

Cape Wagtail

Gewone Kwikkie

Motacilla capensis

The Cape Wagtail is ubiquitous throughout Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa, apart from the Limpopo River catchment and parts of the northern Cape Province. It is scarce in the eastern Transvaal lowveld. The distribution in Zimbabwe is similar to that of the Longtailed Wagtail *M. clara*, but extends also along the Mashonaland Plateau. Its distribution in Namibia is patchy; in Botswana it is restricted to the Okavango Delta and the eastern hardveld. The isolated and distinct swamp-dwelling population in the Okavango, Caprivi and along the Zambezi River upstream from the Victoria Falls (1725DD) constitutes the race *M. c. simplicissima*, which is sometimes argued to be a separate species (Hustler 1993). From Port Nolloth (2916BB) northwards along the coast, the race *M. c. bradfieldi* occurs (Clancey 1980b); if the northern limit were south of 24°S, this race would be isolated from inland populations. The Cape Wagtail is found along the whole coastline of the atlas region, almost without interruption. It is also abundant on offshore islands (Brooke 1983; Randall & Randall 1984).

Typically found in pairs and family parties, it congregates in large numbers, usually close to waterbodies during the nonbreeding period (e.g. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). This is a familiar and confiding species, very visible and easily identified.

Habitat: It has adapted to suburban and urban environments, using sewage works, parks, gardens and lawns. Its commensalism with humans includes begging scraps, scavenging urban ordure and picking dead insects from car radiator grills (Lockwood 1981; Hockey *et al.* 1989; pers. obs). It is, however, also common in a wide range of natural environments, requiring the merest trickle of water. In forest habitats it uses open streams, rivers and waterfalls; it seldom forages in the forest proper.

Movements: It congregates in large flocks, especially in winter, often at communal roosts, even in towns (Taylor 1964; Winterbottom 1964b; Skead 1965; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). It is thought to be largely sedentary, without large-scale migration (Keith *et al.* 1992). The models show small increases in reporting rates in the spring and early summer in Zones 1–3 in the arid west, and in winter in Zone 7 in the east. The extent to which this represents migration is unclear, but the tendency to flock in winter may influence reporting rates. However, considerable movement does occur because it occupies seasonal pans in the wet season in areas remote from permanent

waters. In Zimbabwe it is believed to undergo seasonal movements and the southwest of that country may be visited by South African birds during winter (Irwin 1981). In the Transkei it is subject to post-breeding altitudinal movement (Ginn *et al.* 1979; Quicquelberge 1989). A nestling ringed in the Transvaal was found dead in KwaZulu-Natal at a distance of 454 km after 3.5 years (Oatley 1993).

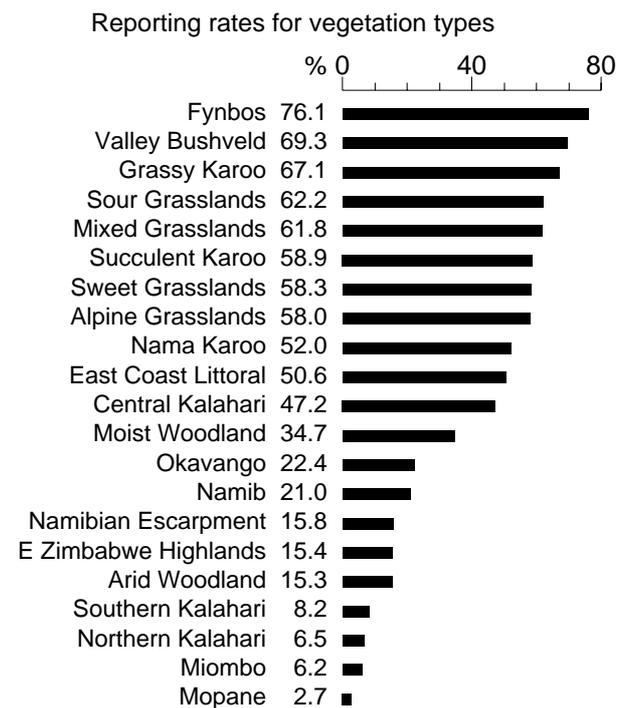
Breeding: The models show that breeding activity occurs throughout the year, but mainly in spring and early summer, apart from the arid Zone 2, where an apparent peak in late summer is based on few records. Breeding peaks are more pronounced in the southern parts of the range, suggesting a more contracted breeding season there. Published egg-laying data show breeding virtually throughout the year in Namibia, with a slight summer peak; elsewhere in southern Africa egg-laying is largely restricted to early summer (August–November), with earlier laying in the southwestern Cape Province than Zimbabwe, the Transvaal and KwaZulu-Natal (Winterbottom 1968a; Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Brown & Clinning in press).

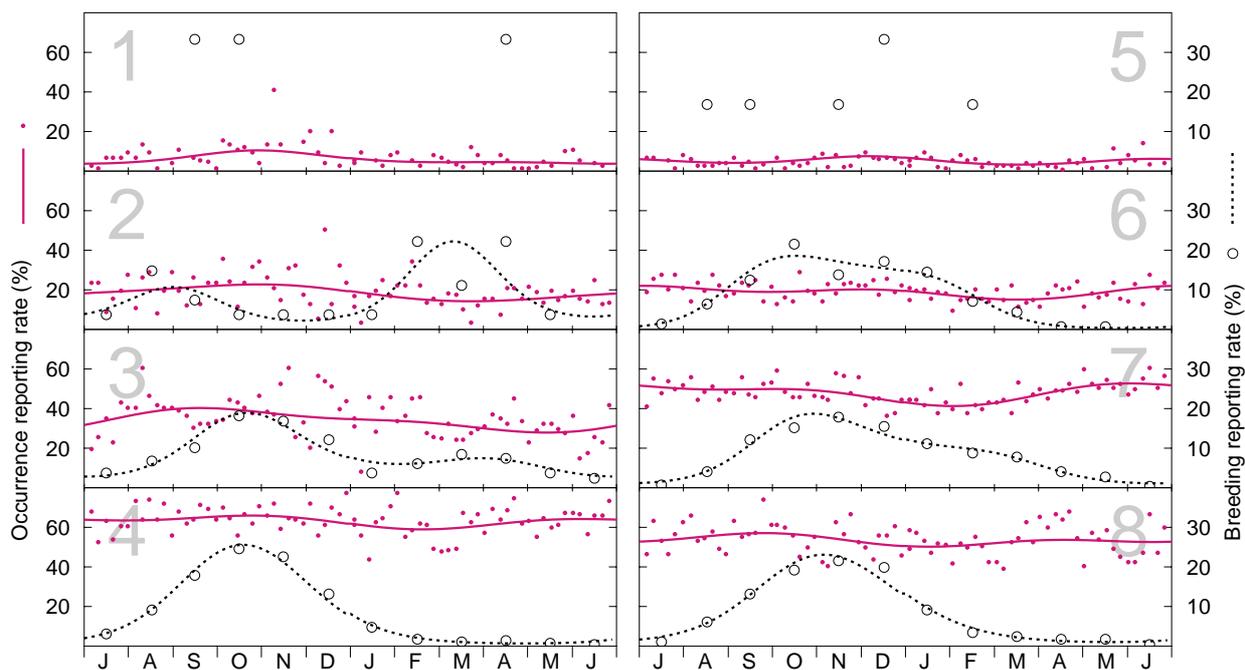
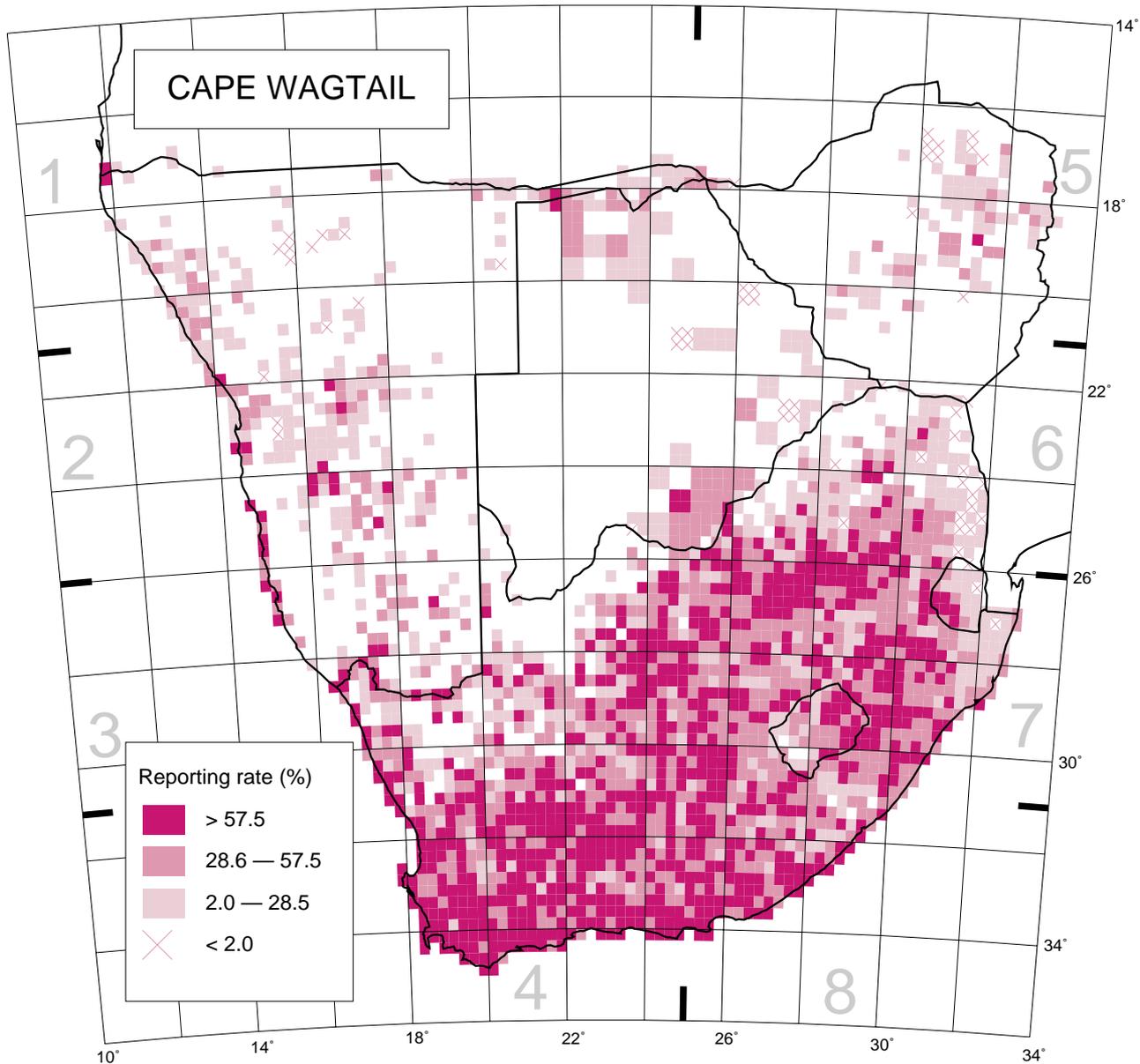
Interspecific relationships: In Zimbabwe it uses habitats not used by the African Pied Wagtail *M. aguimp* (Irwin 1981), and in the Okavango the race *simplicissima* is more common than the African Pied Wagtail. In towns it may suffer from competition with the introduced House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, a more aggressive scavenger (Skead 1967b; Hockey *et al.* 1989).

Historical distribution and conservation: The overall distribution in southern Africa is unlikely to have changed during the 20th century. The Cape Wagtail has large natural populations, is a commensal of humans, and has benefited from modified environments. Population losses were suffered in the 1950s and 1960s after the introduction of insecticides, though the species is now believed to be recovering (Vernon 1972b,c; Lockwood 1981).

S.E. Piper

Recorded in 2293 grid cells, 50.5%
Total number of records: 68 245
Mean reporting rate for range: 52.2%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 189, 647, 1872, 5504, 446, 2150, 9361, 2940; Breeding: 3, 27, 131, 765, 6, 144, 608, 390.