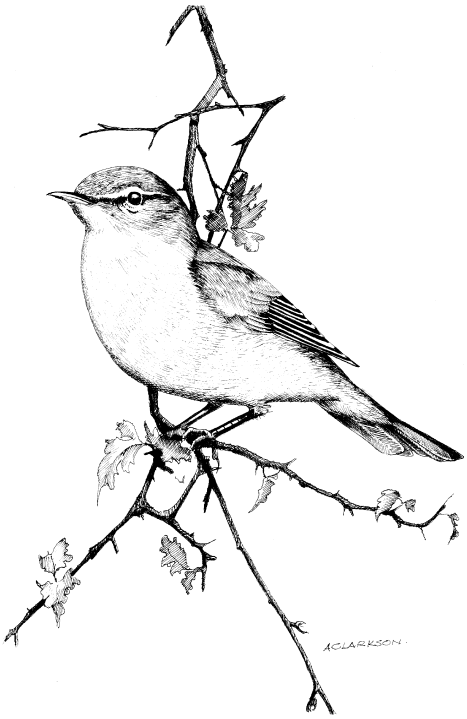
Willow Warbler

Hofsanger

Phylloscopus trochilus



This Palearctic migrant occurs in the nonbreeding season throughout most of the equatorial and southern tropics in Africa (Curry-Lindahl 1981; Pearson & Lack 1992). In southern Africa the Willow Warbler is one of the most common Palearctic passerines. It can be found anywhere in the region, but with a strong gradient of increasing abundance from south to north and from west to east (Underhill *et al.* 1992b).

Three subspecies occur alongside each other: *P. t. yakutensis*, which is by far the least common, migrates between southern Africa and far eastern Asia, the longest migratory journey for a passerine (Curry-Lindahl 1981); *acredula* is usually considered the commonest, nominate *trochilus* being of intermediate abundance (Clancey 1980b; Irwin 1981; Hopcroft 1984), though Blaber (1986) reported *trochilus* as the commonest in a study from Natal. Svensson (1992), however, advised that subspecific identification of individuals is almost impossible.

In the Transvaal, densities of 28 birds/100 ha were found in *Acacia* and 23 birds/100 ha in broadleaved woodland (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). In northern and eastern Botswana it was present in transect-counts in 13 out of 16 woody vegetations, with an overall average density of 6–7 birds/10 ha during February–March 1992, and a peak of nearly 2 birds/ha in riverine gallery woodland along the Linyanti (1823B) upon arrival in early October 1991 (Herremans 1993c).

It is confiding and less skulking than many other Palearctic passerines and this, together with its abundance, meant that most atlas recorders were familiar with the species.

Habitat: It occurs in any habitat with bushes or trees and it was recorded from all biomes in the region. It prefers sunny ecotones in the more complex-structured, mixed thorn-broadleaved vegetations where it forages using a variety of techniques over all strata but with a preference for the middle and upper strata. In the drier southwestern interior it is confined to localities with trees and bushes: e.g. the taller savanna woodlands in the western part of the central Kalahari and the more lush vegetation along the Orange River in the northern Cape Province can be recognized in the distribution. It also covers the whole altitudinal range in the region, from sea-level to the alpine zone in Lesotho.

Movements: It is amongst the earliest Palearctic passerines to arrive in the region; the first birds are present in the north from mid-September. They arrive progressively later further south in the subcontinent, with mid-arrival dates in mid-October in the north and December in the south (Underhill *et al.* 1992b), but at a given latitude, arrival is rapid and the timing is annually consistent (Herremans 1994d). Departure is synchronized over the whole region, with a mid-departure date in early April (Underhill *et al.* 1992b). Males precede females on northward migration by *c.* 10 days (Underhill *et al.* 1992a).

Individual Willow Warblers have been found to return to the same locality in southern Africa in successive years (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Hanmer 1989b). The likely breeding area of most individuals migrating to southern Africa is Fennoscandia; five ring recoveries were from Finland and two from Sweden (Hedenström & Pettersson 1987; Dowsett *et al.* 1988; Oatley 1995a). None ringed in southern Africa have been recovered north of the equator (SAFRING).

Interspecific relationships: Except for the forest-dwelling Yellowthroated Warbler *P. ruficapillus* (Clancey *et al.* 1991), there are no other *Phylloscopus* warblers in southern Africa, and it is not clear with which species (if any) it might ecologically overlap or compete in the region. In morphology, foraging behaviour and habitat use, it appears to come close to *Zosterops*, *Eremomela* and *Apalis*, and it overlaps widely with several species in these genera, most of which have more localized distributions in fewer biomes.

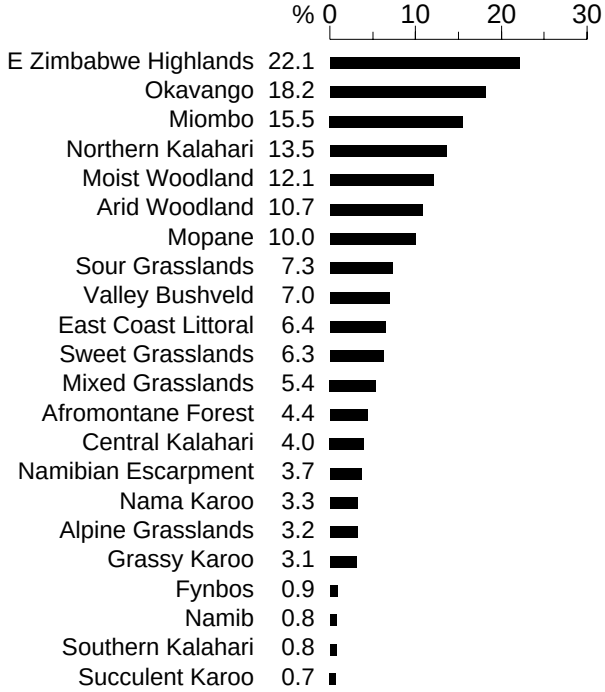
It is a less specialized feeder than the Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, preferring denser vegetation, but there is nevertheless a significant correlation between the reporting rates of these two common migrant species in the different vegetation types.

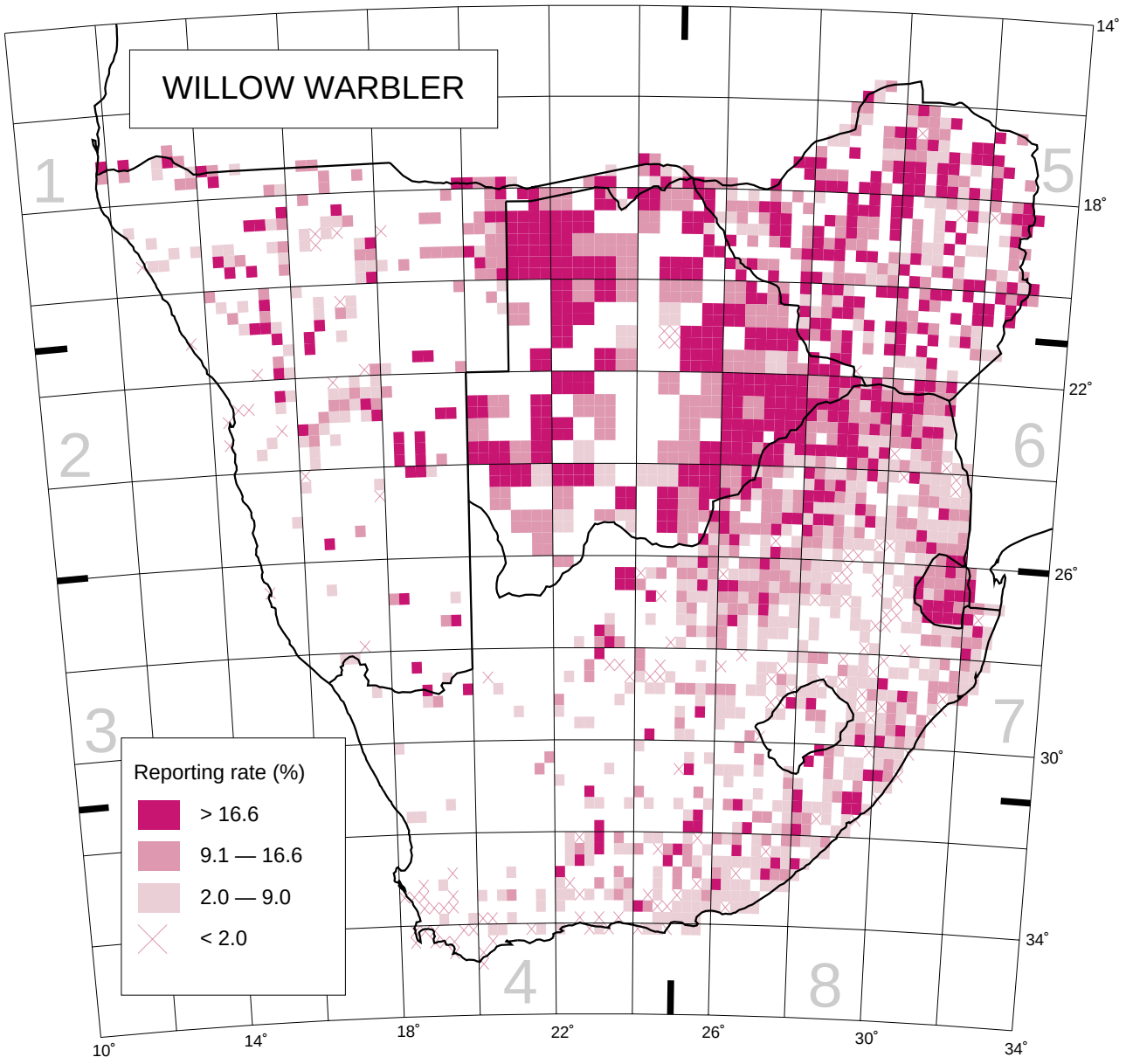
Historical distribution and conservation: The present map is not known to differ from the historical distribution. The Willow Warbler is not under threat while in the region.

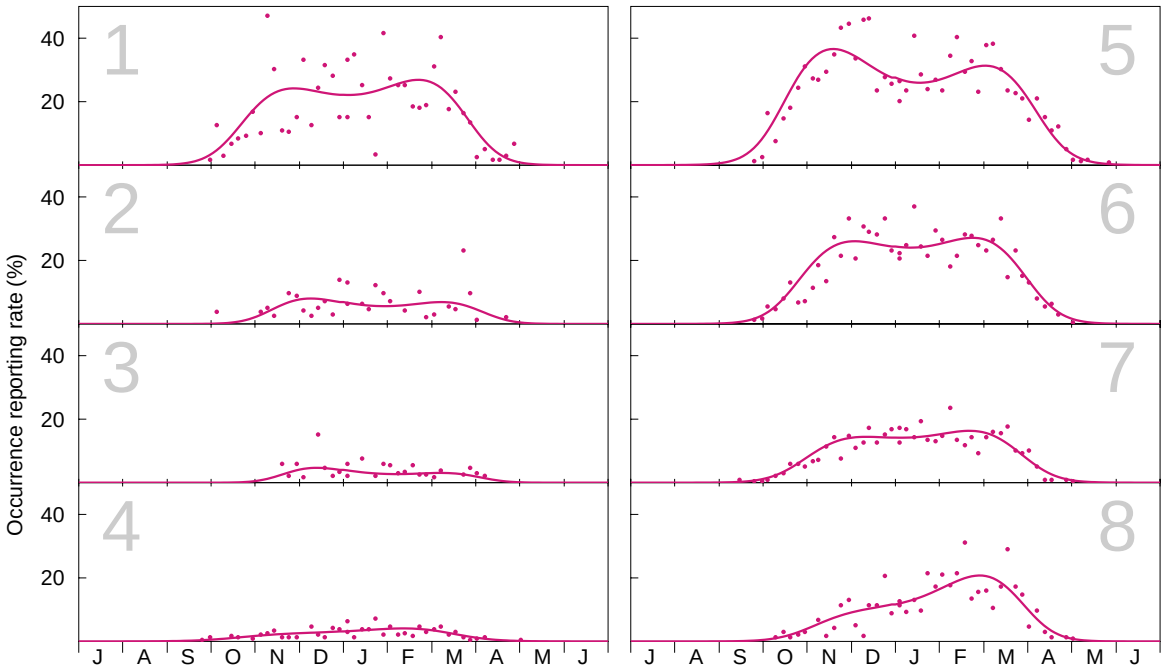
M. Herremans

Recorded in 1958 grid cells, 43.2%
Total number of records: 9952
Mean reporting rate for range: 9.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types







Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 283, 99, 67, 113, 1299, 1301, 1268, 335.