

# ARTICLES & REPORTS

## SURVIVAL OF A CLIFF SWALLOW WITHOUT FOOD

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On Friday, 16 September 1983, at about 19h00 a large number of South African Cliff Swallows *Hirundo spilodera* were captured by mistnet at a colony near Bloemfontein as part of a biological and ringing study on this species. These birds were ringed and were all kept overnight in large keep boxes with a wooden frame and double wall of hessian. Early on Saturday morning the birds were released at the colony and I made sure that no swallows remained in the boxes. However, two swallows had squeezed through the slit in the inside hessian wall of one box and were not detected until Monday morning (19th) at 08h00 when the boxes were opened for cleaning. One was very weak and was put out of its misery with a little ether. The second one, however, was still bright-eyed and appeared healthy. The bird was weighed before being released and it flew away strongly. When first ringed on the 16th it had a mass of 22,4 g, while on release some 61 hours later it weighed only 15,3 g, a loss of 7,1 g or 31,7% of its initial mass. I do not know if it really survived but I have no reason to believe otherwise.

Mayhew (1958) also mentions a case where an American Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* survived in a keep box for at least 46 hours with apparently no ill effects.

The accidental 'experiment' is not likely to be repeated but it showed that a Cliff Swallow can survive without food for a considerable period of time.

### REFERENCE : -

MAYHEW, W.W. 1958. The biology of the Cliff Swallow in California. Condor 60: 6-37.

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