

Swee Waxbill

Suidelike Swie

Estrilda melanotis

The Swee Waxbill is a species of the southern Afromontane and coastal belt, replacing the East African Swee *E. quarantina* which ranges from Eritrea and Ethiopia, through the associated highlands of the Rift Valley, southwards to Malawi and the eastern Zimbabwe highlands. It is almost endemic to the highlands and southeastern coastal plain of South Africa, Swaziland and Lesotho, as well as the adjacent Sul do Save, Mozambique (Goodwin 1982).

It is possibly conspecific with the East African Swee and with the Angolan form, *E. m. bocagei*. However, Pajain (in Goodwin 1982) found that captive birds of these three forms showed no sexual interest in each other and behaved as distinct species. The disjunct population, *bocagei*, occurs on the Angolan central plateau (Hall & Moreau 1970; Goodwin 1982). Clancey (1980b) placed this form also in Owambo in northern Namibia, but it was not recorded there during the atlas period.

Confusion between Swee Waxbills and East African Swees could occur in eastern Zimbabwe where their ranges approach.

Habitat: It is emphatically a bird of habitat edges and transition zones, occurring at the edges of Afromontane or coastal forest, thick riverine scrub, grassy clearings in moist woodland and gardens. The vegetation analysis indicates the biomes within which it finds these ecotones near forest and well-developed woody vegetation. For example, in Fynbos it is found near wooded kloofs, and it is common but localized in brushy undergrowth and grassy tracks amidst coastal dune scrub at the edges of the Wilderness Lakes (3322DC) in the southern Cape Province.

Movements: There is no evidence for large-scale seasonal movements in the atlas models. It appears to be highly mobile and some altitudinal movements may occur in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg (Maclean 1993b).

Breeding: Breeding evidence was recorded mainly October–May. Egg-laying data span October–April (Winterbottom 1968a; Dean 1971; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Interspecific relationships: Swee Waxbills are not usually parasitized by any whydah, but a single case of para-

sitism by the Pintailed Whydah *Vidua macroura* has been documented (Martin 1983a).

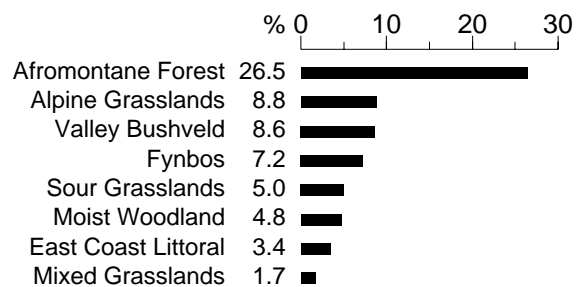
Historical distribution and conservation: Although it was recorded only from the Matobo area (2028BD) in Zimbabwe during the atlas period (not shown), Ginn *et al.* (1989) observed an apparently newly established small population at Great Zimbabwe (2030BD) in the early 1970s, and Swee Waxbills were recorded at Nyanga (1832BC) in the eastern Zimbabwe highlands in the late 1980s (Hustler 1989a; Sheehan & Burrell 1989). Irwin (1981) indicated that it occurred in the vicinity of Great Zimbabwe and on Mount Buhwa (2030AC), and must be rare or vagrant in the Matobos. It was only sparsely recorded from the Transkei and from part of central KwaZulu-Natal where the range appears to be fragmented; this may be the result of habitat transformation.

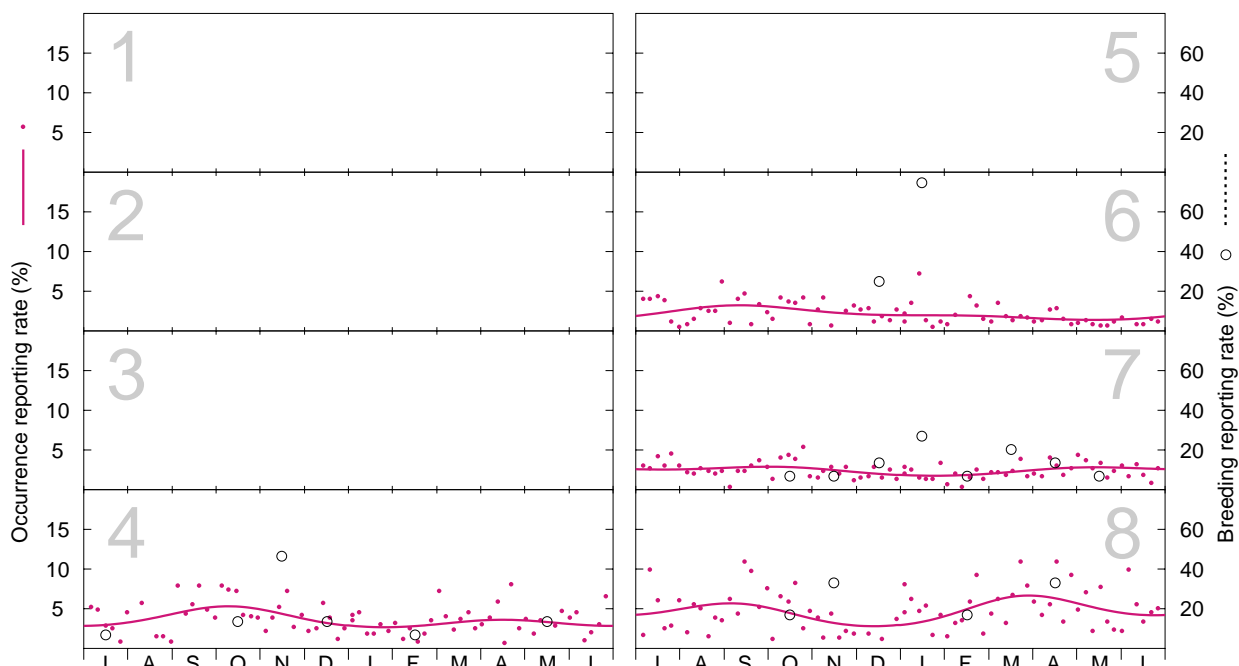
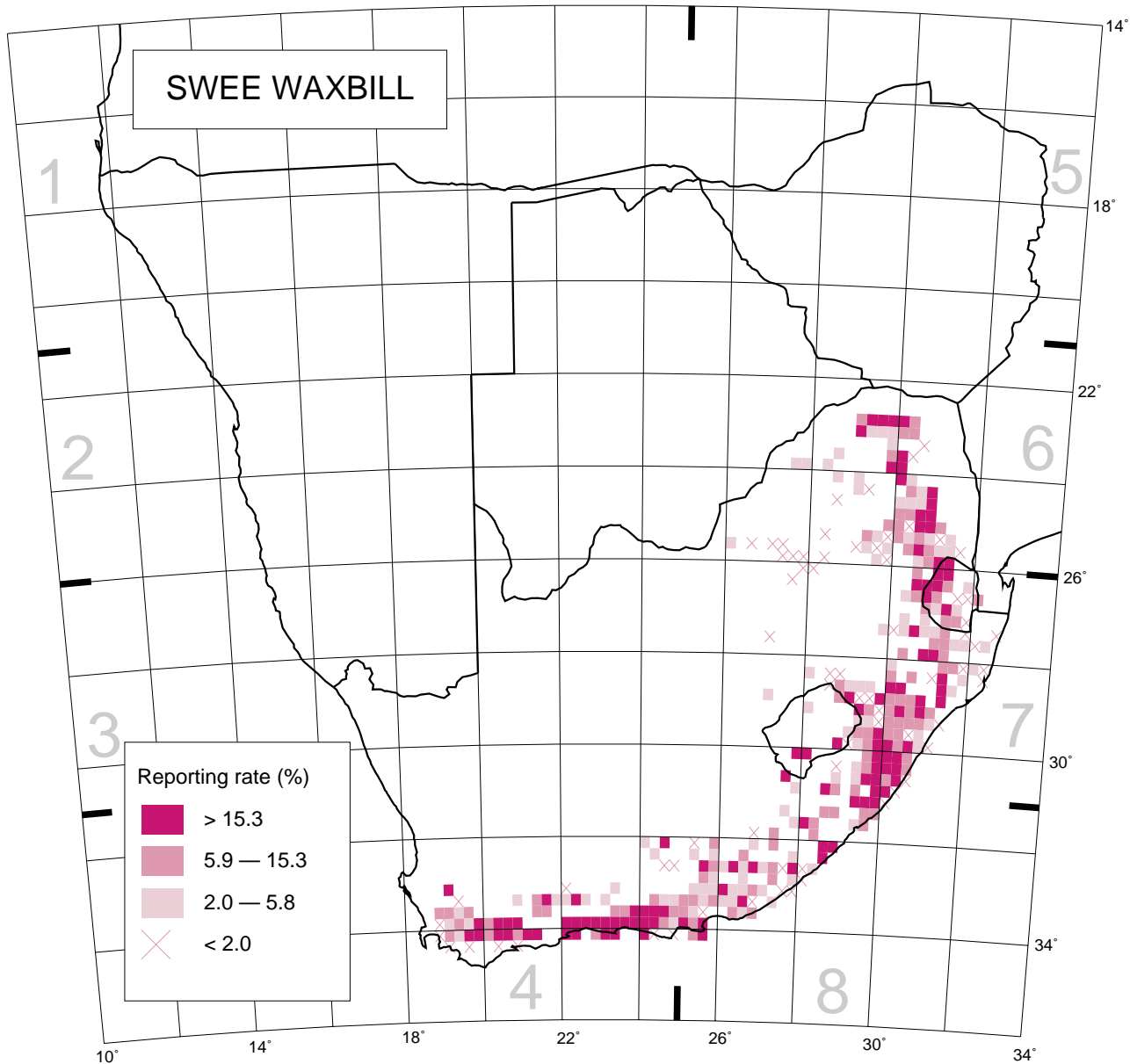
The Swee Waxbill is not regarded as threatened, but it is potentially imperilled by habitat destruction for human settlement and agriculture. Illegal capture for the cage-bird trade may also locally affect populations.

P. Barnard and M. Herremans

Recorded in 379 grid cells, 8.4%
Total number of records: 4609
Mean reporting rate for range: 9.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 0, 0, 0, 317, 0, 243, 477, 258; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 15, 0, 4, 15, 6.