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.

Prematurely and newly fledged birds are charaterized by pale, not dull black toes, also by pale tips to the four outermost primaries (P 7 - 10) and the tail feathers. Pale tips to other feathers in swifts are indications of extreme freshness, irrespective of the age of the bird. Most species in *Apus* have a larger area of the frons pale as juvenals than as adults and here I agree with Mr. Rohloff that this is a useful age character, particularly if both adults and juvenals are available for comparison since it is a question of degree. The shape of the outer tail feather, once observed, can be used without the other age class present for comparison.

I have looked at many hundreds of skins of the genus *Apus* and have always found that degree of gloss was a function of freshness of the feathers, being most obvious in fresh feathers, irrespective of age. To quote Brooke again "a greenish wash or gloss which with wear turns dark bluish-purple in dark forms and dull brownish in pale forms.". The African Whiterumped Swift is, of course, a dark form.

Mr. Rohloff states that his bird was an adult on 5 November 1977 but he does not say how he determined this. I suspect that most ringers' statements on the age classes of swifts ringed other than in a nest are guesses on which too much reliance should not be placed. I hope that Mr. Rohloff and his friends will continue to try and ring swifts and add to the small body of data already available for a most interesting family.

R.K. Brooke, Percy FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town, RONDEBOSCH, 7700

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Dear Sir,

LONGEVITY FROM RETRAPS

I was very interested to read Mrs. Dale Hanmer's article in Volume 10 1981 of SAFRING NEWS on the above-mentioned subject.

It occurs to me that the publication of any significant longevity record, whether by trapping or by recovery, serves a real