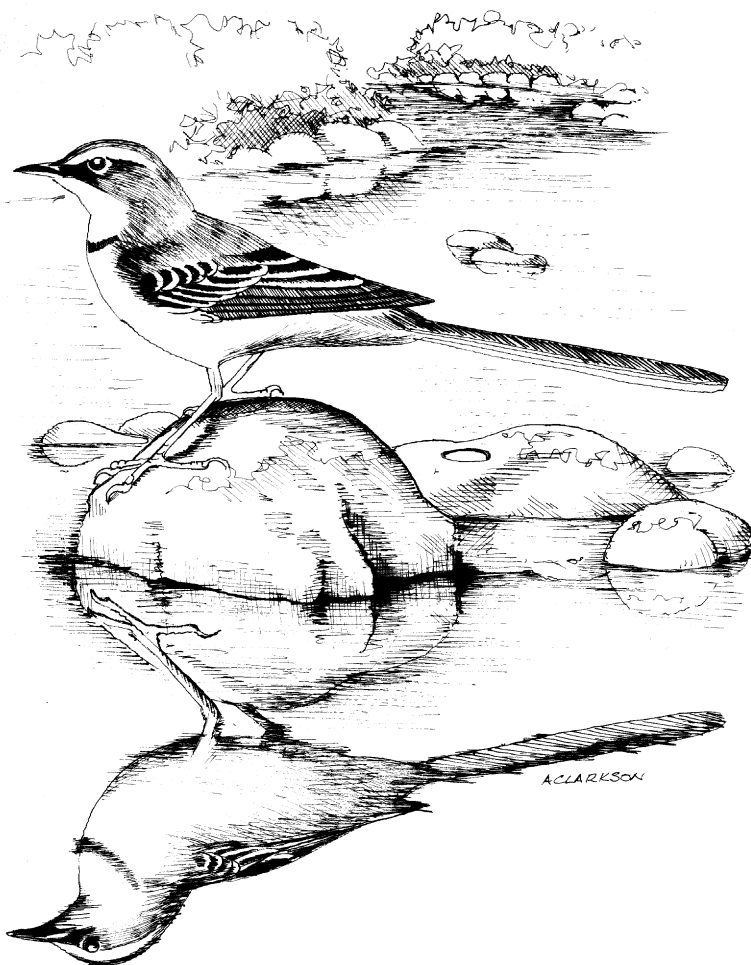




Longtailed Wagtail

Bergkwikkie

Motacilla clara

This delicate wagtail is found along the south and east coast of southern Africa, and inland is associated with the Drakensberg escarpment and Lebombo range from the eastern Cape Province, through KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland, to the Transvaal. It also occurs in eastern and northeastern Zimbabwe. North of southern Africa it is widely but locally distributed south of the Sahara (Keith *et al.* 1992). Adult territorial pairs are always seen together, within a few metres of each other, unless breeding, and are joined in summer by one to three fledglings. Juveniles disperse to become 'birds of passage' and are seen alone in autumn and winter. They occur at densities of about one pair per 590 m along the Palmiet River in Westville (2930DD). Densities are slightly higher on pristine rivers in the region, but much lower on polluted and degraded streams (Piper & Schultz 1988, 1989; pers. obs).

It is seldom confused with other African wagtails, though it is similar in behaviour and habitat preference to the Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea*, a Palearctic migrant which is an infrequent visitor to southern Africa (Maclean 1993b). It is often overlooked because of its specialized habitat. When sought, it is easily found and identified because of its confiding nature. It is likely to have been under-reported.

Habitat: It is found in riverine forest where it forages entirely within the watercourses of small, fast-flowing streams, seldom venturing beyond the river-banks. It sometimes uses open waterfalls, dam spillways and occasionally the lawns and margins of swimming pools where adjacent to its river-based territories, but it has not become a commensal with humans.

Movements: In a study along the Palmiet River, territorial pairs hold their territories for life, never leaving and only occasionally 'upgrading' to a nearby, and presumably better, territory (Piper & Schultz 1988, 1989; pers. obs). However, in the eastern Cape Province they occupy ephemeral streams in summer to breed, and withdraw to winter on larger perennial streams (C.J. Vernon pers. comm.). There is no evidence for seasonal movements in the models, although reporting rates do show seasonal variations, especially in the extreme south (Zone 8).

Breeding: Nesting occurs in early spring to summer throughout the range (Dean 1971; Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Piper 1989). The data suggest that breeding becomes progressively later from north to south. Breeding peaks earlier than shown because most observers probably inferred breeding from fledglings, not nests. It occasionally attempts to breed in the autumn (Winterbottom 1964b; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; pers. obs), but these late attempts nearly always fail.

Interspecific relationships: In encounters with African Pied *M. aguimp* and Cape *M. capensis* Wagtails, the Longtailed Wagtail is invariably dominated by those two species (C.J. Vernon pers. comm.; pers. obs); African Pied Wagtails are thought to exclude Longtailed Wagtails from some Zimbabwean habitats (Irwin 1981).

Historical distribution and conservation: It was relatively widely recorded in KwaZulu-Natal and the Transvaal (cf. Cyrus & Robson 1980; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), presumably as a result of improved coverage. It is likely to decline as streams become polluted. In urban areas, the greatly increased volume of stormwater is causing severe erosion and degradation of streams by scouring detritus out of stream-pools and increasing the transport and deposition of sand and silt.

S.E. Piper

Recorded in 259 grid cells, 5.7%
Total number of records: 2311
Mean reporting rate for range: 8.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

