RINGING AND RECOVERY DETAILS OF FOUR SOUTHERN AFRICAN SWALLOW SPECIES

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INTRODUCTION

Analyses of ringing data of swallows in southern Africa have until now been almost exclusively confined to the European Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (e.g. Rowan 1968. Ostrich 39: 76-84). This was probably due to the large numbers of the species ringed and the resultant workable number of recoveries from Asia and Europe which made interesting reading. On the other hand, the solitarily-breeding swallows of southern Africa have attracted little attention and the ringing of these species has been sporadic over the last 35 years. This short paper is an attempt to stimulate interest in the ringing of swallows, especially those species that 'come back to the same nest each year'. Data for the Lesser Striped Swallow *H. abyssinica*, Whitethroated Swallow *H. albigularis*, Greater Striped Swallow *H. cucullata* and the Redbreasted Swallow *H. semirufa* are presented here.

RESULTS

In all, 8 954 individuals of these four species were ringed and 128 recovered or subsequently recaptured (Table 1 page 69). All four species showed low recovery rates with only the Greater Striped Swallow approaching the 1 % mark. This species was also the only one with a long-distance recovery from the wintering area in central Africa; ringed at Helderberg Nature Reserve, Somerset West, and recovered at Kasanza, Zaire, 3 156 km to the north. Two other Greater Striped Swallows and one Redbreasted Swallow were recovered more than 50 km from the original ringing site but all other birds were recovered less than 50 km from the ringing site (Figure 1 overleaf). Of all birds recovered or recaptured, 60 % were found at the original ringing site (Figure 1). This figure should probably be much higher (up to 80 %) as recovery details (especially of the older records) were often not accurate, stating only the general district of recovery and thus creating 'computer' movements.

Only the Lesser Striped Swallow did not show a higher recapture than recovery rate and this was also the species with the lowest overall recovery and recapture table (Table 1). In all, only 1,43 % of the birds ringed were ever recovered or recaptured which is low by all standards.

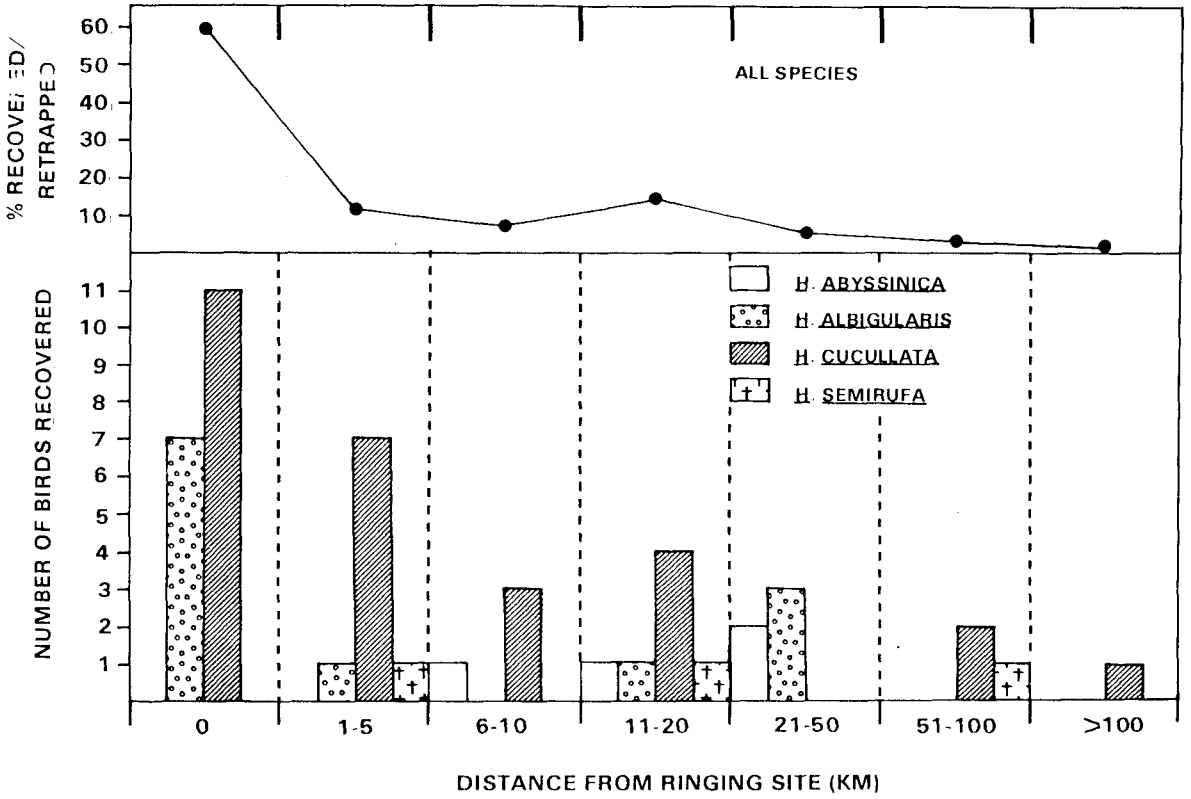

FIGURE 1. RECOVERIES AND RETRAPS OF FOUR SWALLOW SPECIES

TABLE 1

NUMBERS OF FOUR SWALLOW SPECIES RINGED AND RECOVERED AND/OR RECAPTURED

	SPECIES			
	Lesser Striped Swallow *Hirundo abyssinica*	Whitethroated Swallow *Hirundo albigularis*	Greater Striped Swallow *Hirundo cucullata*	Redbreasted Swallow *Hirundo semirufa*
Total no. ringed	2 880	1 995	3 045	1 034
Total no. recovered	14	4	29	3
% ringed/recovered	0,49	0,20	0,95	0,29
Total no. recaptured	6	25	30	11
% ringed/recaptured	0,21	1,25	0,99	1,06
Total no. recovered and recaptured	20	29	62	17
% ringed/recovered and recaptured	0,69	1,45	2,04	1,64

TABLE 2

LONGEVITY OF FOUR SWALLOW SPECIES AS REVEALED BY RECAPTURE AND RECOVERY DATA AT SAFRING. ONLY THE FIVE OLDEST INDIVIDUALS OF EACH SPECIES ARE GIVEN.

RING NUMBER	AGE AT RINGING	SEX	AGE AT RECOVERY	
			MONTHS	YEARS
	Lesser Striped Swallow *Hirundo abyssinica*			
5408664	Final plumage	0	71	5 Y 11 mths
5527263	Final plumage	?	36	3 y 0 mths
60171226	Unknown	?	36	3 y 0 mths
60184290	Unknown	?	34	2 y 10 mths
5408658	Final plumage	0	34	2 y 10 mths
	Whitethroated Swallow *Hirundo albigularis*			
5703019	First plumage	0	119	9 y 11 mths
5014869	Final plumage	?	108	9 y 0 mths
58208097	First plumage	?	96	8 y 0 mths
60181211	Final plumage	?	59	4 y 11 mths
58104608	First plumage	?	34	2 y 10 mths
	Greater Striped Swallow *Hirundo cucullata*			
5523521	Final plumage	?	80	6 y 8 mths
AA07411	Nesting	?	77	6 y 5 mths
231554	Final plumage	?	72	6 y 0 mths
60170838	Final plumage	?	60	5 y 11 mths
60168956	Final plumage	?	59	4 y 11 mths
	Redbreasted Swallow *Hirundo semirufa*			
5007472	Final plumage	?	69	5 y 9 mths
62215213	Final plumage	?	60	5 y 0 mths
58102434	Final plumage	?	50	4 y 2 mths
5016720	First plumage	?	48	4 y 0 mths
5018756	Final plumage	?	48	4 y 0 mths

TABLE 3

CAUSES OF MORTABLITY IN FOUR SWALLOW SPECIES RECOVERED AND NUMBERS RECAPTURED UP TO JUNE 1986

RECAPTURE/RECOVERY DETAILS	SPECIES			
	Lesser Striped Swallow *Hirundo abyssinica*	Whitethroated Swallow *Hirundo albigularis*	Greater Striped Swallow *Hirundo cucullata*	Redbreasted Swallow *Hirundo semirufa*
Recaptured and released	6	25*	30	11
Found sick or injured - died	2	1	4	1
Collided with road vehicle	1		2	1
Found dead - details unknown	10	3	22	
Killed by explosion	1			
Shot				1
Unknown if dead or alive (taken as alive)			3	3
Killed by cat			1	
TOTAL	20	29	62	17

* 18 of these records are for only three individuals caught repeatedly in consecutive seasons.

Table 2 gives records for the four species as recorded in the SAFRING records. This probably only gives approximate 'longevity' for one species, the Whitethroated Swallow, as it is glaringly obvious that there are too few records to consider these to be real 'records'.

DISCUSSION

Swallows are the ideal birds for long-term ringing studies. All four species discussed here are well-known for their habit of returning to breed in the same nest year after year. This is well illustrated by the fact that at least 60 % of the recovered/recaptured birds were found at the original ringing site. The oldest Whitethroated Swallow (Table 2) was trapped nine times between 1958 and 1968 at the same nest in Bryanston, Johannesburg. Furthermore, the 25 recapture records for the Whitethroated Swallow came from only six birds (Table 3). From the above it is clear that one can repeatedly trap individual swallows at the nest site for as long as they return to it. In the light of the low recovery rate (Table 1), a 'retrap'-orientated ringing approach towards these swallows is a worthwhile course to follow. However, ringing of these solitarily-breeding swallows might result in a recovery from their winter grounds. The Greater Striped Swallow recovery from Zaire, together with four museum specimens, provide the only indication of the wintering grounds of this species.

I hope that the totally inadequate data on which this short paper is based will be an incentive for the revival of swallow ringing.

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