

Whitethroat

Witkeelsanger

Sylvia communis

This Palearctic migrant is a visitor to the dry savannas of sub-Saharan Africa (Curry-Lindahl 1981; Pearson & Lack 1992). It prefers dense shrubland and the understorey of woodland in the Kalahari and adjacent biomes north of 28°S. In the Kalahari it is particularly attracted to stands with small berries, such as *Grewia* spp. Three subspecies occur, but overlap widely in the region (Clancey 1980b; Maclean 1993b). The Whitethroat is solitary and usually skulks low in dense thickets where it is easily overlooked, but it is locally common. During late summer 1992 it was encountered in Botswana in six out of 16 transect-counts in habitats with shrubs or woodland, with a maximal density of 1 bird/0.9 ha in dense, secondary riverine shrub along the Chobe River in early March (Herremans 1993c).

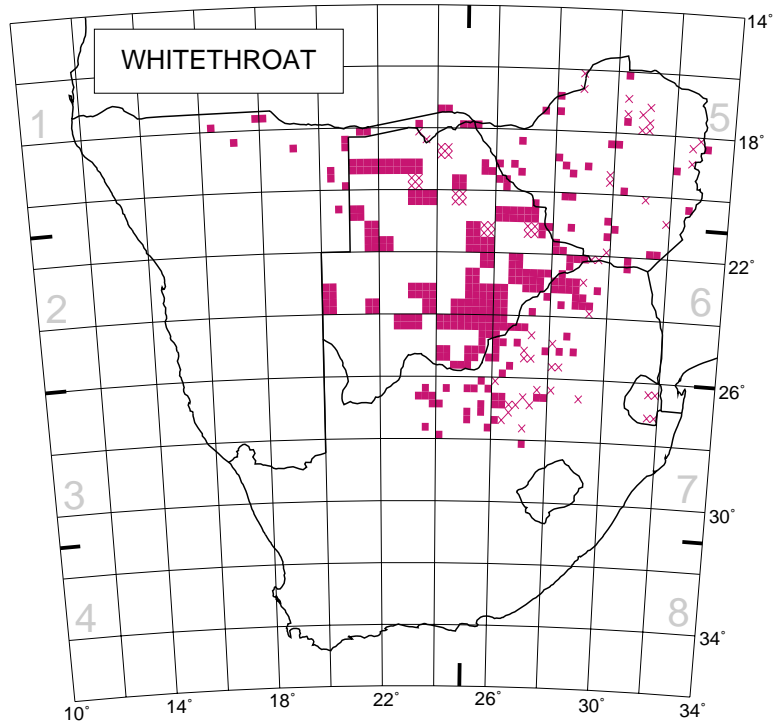
It arrives mid-November to late December (Taylor 1979; Herremans *et al.* 1992; Herremans 1994d). Site fidelity has been demonstrated (Raijmakers & Raijmakers 1994), but there are no ring recoveries to indicate provenance (Dowsett *et al.* 1988; SAFRING). Departure is in March–April.

It generally prefers drier habitat with denser shrub vegetation than the Garden Warbler *S. borin*, and is more common than the Garden Warbler in the Kalahari and adjacent more arid areas (Herremans 1993c), but less common in Miombo and on higher ground. The two species are not mutually exclusive; high densities of both were found in *Baikiaea* woodland in northern Botswana (Herremans 1993c, 1994e). The Whitethroat is virtually absent from the more humid northeastern part of southern Africa (except on passage).

Palearctic warblers are far outnumbered by resident Sylviidae warblers in southern Africa (Herremans 1993c). The Titbabbler *Parisoma subcaeruleum* and the Barred Warbler *Calamonastes fasciolatus* are probably ecologically closest to the Whitethroat, but both tend to be *Acacia* specialists and are typically bushveld-canopy feeders in summer.

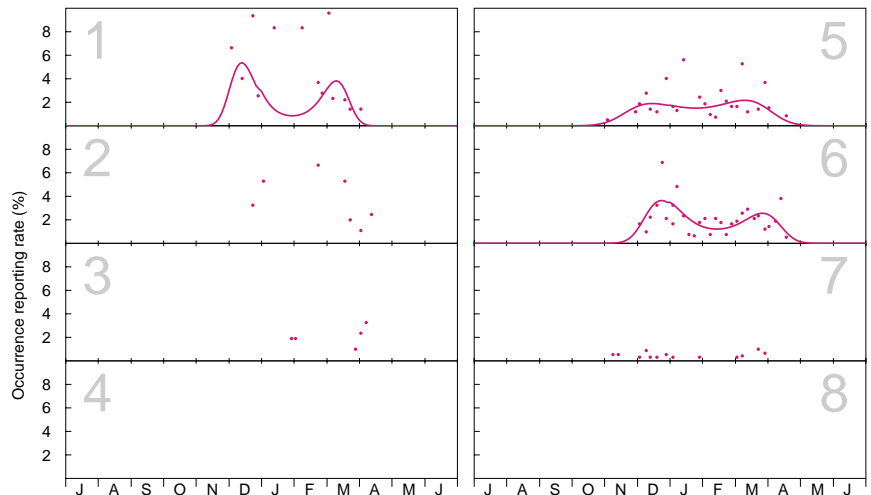
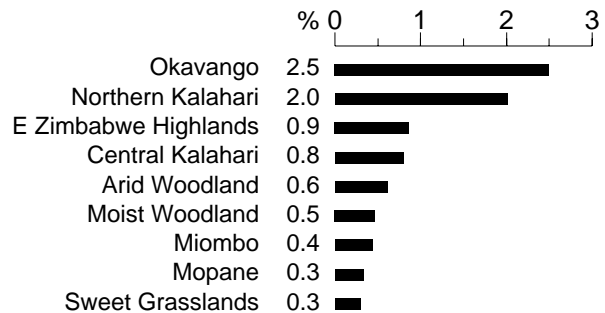
It declined dramatically in western and central Europe (Cramp *et al.* 1992) as a result of droughts in the Sahel (Winstanley *et al.* 1974), but there is no information on whether drought in the Kalahari may also affect it. Contrary to the accompanying map, it was found concentrated in the moister broadleaved woodlands at the periphery of the Kalahari during a drought year (Herremans 1993c), suggesting both sensitivity and flexibility. The Whitethroat does not seem to be under any particular threat in the region.

M. Herremans



Recorded in 384 grid cells, 8.5%
 Total number of records: 381
 Mean reporting rate for range: 2.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 26, 19, 9, 0, 59, 100, 18, 0.