

### European Marsh Warbler

Europese Rietsanger

*Acrocephalus palustris*

The European Marsh Warbler is one of the few Palearctic passerines in which the entire population spends the nonbreeding season in the southern third of Africa (Curry-Lindahl 1981; Pearson & Lack 1992). The core of the nonbreeding range lies just north of the atlas region (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1987b), but it is common in the humid northern and eastern part of southern Africa as far south as Port Elizabeth (3325DC) (Tree 1971). There are a few scattered records from Namibia (see also Clancey 1975c; Becker & Lütgens 1976), but it generally avoids the central and southern Kalahari, most of Namibia and the interior of the Cape Province. The apparent stronghold in Swaziland is an artefact of a particular observer's attention and coverage. Vagrants have occurred on the Cape Peninsula (3418A) (Fraser & McMahon 1995b).

It is unobtrusive and solitary, skulking deep in dense thickets. It is territorial in its nonbreeding quarters and sings for prolonged periods (Kelsey 1989), but is otherwise difficult to identify; it must have been widely overlooked. When silent, it is difficult to distinguish from congeners like African Marsh *A. baeticatus* and European Reed *A. scirpaceus* Warblers. In Botswana, it was discovered only recently (Bennett 1974; Hunter 1984) but is, in fact, common in lush vegetation in the north where densities of 3–7 birds/10 ha were recorded in late summer 1992 (Herremans 1993c, 1994e).

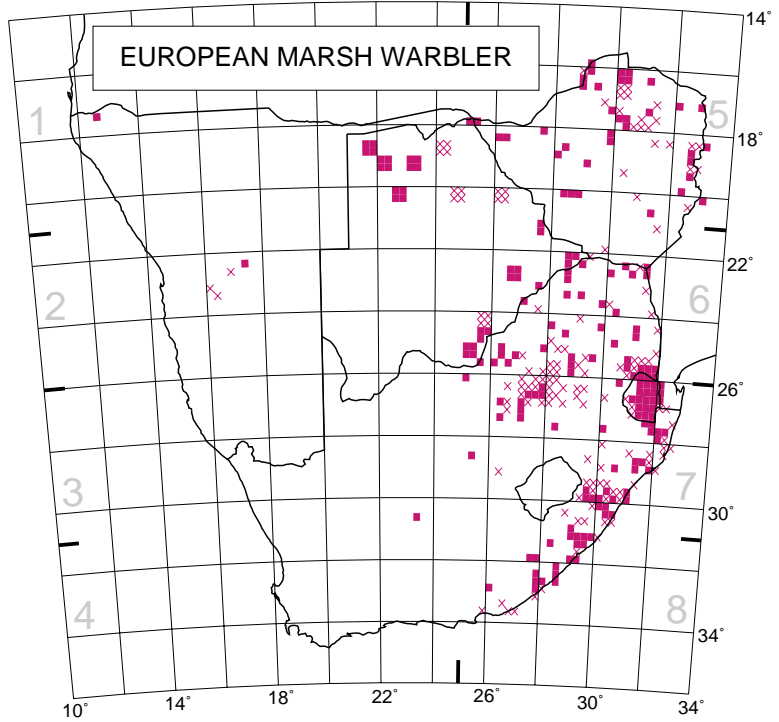
On the nonbreeding grounds it prefers dense, lush thickets, particularly with rank herbaceous undergrowth, usually away from water (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1987b).

It spends 2–4 months at 'autumn quarters' in northeastern Africa before continuing migration to southern Africa (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1987b) in November–December (Pearson 1982; Kelsey *et al.* 1989). It arrives rapidly over the whole latitudinal range from late November, but mostly in December (Taylor 1979; Irwin 1981; Herremans 1994d). In the more arid fringes of the Kalahari, good numbers arrive only in January–February, after good rains (Herremans *et al.* 1992). Departure is rapid, during April. There are ring recoveries linking South Africa with Finland and Mozambique with Belgium (Dowsett *et al.* 1988).

In relatively mesic areas there is nonbreeding-site fidelity (Manson & Manson 1976; Irwin 1981; Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1987b; Hanmer 1989a; Medland 1993b).

Its distribution overlaps widely with those of the African Marsh and European Reed Warblers, but they prefer wetland habitat. Its overall distribution is somewhat similar to that of the Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*. The present distribution is not known to differ from the past and the European Marsh Warbler is not threatened.

*M. Herremans*



Recorded in 328 grid cells, 7.2%  
 Total number of records: 914  
 Mean reporting rate for range: 2.2%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types

