 26, 51, 23.