

## Little Swift

### Kleinwindswael

*Apus affinis*

This largely resident swift breeds from the Cape Province to Morocco, Turkmenistan, India and Sri Lanka, and is replaced to the east by a similar species, the House Swift *A. nipalensis*, which is often considered conspecific. The Little Swift occurs throughout southern Africa and is expanding its local range and populations within the region. Penry (1994) indicated that its distribution in Botswana is restricted by the availability of surface water for drinking, and the map clearly shows its absence from the drier parts with the deepest permeable sandy soils in the Namib and the Kalahari. It does not necessarily avoid arid conditions, as it is a common inhabitant of arid regions in some parts of its range, cf. the ranges of the races *A. a. galilejensis* in the Middle East and of *theresae* in southwestern Africa (Brooke 1971d).

It is probable that some atlas records are referable to the Horus Swift *A. horus*. This is not likely to have affected the mapping of this species, however.

**Habitat:** It forages in the air over all vegetation types, but prefers the more open grasslands and Karoo, except high-altitude alpine grasslands. It occurs regularly over water and drinks frequently (Penry 1994). It builds its nests, often in large colonies, under dry overhangs, originally on cliff faces but nowadays much more frequently on human constructions such as bridges, water towers, grain silos and buildings. Where available, multi-storey buildings are preferred to single-storey ones (Brooke 1963b, 1971g, 1974e).

**Movements:** There is evidence from atlas data for partial migration of populations, but the habit of nonbreeding Little Swifts foraging high in the winter skies, and only being visible while circling near nest sites for a few minutes in the morning and the evening (e.g. Ferguson 1955), is possibly a confounding factor. Some of the seasonality in the models may, therefore, be attributable to fluctuations in conspicuousness. I believe that breeding birds forage only within c. 20 km of a breeding site. It should be noted that the majority of records from northwestern Namibia (including the Skeleton Coast National Park), and from northcentral Botswana where the species does not breed (M. Herremans pers. comm.), are of nonbreeding birds from other parts of the range, presumably in southern Africa. It is a winter visitor to the Zambezi Valley (e.g. Tree 1987i).

**Breeding:** Egg-laying takes place September–April in the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and September–May with a November peak in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981). The atlas data confirm a long summer breeding season and perhaps suggest two breeding peaks in Zone 5. There are two breeding seasons in Gujarat, India (Naik & Naik 1965), and in Kenya there is also some suggestion of two breeding peaks associated with the two rainy seasons (Brown & Britton 1980).

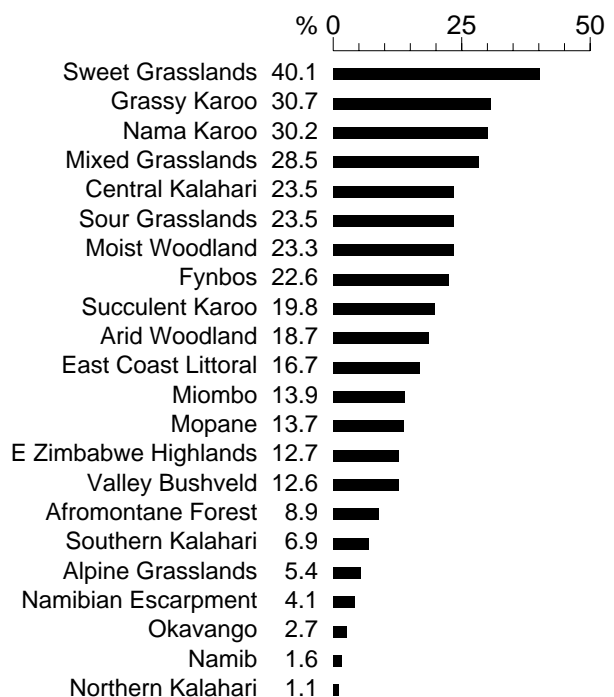
**Interspecific relationships:** It freely joins mixed-species foraging flocks of swifts and, less often, of swallows. A few nests are lost to usurpation by House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*. Substantial avoidance of high-altitude grasslands may be due to competition with the House Martin *Delichon urbica* of similar size, appearance and behaviour, which does frequent mountain tops. Complementarity with the Horus Swift at higher elevation in the Drakensberg is also striking.

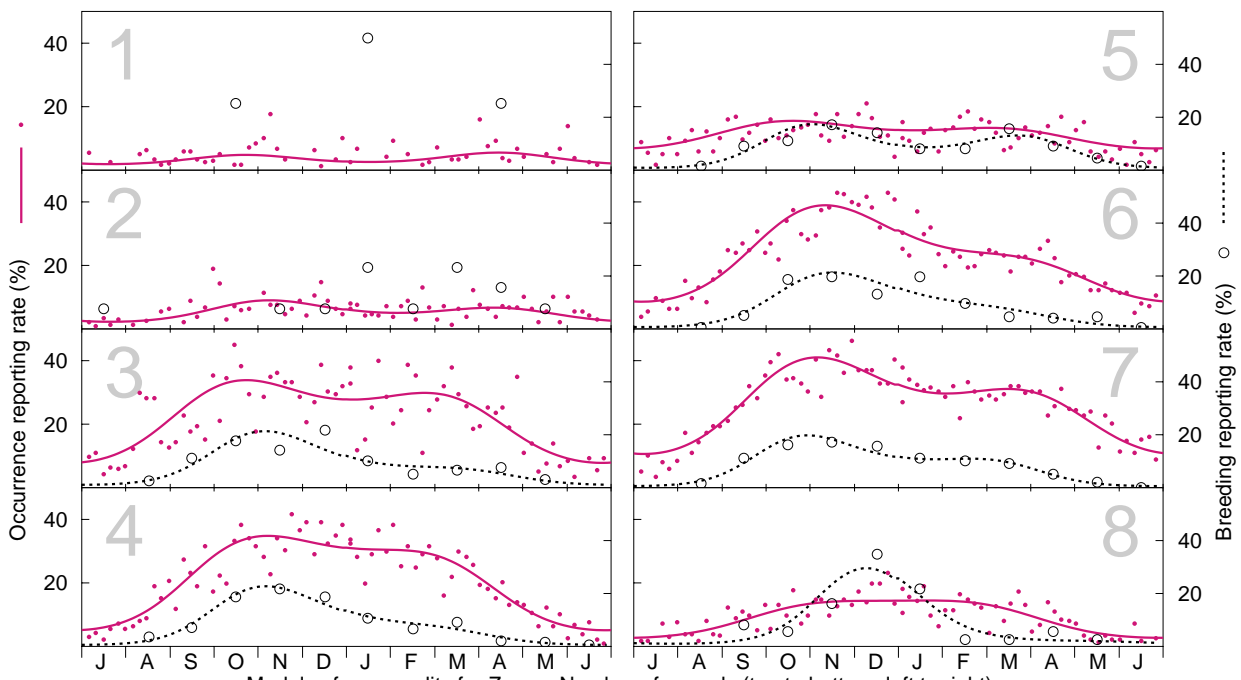
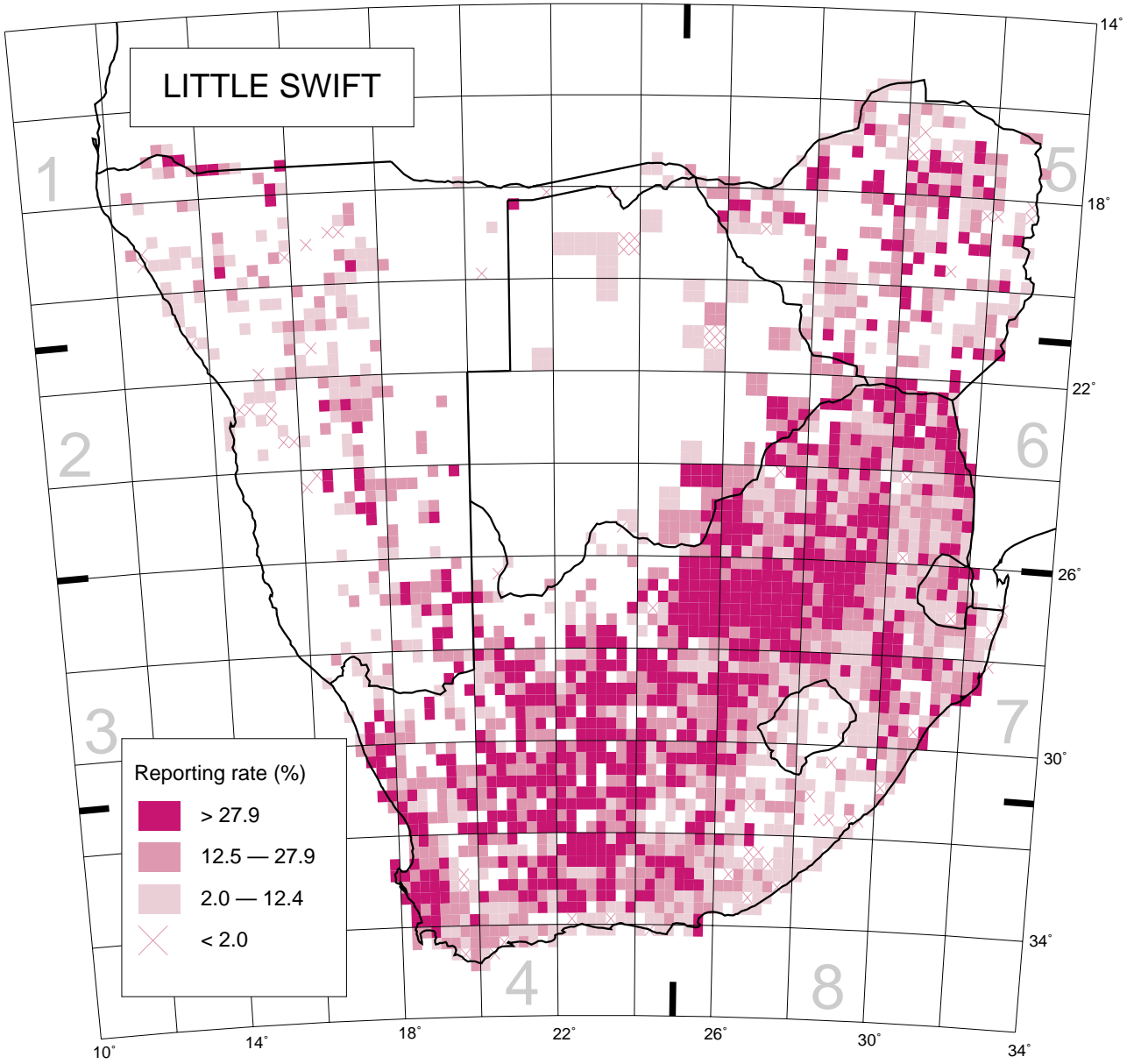
**Historical distribution and conservation:** The only 19th-century record from South Africa is of a cliff-breeding colony at Nelspoort (3223AA) on the border between the Great and Upper Karoo (Layard & Sharpe 1884; Stark & Sclater 1903). The population explosion in southern Africa started early in the 20th century (Hare 1915; Gill 1928; Brooke 1965a) and by the 1930s it could be described as 'now common in many parts, especially on the Karoo and Highveld' (Gill 1936). The atlas data show that the Little Swift's range expansion and increase in numbers have continued. A species which has made such extensive use of man-made constructions for breeding, and which now occurs in greater numbers than ever before, does not give cause for conservation concern.

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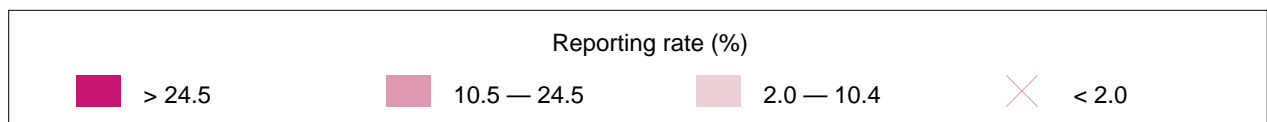
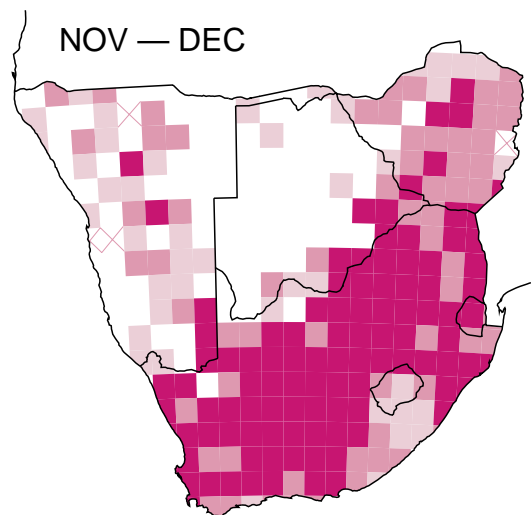
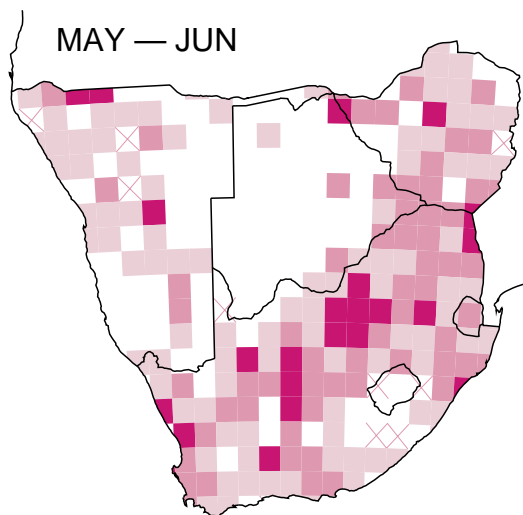
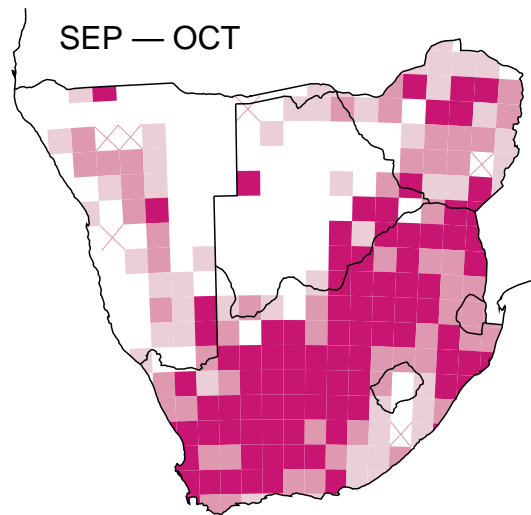
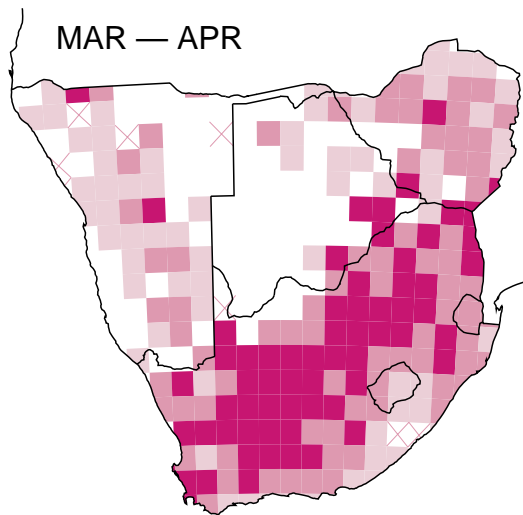
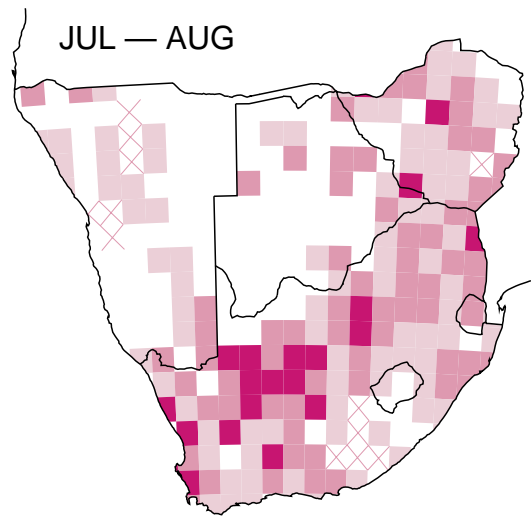
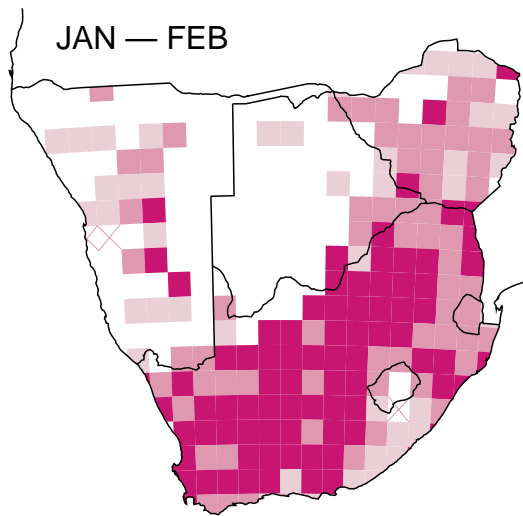
Recorded in 2220 grid cells, 48.9%  
Total number of records: 30 730  
Mean reporting rate for range: 23.4%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types





## LITTLE SWIFT



Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.