

AN EXAMINATION OF ROAD-KILLED EUROPEAN SWALLOW *HIRUNDO RUSTICA* MOULTS

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Between 8 and 12 January 1995, I travelled by bakkie (pickup truck) across the Provinces of Northern Transvaal and Northern Cape, and the Northwest Province. There was much rain and cloud around and many hundreds European Swallows *Hirundo r. rustica* were sitting on tarred roads. The great majority rose into the air as I and other vehicle drivers approached but 18 (five adults and 13 immatures) were found dead, and moult was recorded, the minimum being the nine primaries in one wing. After examination the carcasses were thrown into the roadside vegetation for consumption by ants and other scavengers without disturbance by passing traffic.

The moult scores of the adults varied from 20 to 34 (45 = moult just completed and 0 = moult not yet started), mean 25,8. The great range in moult scores suggests that more than one population was involved in these deaths over a five day period. It will probably eventually be shown from ringing recoveries that the Score 20 bird came from the eastern part of the Palearctic range (central Siberia?) where breeding starts later than in parts further west and south. Analogously, the Score 34 bird probably came from the southwestern part of the range where breeding starts earliest. Mendelsohn's (1973) study makes the same suggestion.

Similarly, the moult scores of the 13 immatures ranged from 15 to 29, mean 20,8 and similar deductions about origin will probably be possible in due course through a combination of ringing and moult studies. Moulting in adults was symmetrical (equal scores in both wings),

and in immatures it was usually symmetrical but sometimes differed by one point. I have taken the higher value for calculating the mean. It will be noted that adult moult was more advanced than that of immatures: differences in timing of moult by age (and sex) classes is not rare in birds, including the European Swallow (Mendelsohn 1973 and references therein).

Motor vehicles were not the only observed cause of death of European Swallows: a Little Banded Goshawk *Accipiter badius* took a European Swallow from the waterside at the Hans Strijdom Dam in the Northern Transvaal Province on 10 January.

REFERENCE

MENDELSON, J.M. 1973. Some observations on age ratio, weight and moult of the European Swallow *Hirundo rustica* L. in the central Transvaal (Aves: Hirundinidae). *Annals of the Transvaal Museum* 28: 79-89.

