

Common Sandpiper

Gewone Ruiter

Actitis hypoleucos

The Common Sandpiper is a migrant which breeds further south in the Palearctic than any other member of the wader families Scolopacidae or Charadriidae which regularly migrates to southern Africa. The breeding range stretches from about 45°N in the deciduous forest zone to the northern limit of the coniferous forest zone at about 70°N, and from Ireland to eastern Siberia (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Rogacheva 1992). It migrates to Africa south of the Sahara, southern Asia and Australasia (Hayman *et al.* 1986). It occurs throughout southern Africa where there is suitable open water. Records in the arid western half of the region are therefore scattered, particularly on the deep sands of the Kalahari in Botswana. The highest reporting rates were from the Okavango Delta, Zimbabwe, Transvaal, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, and the coastal regions of the Cape Province.

While feeding it is generally encountered singly or as loose associations of a few individuals. It congregates in the evenings to roost; the largest recorded group size in southern Africa is *c.* 100 birds, roosting on a large rock in the Save River (Brooke 1972c).

The population breeding in Europe was estimated by Rose & Scott (1994) to exceed one million individuals, but is decreasing. The size of the population breeding in Asia is unknown. The coastal population in southern Africa was estimated by Summers *et al.* (1987a) to be 2000 birds; the size of the population at inland localities is unknown, but must far exceed this number.

It has distinctive plumage and behaviour, both while feeding (it constantly bobs its rear half) and in flight (after a few flickering wingbeats, a downbeat is arrested just below horizontal and it glides a short distance).

Habitat: It occurs along all kinds of open wet edges, sometimes being the only wader on a stretch of shoreline. Favoured localities are streams, rivers, marshes, farm dams, sewage works, vleis, coastal lagoons and the upper reaches of tidal estuaries. It also frequents temporary puddles, e.g. on roads, and it will forage on any damp ground after heavy rain, regularly venturing into woodlands. Where it occurs along the marine coast, it is often associated with freshwater seeps.

Movements: Breeding at 60°N commences about mid-May and birds leave by the second half of August (Rogacheva 1992). Arrival in southern Africa is from late July and early August onwards (see also models and northeastern part of range in seasonal maps) (Taylor 1979; Irwin 1981; Herremans

1994d), in the middle of the dry season, when wetland habitat availability is much below maximal inland (Herremans 1994d).

Of 1798 ringed in southern Africa, there are six records of long-distance movements (SAFRING). Four recoveries, all of birds ringed in Zimbabwe, were in the breeding range in a rectangle framed by 57–61°N and 44–55°E, west of the Ural Mountains, and between 28 April and 9 May, which is soon after arrival there. Two recoveries along the migration route northwards were in southern Sudan (at 4°N 28°E and 5°N 33°E): a bird ringed in December 1981 near Harare (1731CC) was recovered on 23 March 1983, and one ringed in December 1977 at the Umhlanga Sewage Works (2931CA) was recovered on 6 April 1978, respectively. This is consistent with the models which show departure from all Zones starting early in March and continuing to the end of April.

A few birds remain in southern Africa throughout the austral winter, particularly at inland sites, but relatively fewer overwinter as compared to predominantly coastal waders. There are numerous examples of birds returning in subsequent years to the same or adjoining localities in Zimbabwe, Namibia and the Cape Province (A.J. Tree *in litt.*). Hockey *et al.* (1989) noted that it is territorial at its nonbreeding sites, and suggested that individuals might hold the same territories annually.

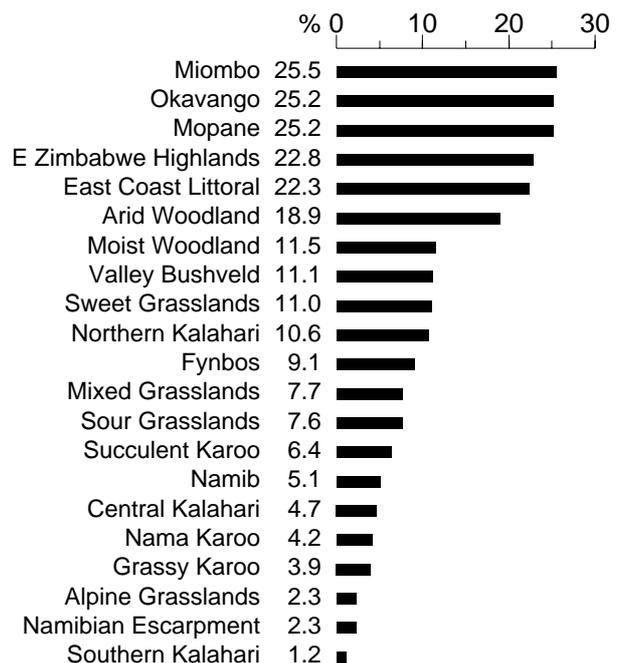
Interspecific relationships: It regularly forages from floating objects, including the backs of wallowing hippopotami (e.g. Larsen & Fee 1992), and may take leeches from their skin (Maclean 1993b).

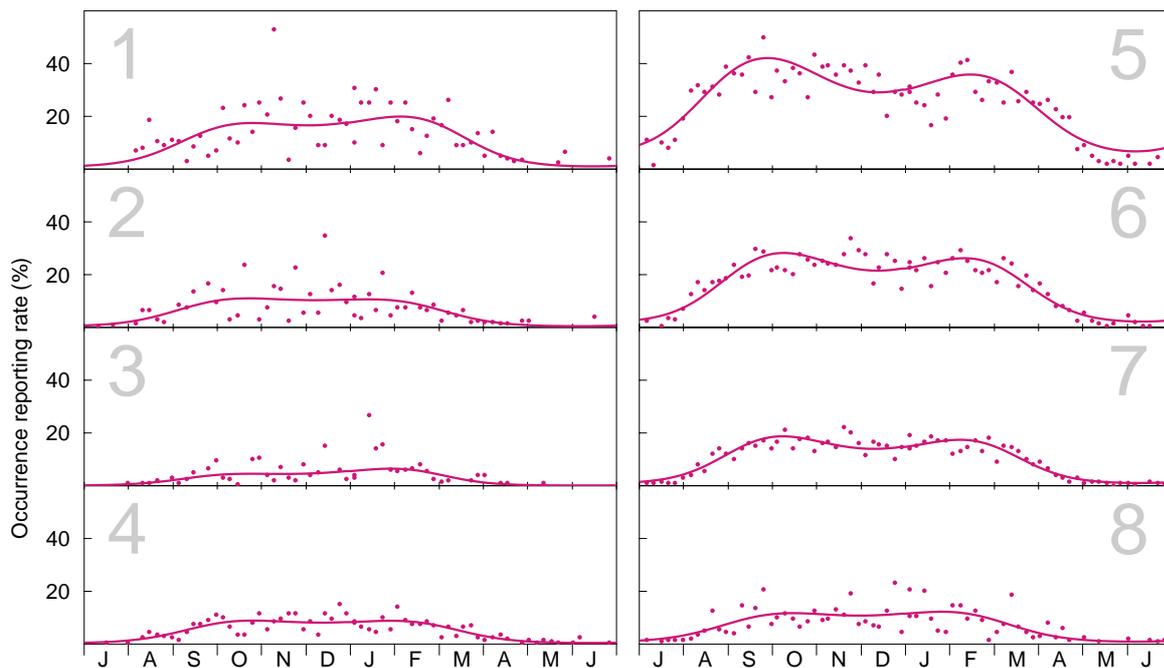
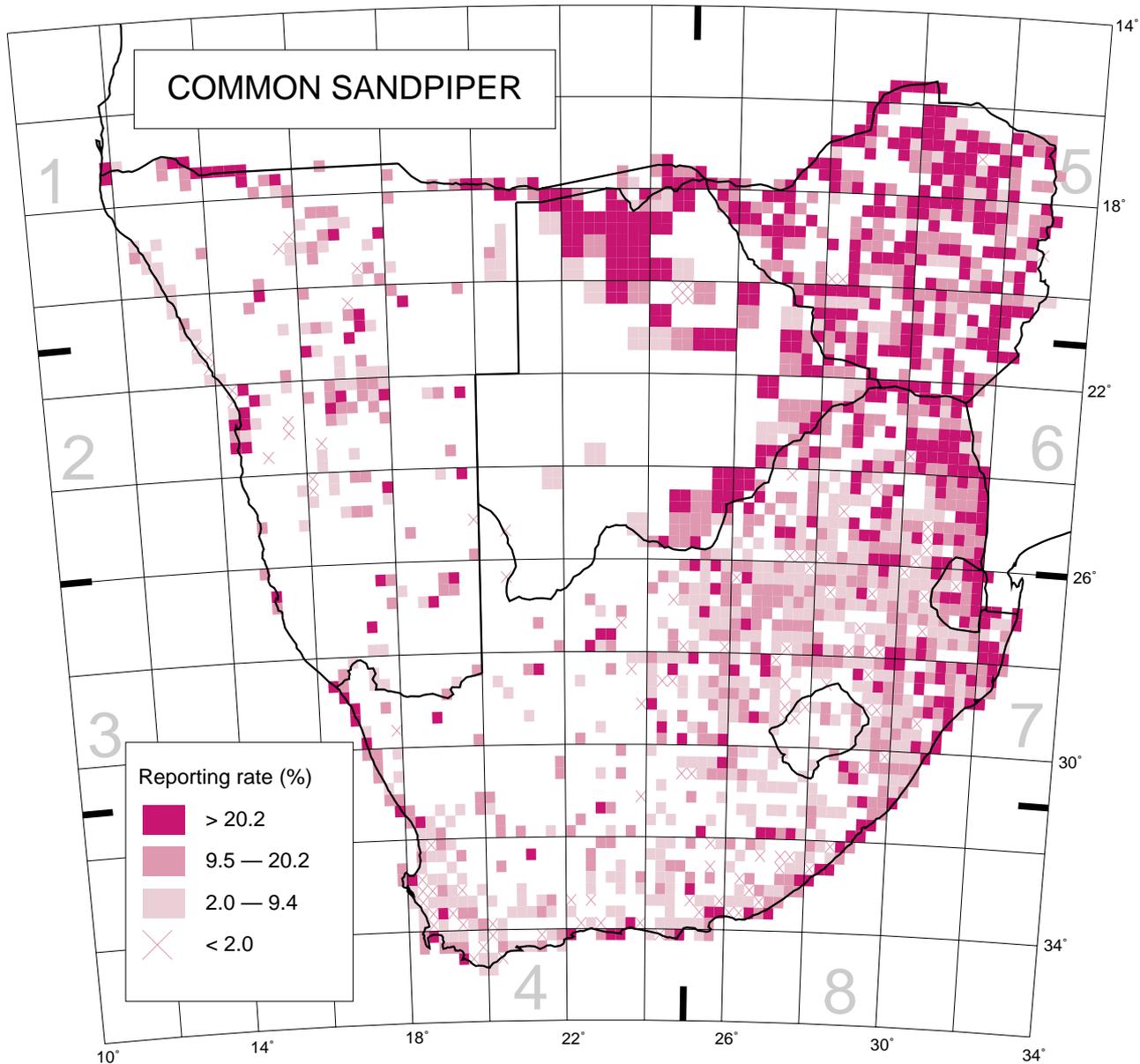
Historical distribution and conservation: It is catholic in its choice of wetland sites during the nonbreeding season, adapting well to artificial wetlands such as farm dams and sewage works; thus no conservation action is required while the Common Sandpiper is in southern Africa.

L.G. Underhill

Recorded in 1791 grid cells, 39.5%
Total number of records: 17 719
Mean reporting rate for range: 14.7%

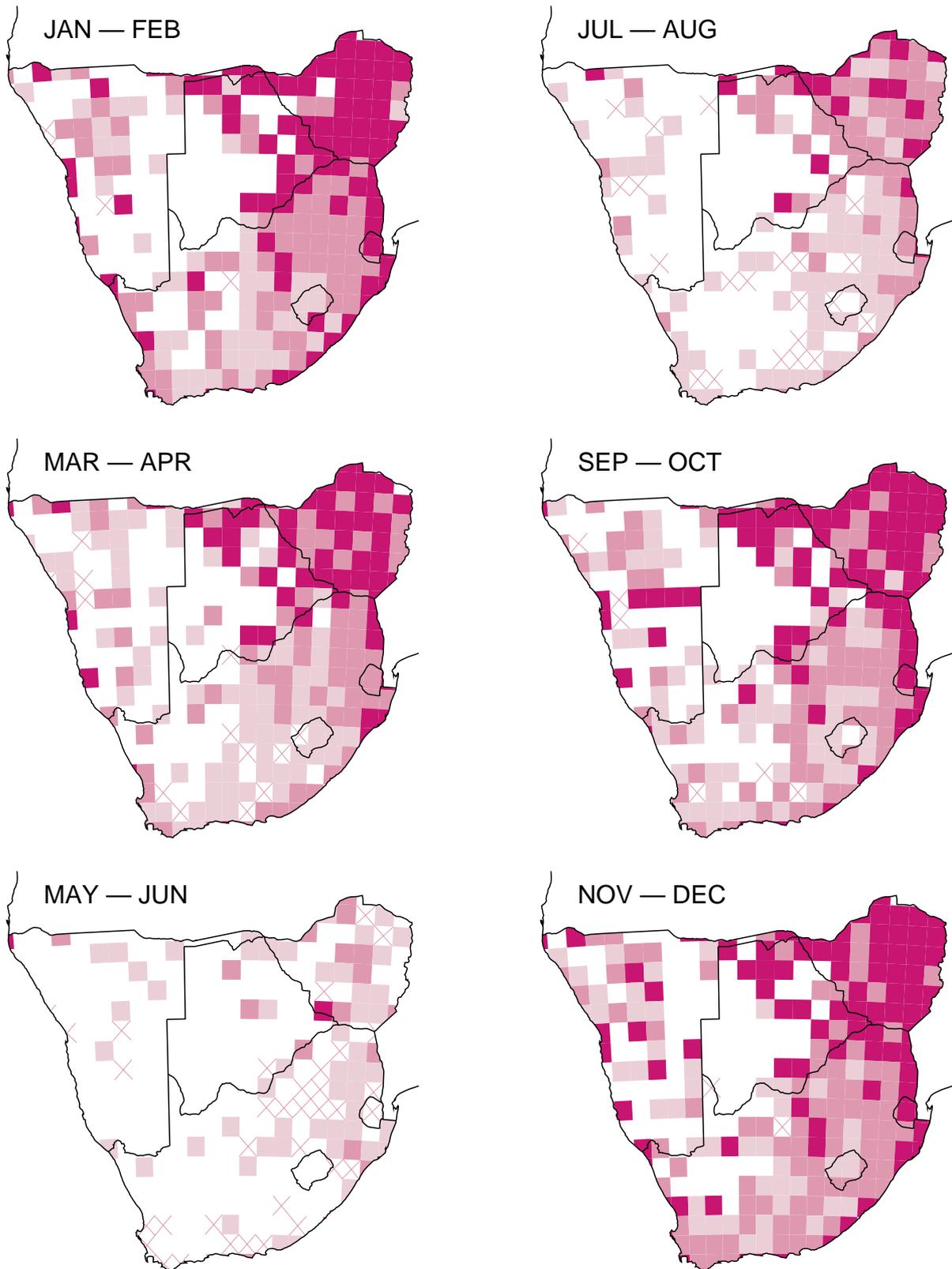
Reporting rates for vegetation types





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 307, 180, 133, 416, 2315, 1865, 2033, 394.

COMMON SANDPIPER



Reporting rate (%)

> 21.3

7.8 — 21.3

2.0 — 7.7

X < 2.0

Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.