



Rock Martin

Kransswael

Hirundo fuligula

The Rock Martin is a locally common breeding resident throughout much of South Africa and Namibia, with a more scattered distribution in most of Zimbabwe. It is absent from northeastern Namibia and from Botswana, except in the eastern hardveld and a few rocky outcrops in the north. It is most common in hilly and mountainous areas, such as along the major escarpment ridges lining the interior plateau. This martin is patchily distributed over much of its range, dependent on the availability of suitable nesting habitat. Other races of this species are widely distributed over much of the rest of Africa, the Middle East to Afghanistan and Pakistan. A density of 9.5/100 ha was found in suburban habitat in the southwestern Cape Province (Siegfried 1968b).

It is a conspicuous bird and can be confused only with the all-brown morph of the Brownthroated Martin *Riparia paludicola*, which is smaller, lacks the white tail spots, and is associated with wetland habitat.

Habitat: The vegetation types in which it has the highest reporting rates are those in which rock formations are most frequent. It has adapted to breeding on man-made structures in many urban and farming areas. Rock Martins are less dependent on water than most members of the Hirundinidae but seldom occur far from rocky terrain.

Movements: These birds are generally thought to be resident in southern Africa but movements to lower altitudes, and even from South Africa northwards to Zimbabwe in winter, have been suggested (e.g. Irwin 1977; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Hockey *et al.* 1989). In at least Zones 4 and 8, i.e. southern South Africa, reporting rates peaked during early summer, were intermediate during winter, and were at their lowest during late summer. This pattern may also be discernible in Zones 3, 6 and 7, i.e. the remainder of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, but is less pronounced. No pattern of seasonality is evident in Zones 1, 2 and 5, i.e. northern Namibia and Zimbabwe. The extent to which these patterns reflect large-scale migration, local or altitudinal movements and local seasonal changes in conspicuousness, e.g. because of local differences in breeding seasons and increased chances of being recorded at man-made structures when nesting, requires further investigation.

Breeding: In the southern Zones 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8, most of the breeding records were from the spring and early summer months with a peak September–January. In the northern Zones 1, 2 and 5, two breeding peaks, in late summer–autumn and spring, were evident. Bimodal breeding seasonality has also been recorded in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and other countries in East Africa (Earlé 1988b).

Interspecific relationships: This species may compete with, or be excluded from, some nest sites by other Hirundinidae, but no data exist on this point. Nests are sometimes usurped by Little Swifts *Apus affinis* (Carr 1984).

Historical distribution and conservation: The ability to use man-made structures for breeding in this species has almost certainly allowed it to colonize or increase in areas that previously lacked or were poor in suitable nest sites (e.g.

Hockey *et al.* 1989 for the southwestern Cape Province). Breeding pairs now occur at farmhouses in otherwise totally level terrain in some regions, e.g. in parts of the Karoo and Kalahari. In the Transvaal, however, it has apparently not adapted to using man-made structures to the same extent as in other regions (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). A local decrease in the Cape Peninsula (3318CD, 3418AB) area has been reported (Schmidt 1990).

R.A. Earlé

Recorded in 2410 grid cells, 53.1%
Total number of records: 32 827
Mean reporting rate for range: 26.2%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



