Dear Mr. Oatley,

On the 17th January 1982 a Whiterumped Swift *Apus caffer*, bearing the ring number E-04219 was re-captured during ringing operations at the Melville Koppies Nature Reserve, Johannesburg (26 10S; 28 00E) by the Writer. It had been previously ringed as an adult on the 5th November 1977 at the same locality. To date this is the only retrap worth mentioning (4 years 2 months); the other two retrapped Whiterumped Swifts being retrapped in the season following the original ringing.

When the retrap was being examined it was noticed that there was much less white on the forehead of this bird than on the other swifts caught together with it. This bird also had a glossier sheen about its upperparts, particularly the wing coverts. Could this possibly be criteria for aging Whiterumped Swifts? Other ringers handling these birds could add to our knowledge by noting the amount of white on the forehead as well as the age of the bird.

It is thought that birds with a lot of white on their foreheads are fairly young birds while those with little white are adults, as the retrap would indicate. However, much more work is needed to be done before we can tell with certainty.

P. Rohloff, 24 Circle Street, DISCOVERY, Transvaal, 1710

Dear Mr. Oatley,

Thank you for showing me Mr. Rohloff's letter of 21 April. Few species of swift are easy to age in the hand. The principal paper on the subject is Brooke, R.K. 1969. Age characters in swifts. Bull. Brit. Orn. Club 89: 78-81. In general he found that examination of the shape and relative length of the outermost or 5th tail feather was the best guide to aging swifts. He wrote "In most fork-tailed swifts the fifth or outermost rectrix is more pointed or attenuated or emarginate on its inner web in the adult than in the juvenal.". This is certainly true of the African Whiterumped Swift *Apus caffer* even though in fully grown juvenals, not prematurely flown nestlings picked up in the street, the outermost tail feather is relatively as long as it is in the adult.