Turnstone

Steenloper

Arenaria interpres

The Turnstone is a circumpolar breeder in arctic tundra. There are two subspecies (Hayman *et al.* 1986). Race *A. i. morinella* breeds in Alaska and southeastern Canada and migrates to central and South America and to the islands of the Pacific Ocean. The nominate race has four distinct populations. Birds breeding in northeastern Canada and Greenland migrate through Iceland to spend the northern winter in western Europe with some going to western Africa; those breeding in Fennoscandia and western Russia migrate through western Europe to western Africa; the central Siberian population migrates through the Mediterranean and Black seas to southern Africa (Summers *et al.* 1989), while Turnstones breeding in eastern Siberia migrate to Australasia.

The total size of the three populations which migrate to destinations along the eastern Atlantic flyway (western Europe, and western and southern Africa) has been estimated to be 99 000 birds (Rose & Scott 1994), with little information about the sizes of the other populations. About 34 000 use the shoreline of Namibia and South Africa (Summers *et al.* 1987a). Thus 34% of the eastern Atlantic flyway population migrates to southern Africa. The largest concentration at a coastal wetland is at Langebaan Lagoon (3318AA) in the West Coast National Park where the median midsummer count over 12 years was 1976 birds (Underhill 1987a).

Amongst shorebird species it is unmistakable and misidentification is unlikely.

Habitat: In southern Africa it is primarily coastal, but there are sightings at even the smallest wetlands in the interior. Small numbers spend the summer in the interior, particularly at saltpans, but it occurs at highest densities along sheltered rocky shores, mixed rocky and sandy shores and on shorelines with washed-up kelp (e.g. Summers *et al.* 1976; Underhill & Whitelaw 1977; Underhill *et al.* 1980). It is also found on sandflats and mudflats of tidal estuaries where it feeds among seaweeds and *Zostera.* It is abundant on the rocky offshore islands of southern Africa, especially those with large seabird colonies, such as Dassen Island (3318AC) and Bird Island (3326CD) (Underhill 1992). On the offshore islands, guano and bird carcasses attract an abundance of invertebrates on which it forages.

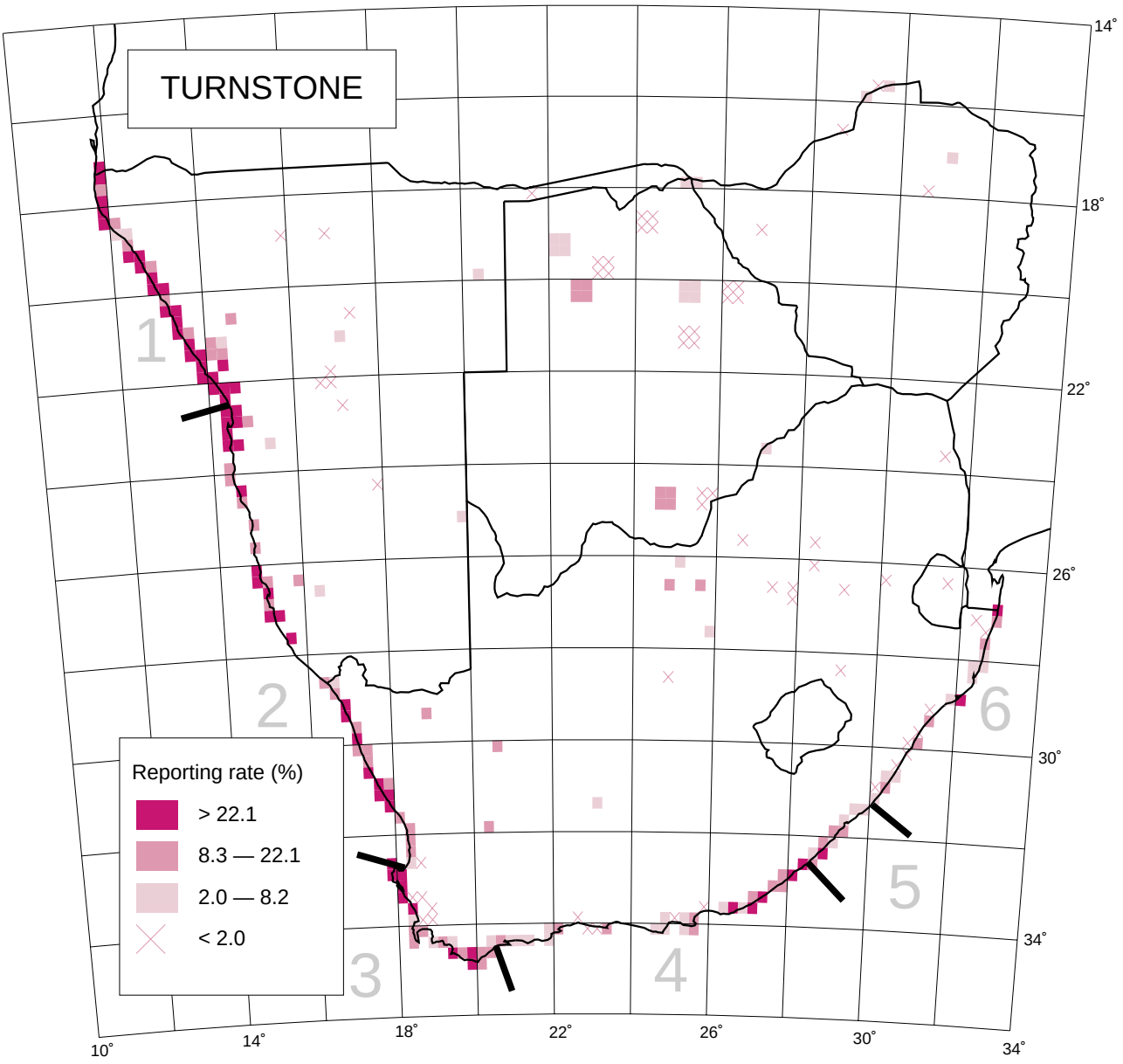
Movements: The pattern of ring recoveries, and observations of birds on passage, suggest that northward migration to the Siberian breeding grounds is mainly along the west coast of Africa, across the Sahara to the Mediterranean Sea. Southwards migration takes place through the Black and Caspian sea regions August–September (Summers *et al.* 1989). Records at wetlands in the interior are especially during arrival passage in the austral spring and consist mainly of first-year birds; fewer birds are recorded inland during departure in autumn (Taylor 1979; Dowsett 1980a; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Herremans 1994d). Over the period 1972–78, few Turnstones passed through Zambia in the springs of 1974 and 1977 (Dowsett 1980a) – these were years of breeding failure in Siberia (Summers & Underhill 1987).

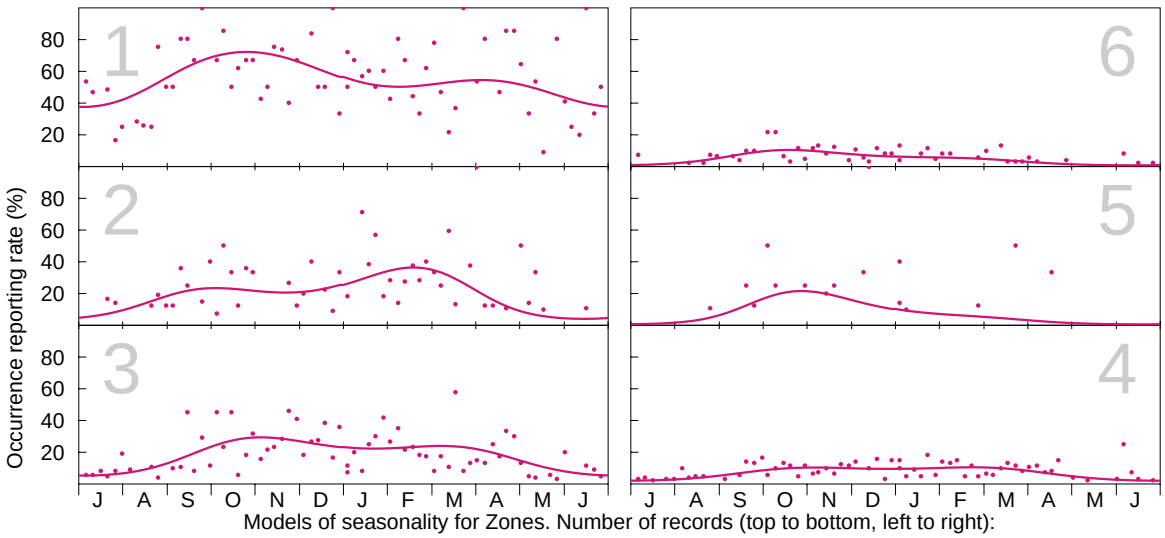
Because of large numbers staying over in the region during the austral winter, the models do not show the timing of arrival and departure clearly. Monthly count data indicate that arrival occurs from September, and departure mostly in April (Summers *et al.* 1989). The bimodal model for the northern Namibian coast is consistent with the observations of Tarr & Tarr (1987) who showed that, at Möwe Bay (1912BC), peak densities occurred during the migration periods: September–October and April–May.

Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence of changes either in distribution or in abundance during the 20th century. It adapts to moderate human use of the coastline, feeding close to fishermen and bait collectors. A by-product of the reserve status of most of the offshore islands where seabirds breed is the conservation of prime Turnstone habitat.

L.G. Underhill

Recorded in 245 grid cells, 5.4%
Total number of records: 3938
Mean reporting rate for range: 11.6%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 370, 116, 249, 190, 22, 115.