

House Martin

Huisswael

Delichon urbica

The House Martin is present throughout the eastern and southernmost parts of southern Africa during the summer, but is found far less frequently in the drier western regions, especially in the northern Cape Province. It spends the nonbreeding season throughout sub-Saharan Africa and breeds widely in Europe and Asia. An estimated 90 million birds enter Africa each year (Keith *et al.* 1992). It can be plentiful locally when on northward passage in late summer, such as the estimated 3000–4000 near Settlers (2428DC) on 16 April 1977 (Mendelsohn & Maclean 1982). It is often regarded as scarce but is easily overlooked owing to its foraging at high levels above the ground and its habit of roosting on the wing. For example, during November–December 1957 and January–April 1980, Hofmeyr (1980a,b) recorded up to 1100 House Martins in the early mornings in the village of Grabouw (3419AA). The earlier occurrence was not published until 1980 and no other reports of large concentrations of House Martins were published in any of the intervening years. Its numbers in any one place appear to fluctuate widely from year to year.

It is easily confused with the similar Grey-rumped Swallow *Pseudhirundo griseopyga*, and even the Pearl-breasted Swallow *Hirundo dimidiata*.

Habitat: This martin forages over a wide variety of habitats, including fynbos, grassland, savanna woodland and cultivated areas. It appears to be most common in hilly open country.

Movements: The models suggest that it arrives earlier in, and departs later from, the northern parts as compared with more southerly regions. It overwinters occasionally in southern Africa (e.g. Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Hockey *et al.* 1989).

Breeding: It has bred sporadically in southern Africa (Brooke 1984b; Keith *et al.* 1992), for example, Cape Town (3318CD; 1982–83), Somerset West (3418BB; 1969), Keiskammahoek (3327AB; 1946 and for a few years

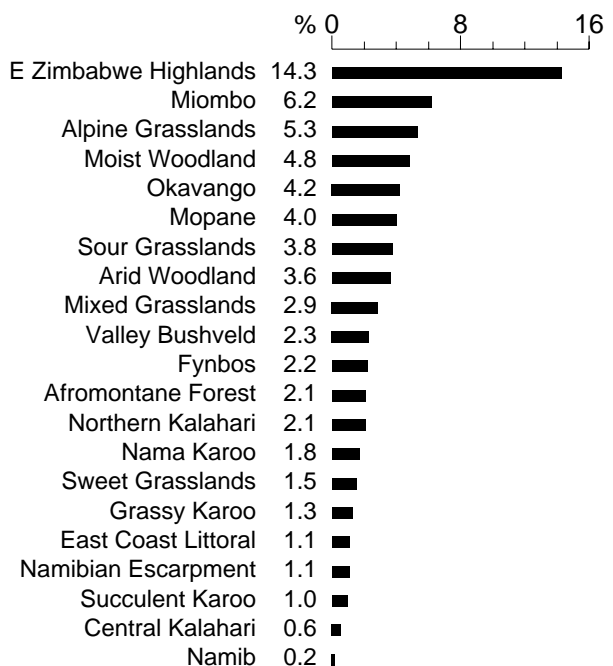
before), Kokstad (3029CB; 1967), Otjiwarongo (2016BC; 1928 and for a few years after) and Windhoek (2217CA; 1985).

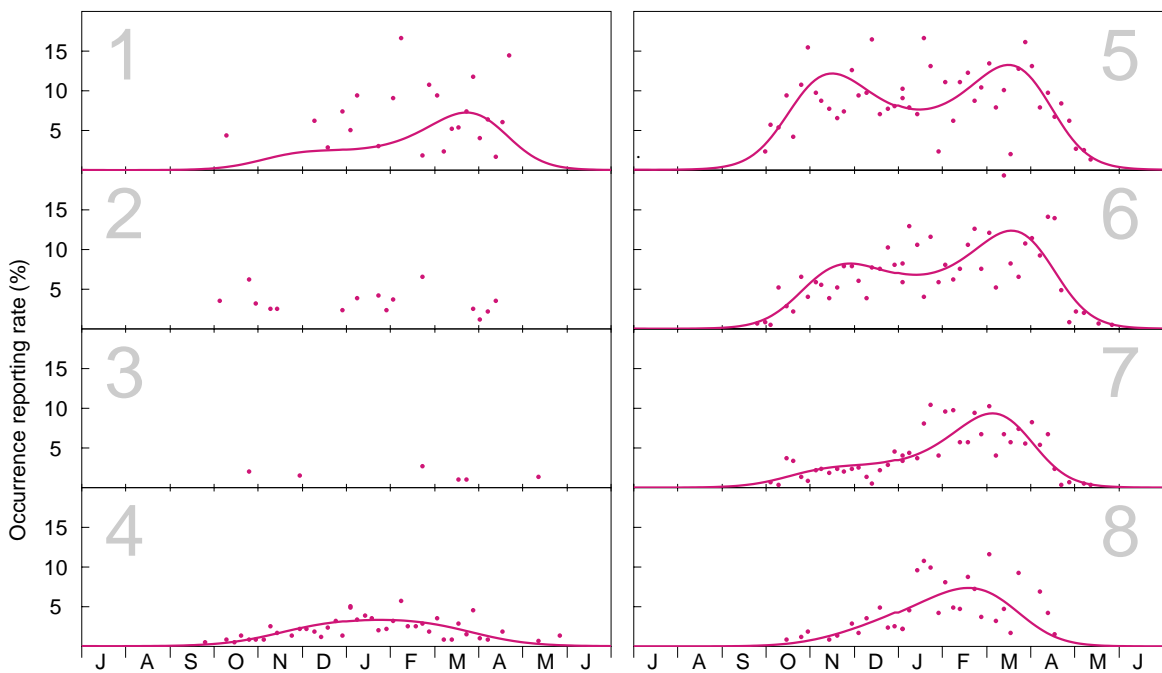
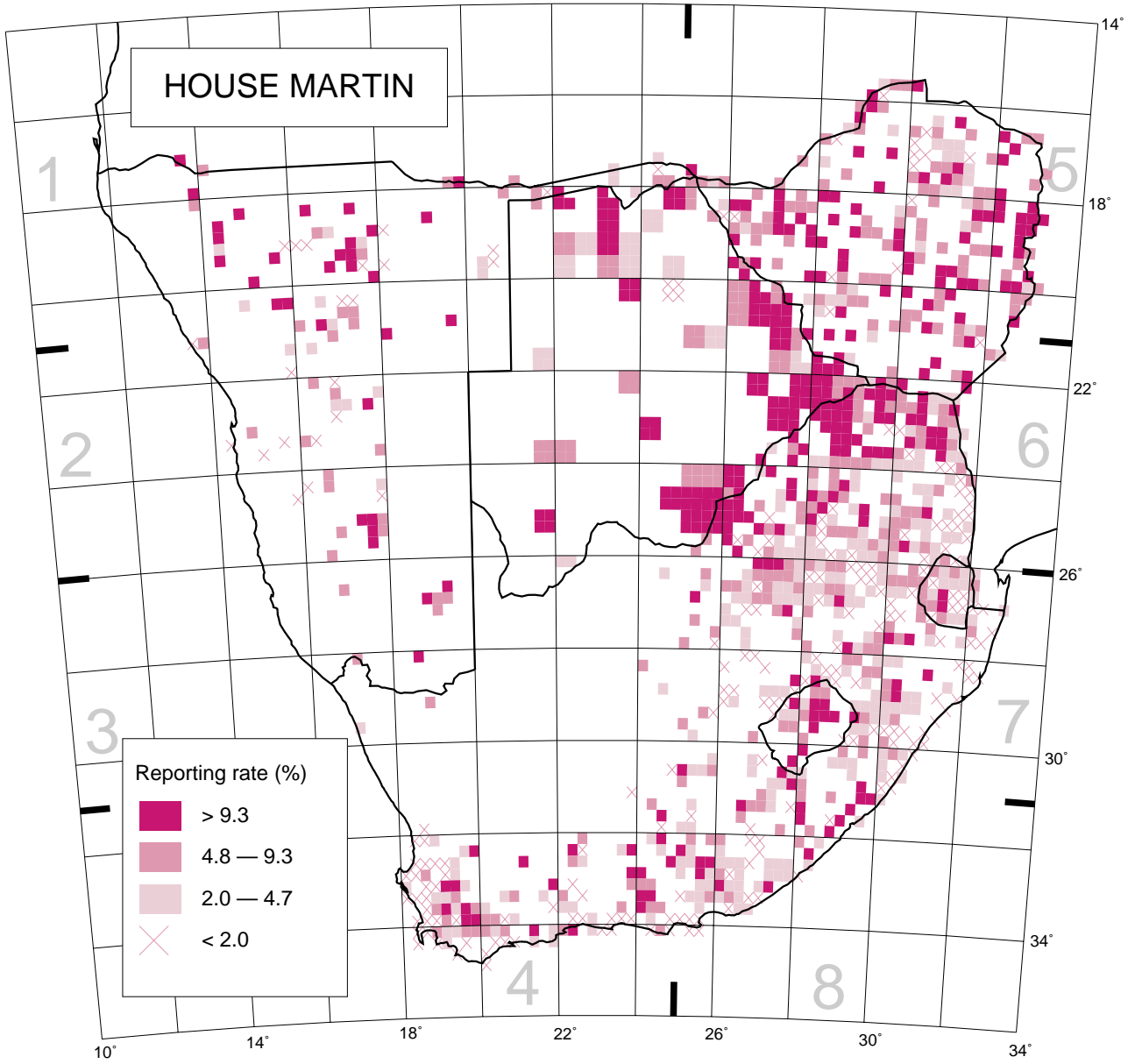
Historical distribution and conservation: The House Martin has decreased in numbers in at least parts of its European breeding range (Cramp *et al.* 1988). It was included in the South African Red Data book (Brooke 1984b), classified as 'indeterminate', on the basis of the sporadic breeding attempts, but migrants do not seem to be of conservation concern in southern Africa.

R.A. Earlé

Recorded in 1219 grid cells, 26.9%
Total number of records: 4308
Mean reporting rate for range: 4.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 75, 19, 7, 104, 493, 542, 516, 112.