

European Marsh Harrier

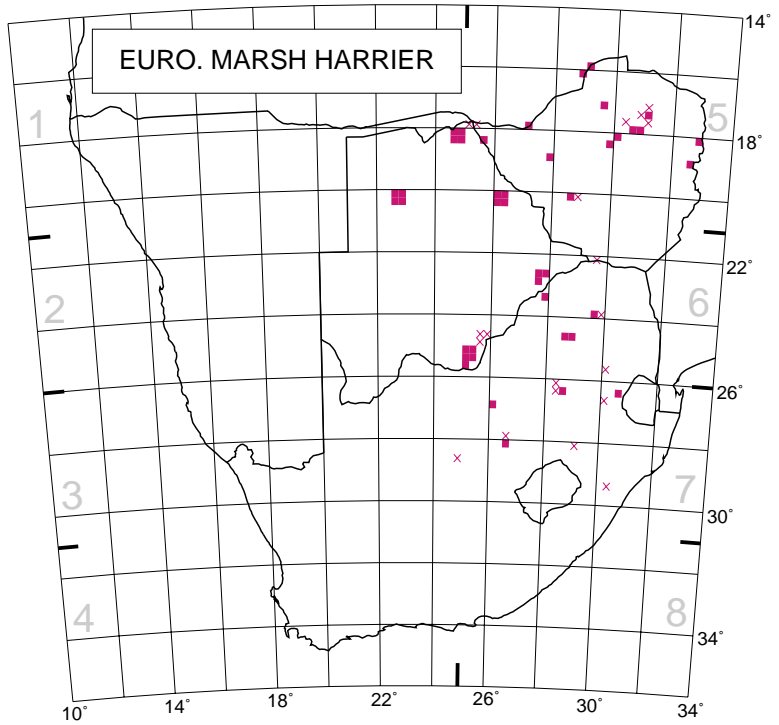
Europese Paddavreter

Circus aeruginosus

As the scattered occurrence on the distribution map shows, European Marsh Harriers are rare nonbreeding visitors to southern Africa. They are migrants from the Palearctic and occur mainly over well-vegetated wetlands in the northeastern parts of southern Africa. Although they chase large waterbirds, such as ducks, cormorants and egrets which the resident African Marsh Harrier *C. ranivorus* rarely pursues, their main diet is probably small mammals and birds. Most records are of females and immatures, which resemble and may be misidentified as young African Marsh Harriers. They are, however, larger, darker, have a cream-coloured and well-defined patch on the head (and often shoulders), lack any barring in the plumage and do not have an orange base to the tail.

Most records are from November–March. An unprecedented number occurred in South Africa in the high-rainfall summer of 1987–88: singletons were reported from Bapsfontein (2628AB) and Pietersburg (2329CD) (W.R. Tarboton pers. comm.), four from the Kruger National Park (J. van Jaarsveld pers. comm.), and on the flooded Nyl River (2428DA) five were found (Simmons 1988). It is more common in Zimbabwe and further north, however, as these birds probably represent immatures from a distributional tail that spreads south from Central and West Africa, the main nonbreeding areas. A large roost of ‘several thousand’ birds was recently found in Mali (C. Perennou *in litt.*). Two records are known for Namibia (not shown), one from the Kuisieb River (2315BC) (L. Komen pers. comm.), and another from Bushmanland, in northeastern Namibia (Hines 1993).

Expansion of some well-monitored populations in Europe, owing to decreased pesticide abuse (e.g. Underhill-Day 1984; Altenburg *et al.* 1987), together with the greater awareness and publishing of rarities in southern Africa, has led to increased reporting in the last two decades (Tarboton *et al.*



Recorded in 62 grid cells, 1.4%
 Total number of records: 142
 Mean reporting rate for range: 2.2%

1987b). The recovery of the European Marsh Harrier in the Palearctic is apparently widespread (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994); therefore it may become more regular in southern Africa in future, particularly in wetter years. The continuing degradation of wetlands is the main direct threat to this species in southern Africa.

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