

## Black Sawwing Swallow

### Swartsaagvlerkswael

#### *Psalidoprocne holomelas*

Clancey (1980b) is followed here in regarding this swallow as a species separate from the Eastern Sawwing Swallow *P. orientalis* with which it is merged by some authors (e.g. Turner & Rose 1989; Keith *et al.* 1992). The Black Sawwing Swallow occurs along the southern and eastern coasts of South Africa and along the escarpment from KwaZulu-Natal northwards through Swaziland and the eastern Transvaal. An isolated population, of only a few hundred individuals (Irwin 1981), occurs in southeastern Zimbabwe. Elsewhere it occurs in southern Mozambique south of the Save River and has been recorded as a vagrant in southern Malawi and far northern Botswana in winter (Hanmer 1980; Newman 1989). It is therefore endemic to southern Africa, although this was overlooked by Clancey (1986a). Its range coincides largely with those parts of the subcontinent that receive the highest rainfall.

Black Sawwing Swallows can be confused with young Eastern Sawwing Swallows, which do not have the obvious white underwing coverts of the adults. The accepted

vagrant record of a Black Sawwing Swallow (Bushell & Bushell 1989) from northern Botswana is almost certainly in error for Eastern Sawwing Swallow. There are records from the Caprivi Strip of the Eastern Sawwing Swallow, the western race *P. o. reichenowi* of which occurs just north of the atlas region in southern Zambia (Turner & Rose 1989). Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea* is also superficially similar to the Black Sawwing Swallow. It is usually encountered in pairs or small flocks of up to about 20 birds.

**Habitat:** The typical habitat is clearings in, and edges of, forest, tall dense woodland, thick bush and plantations of alien trees, especially close to watercourses. Breeding takes place in the banks of watercourses and road cuttings.

**Movements:** The seasonality maps and models show clear evidence of movement out of most of the atlas area during the winter. Reporting rates along the southern and southeastern coasts, the interior of KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland, the Transvaal and Zimbabwe are all markedly lower in the winter, although some birds remain in these areas throughout the year (Berruti *et al.* 1994). Only along the KwaZulu-Natal coast do reporting rates remain relatively unchanged throughout the year. Migrating birds appear to travel to southern Mozambique during the winter (Benson 1982b). In Zimbabwe, an apparent eastward movement to the Mozambique border, and probably beyond, is evident in the seasonality maps.

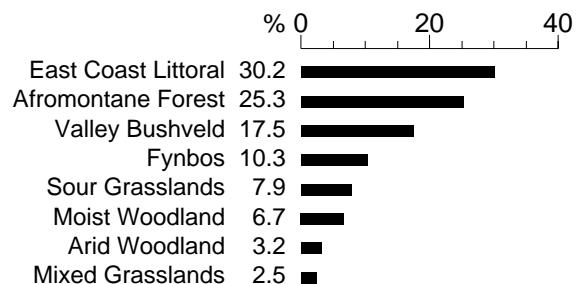
**Breeding:** Breeding was recorded during spring and summer (mainly August–March), possibly peaking earlier in the southwestern Cape Province (Zone 4; October–January).

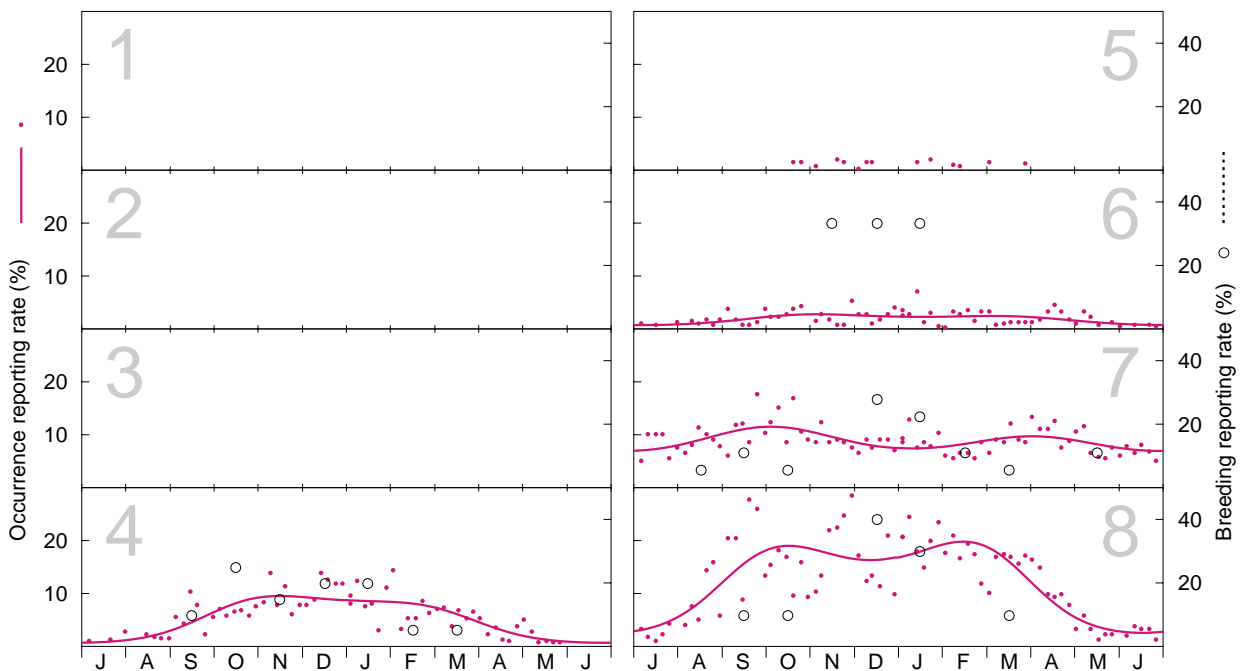
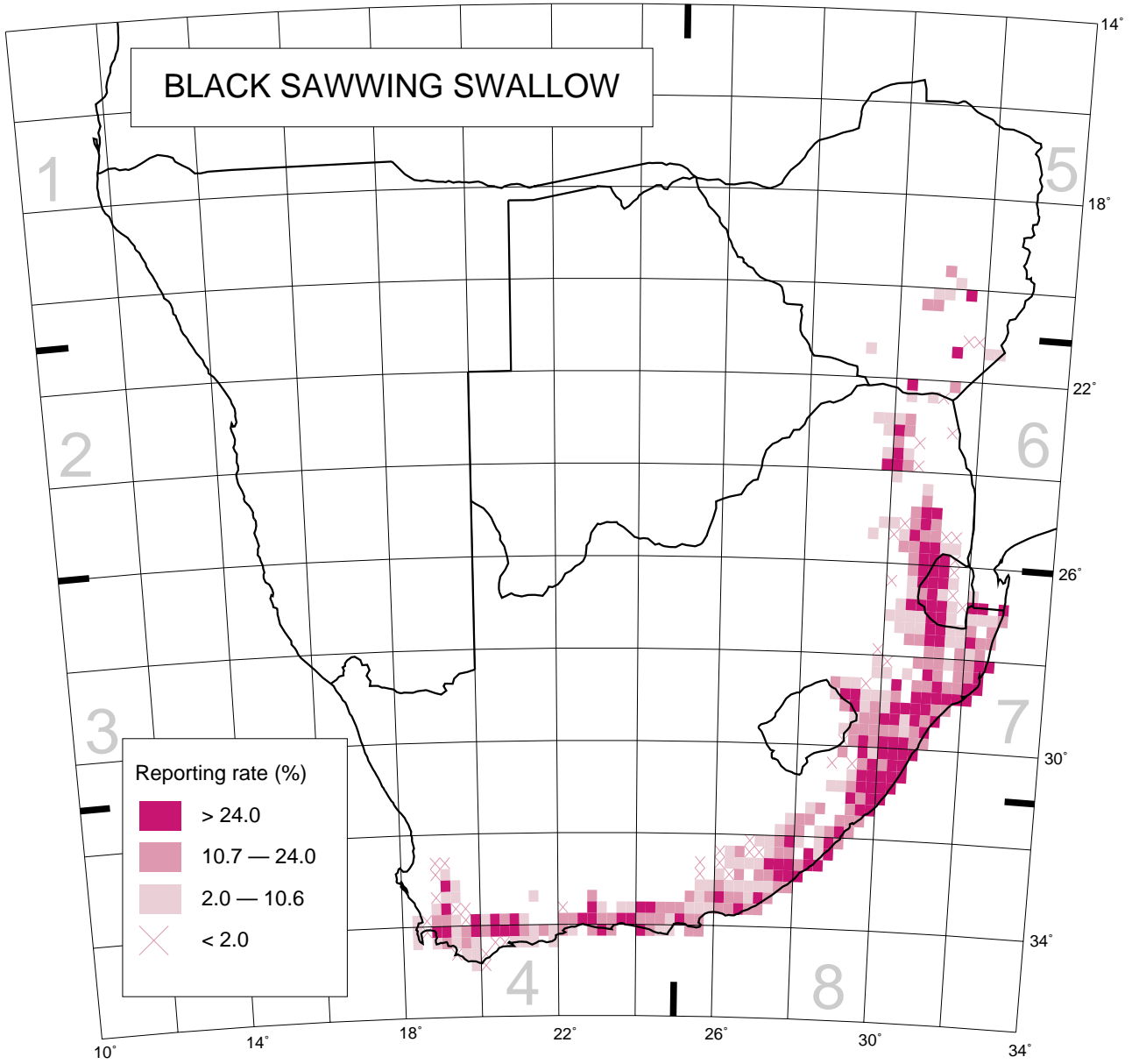
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The Black Sawwing Swallow is likely to have been affected by commercial forestry activities. Forestry road cuttings provide suitable nesting sites. Although it occasionally occurs in alien plantations, it appears to prefer natural habitats and may have suffered from the replacement of natural forests and woodlands by plantations. The clearing of areas during forestry activities, however, may open up a new habitat for this bird, as it appears to be attracted to recently felled plantations (Clancey 1969b).

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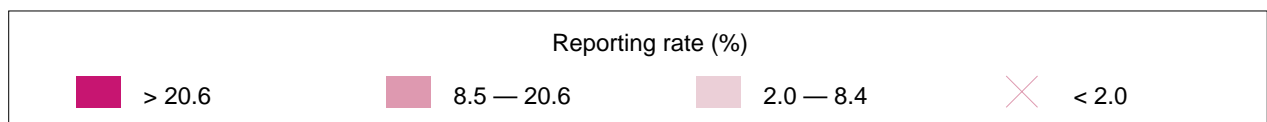
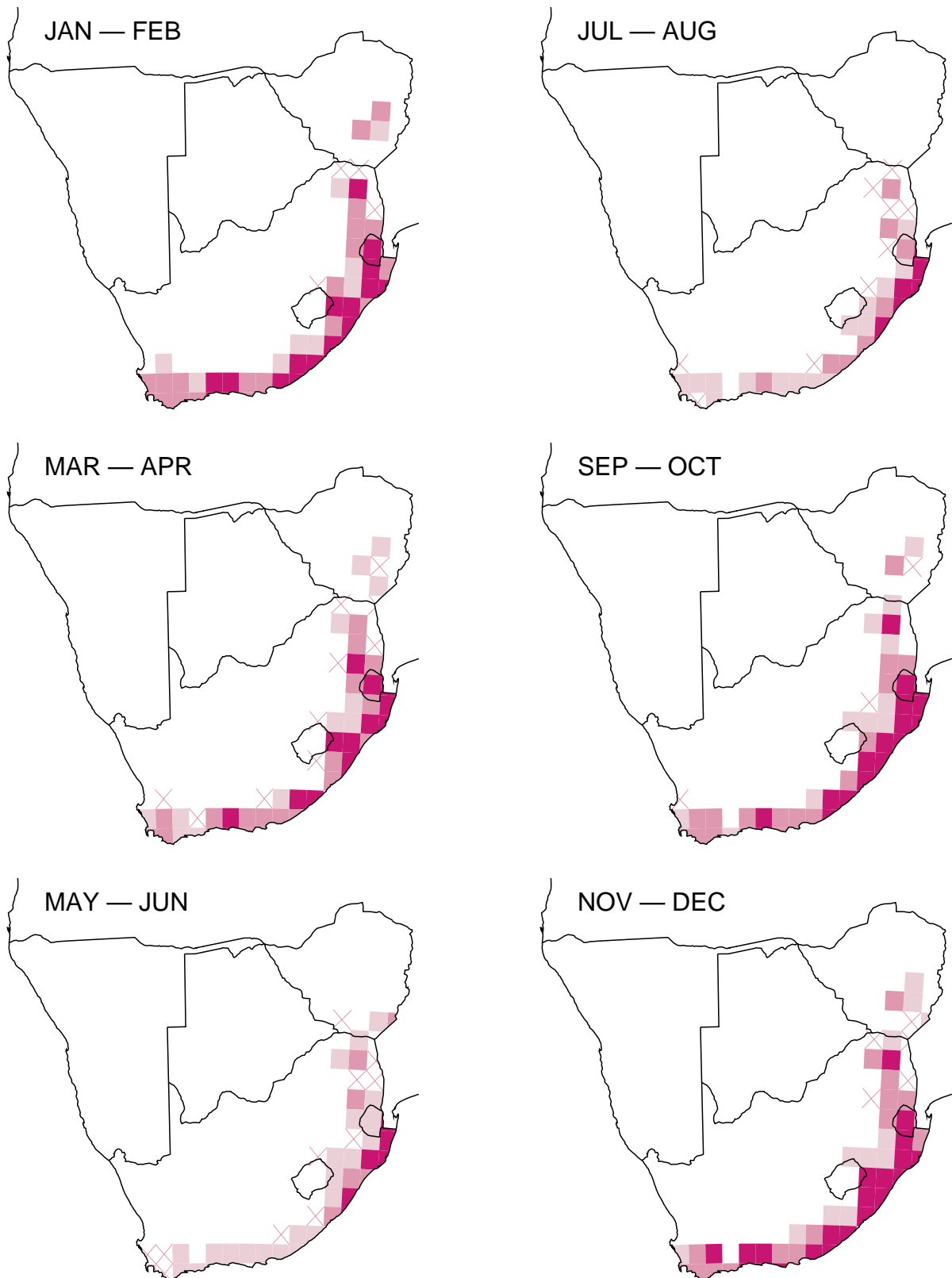
Recorded in 417 grid cells, 9.2%  
Total number of records: 9398  
Mean reporting rate for range: 18.7%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





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Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.