



Alpine Swift

Witpenswindswael

Apus melba

The Alpine Swift has a wide but disjunct range from the Cape to southern Europe, the Middle East, India, Sri Lanka and Madagascar (Brooke 1971e). It occurs widely in southern Africa, chiefly near its montane breeding sites, but it is a partial migrant. It does not present problems in identification and the atlas data may be accepted in full. However, like the Little Swift *A. affinis*, the Alpine Swift is likely to feed at such heights in the winter skies that it escapes detection, thus reducing the winter reporting rates.

Habitat: It forages in the air, from 0.5 m upwards to great heights, over any vegetation type. It was most abundantly reported over Alpine Grasslands and Fynbos, the biomes in which most of its breeding sites lie. It usually breeds in dry vertical cracks in overhanging cliffs, sometimes horizontal ones (Martin *et al.* 1990a). It has recently taken to breeding on tall buildings in Bloemfontein (2926AA) (Colahan *et al.* 1991) and grain silos in Calvinia (3024BB) which conform to its geomorphological requirements (Brooke 1990; Martin *et al.* 1990a). Breeding in buildings has long been known in European populations (Cramp *et al.* 1985). There is also a probable record of breeding in the box-girder superstructure of a northern Transvaal railway bridge (Brooke 1974f).

Movements: It is a partial migrant in the western and eastern Cape Province and in KwaZulu-Natal, passing through Zimbabwe on southward passage August–October and on northward passage March–June (Brooke 1972a). The seasonal maps show that the majority of records from Zimbabwe are from spring and early summer when the birds are presumably on southward passage. Medland (1993a) reported a pattern of records from Malawi indicating northward passage March–April and southward August–October. Seasonal fluctuations in reporting rates for Namibia and the Transvaal are more subtle, suggesting a greater degree of residency. Records from Botswana do not

show a strong temporal pattern (Abernethy & Herremans 1994), but there may be passage in April and September (Penry 1994). The nonbreeding grounds are not known but presumably lie in the equatorial belt of Africa, probably to the east of the main areas frequented at other times by Palearctic Alpine Swifts. The seasonal maps show a relatively long winter absence from the Lesotho massif (2928), as one might expect given the severe winter conditions which prevail there.

Breeding: The few atlas breeding records indicate a spring/summer breeding season. Breeding has been recorded from Zimbabwe (Donnelly & Howells 1982) but not Botswana (Skinner 1996a).

Interspecific relationships: It often joins mixed foraging flocks of swifts. Except in northern Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia where the mountains are high enough, it (*A. m. africanus*) does not breed in the same areas as the similarly sized Mottled Swift *A. aequatorialis* which also uses dry vertical cracks in overhanging rocks. In Kenya and Ethiopia it breeds at higher altitudes than the Mottled Swift (Snow 1978).

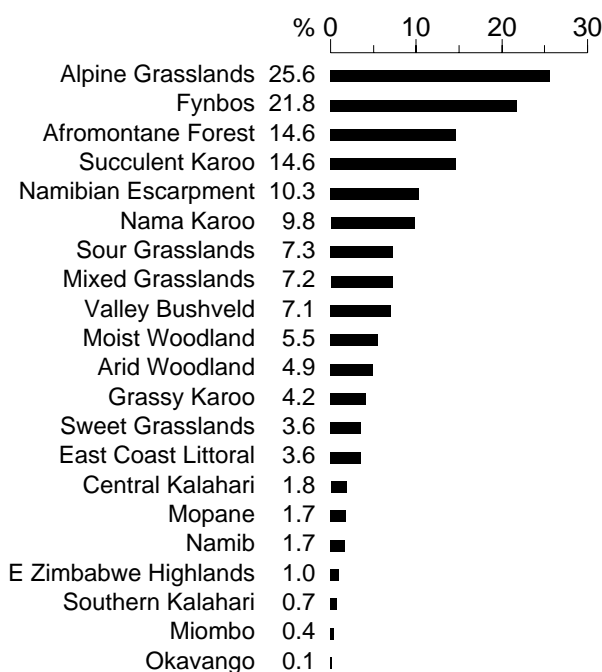
Historical distribution and conservation: This is not known to have differed from the present distribution, though occasional adoption of man-made constructions as breeding sites suggests an increasing population.

A montane-breeding species with the powers of flight of an Alpine Swift is hardly at risk from human activities. However, one colony in a riverside cliff was lost with the completion of the Vanderkloof Dam (3024BB) on the Orange River (Bell 1970).

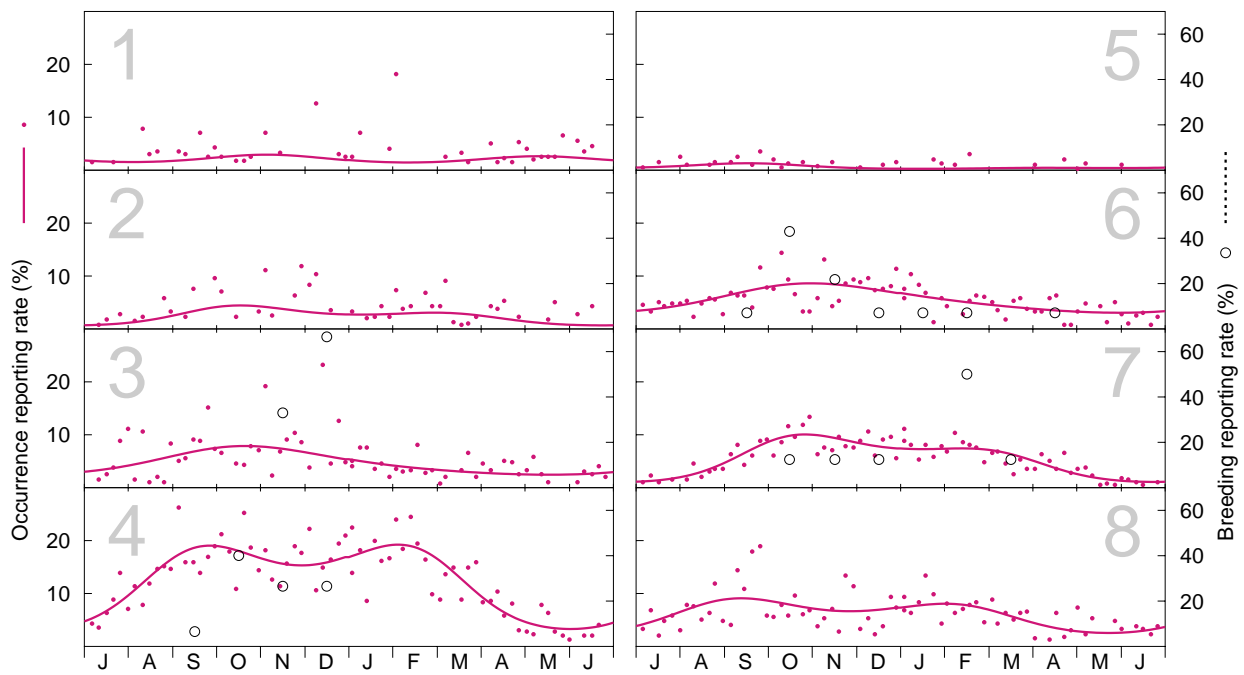
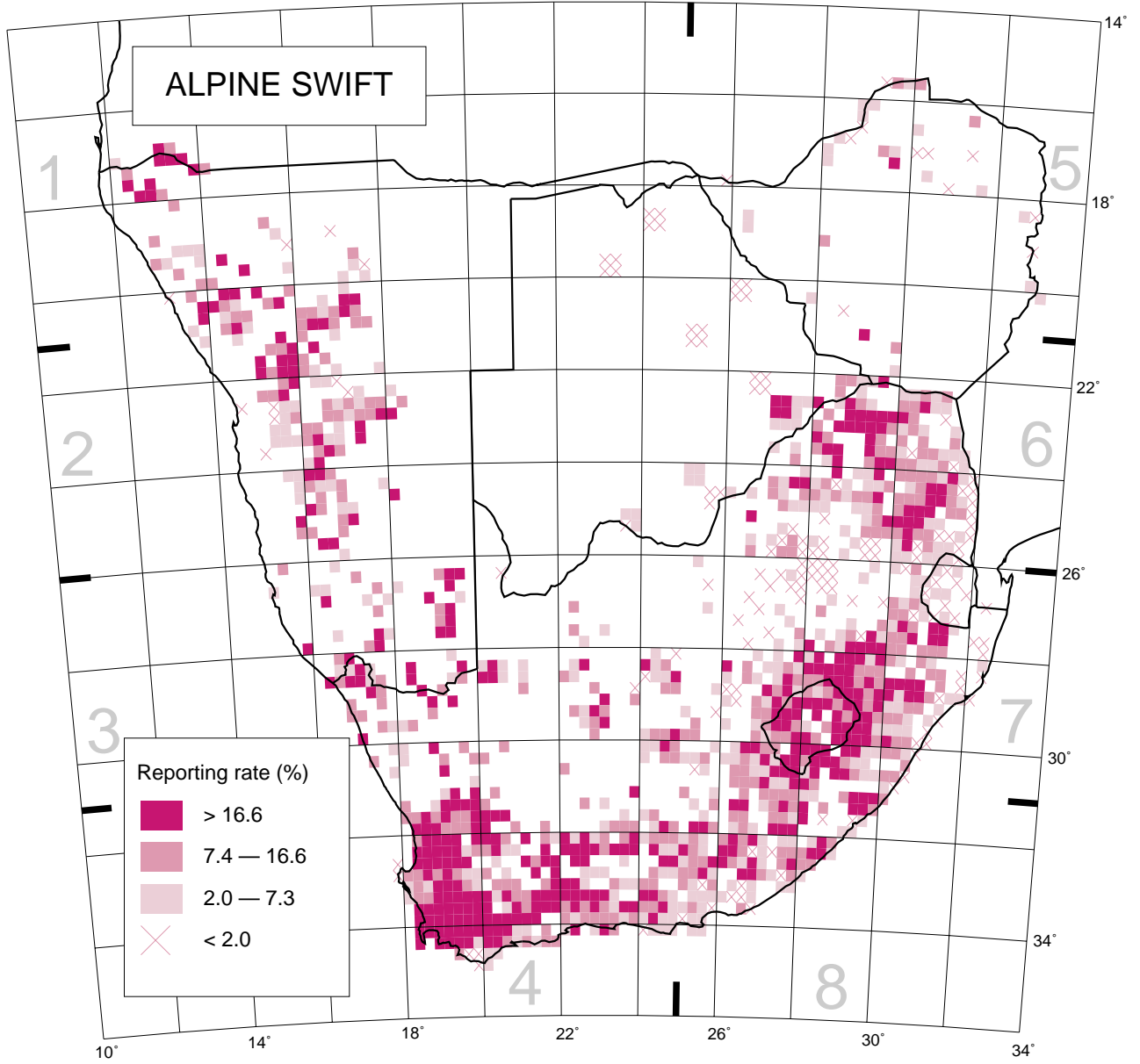
R.K. Brooke

Recorded in 1292 grid cells, 28.5%
Total number of records: 11 707
Mean reporting rate for range: 11.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

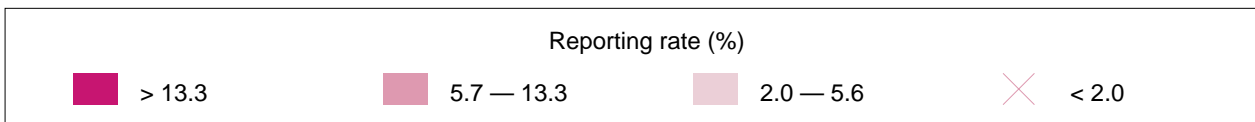
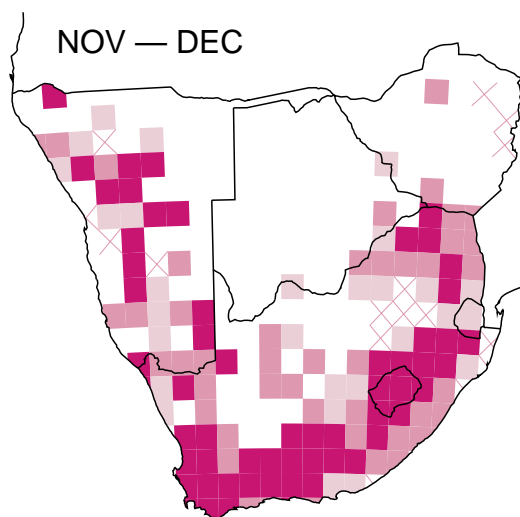
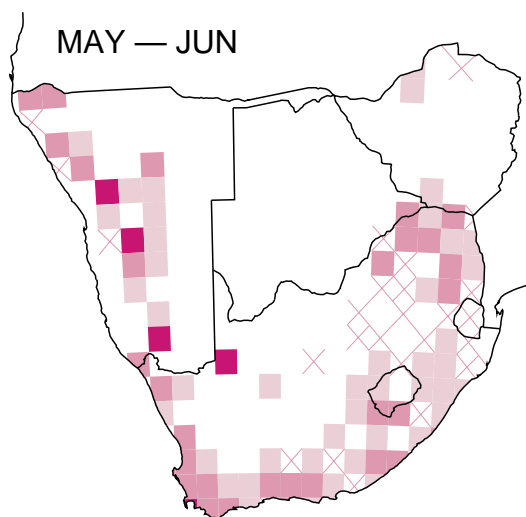
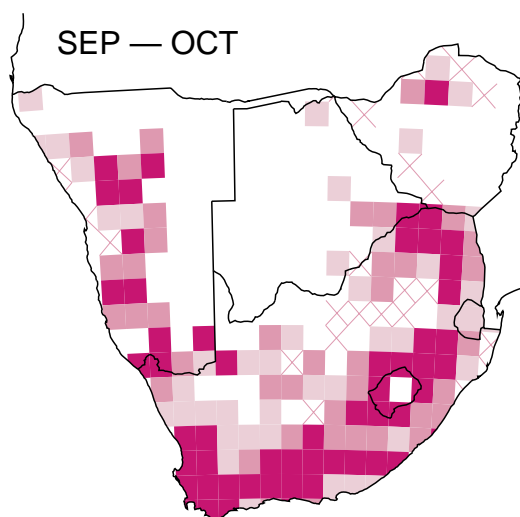
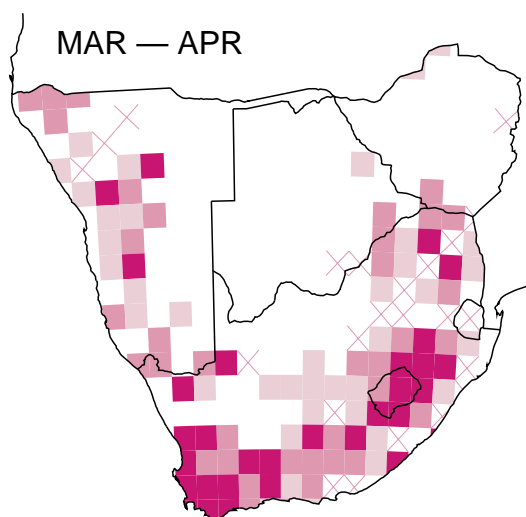
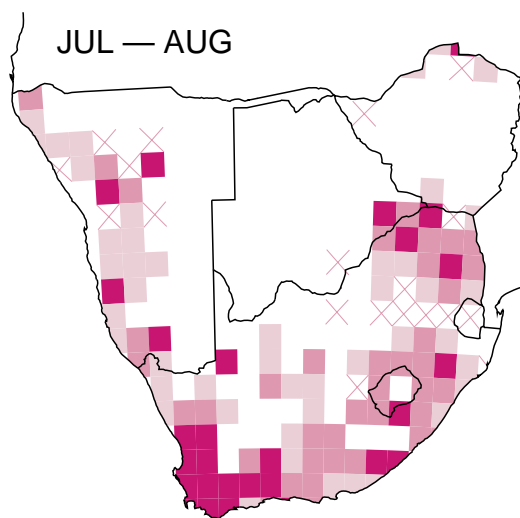
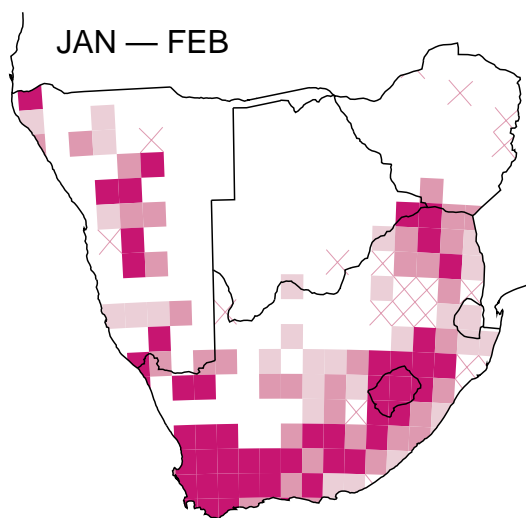


Also marginally in Northern Kalahari.



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 70, 81, 246, 1080, 55, 621, 1078, 337; Breeding: 0, 0, 3, 15, 0, 14, 8, 0.

ALPINE SWIFT



Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.