Abstract of article in *Oriolus 64 (2) 1998*, pp.37-56: *Trek, overwiffiering en gedrag van Gierzwaluwen Apus apus in Congo en zuidelijk Afrika;* reproduced with permission.

MIGRATION, WINTERING AND BEHAVIOUR OF COMMON SWIFTS IN CONGO AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Abstract

Data on migration, wintering, behaviour, moult, weight of and amount of subcutaneous fat in Common Swifts in sub-Saharan Africa are presented. These were gathered (1) in the field in Congo, during the author's nine-year stay (1950-1960) in Equateur province, (2) by examining 101 skins of nominate *A. apus* from collections in Tervuren, Brussels and New York, and comparing these with 37 specimens of *A. a. pekinensis* and 20 of A. *pallidus*, (3) by scanning relevant literature and collecting recovery data from several European ringing schemes.

The possible occurrence of other Apus species in central Affica is discussed; only A. *niansae, pallidus* and (especially) *barbatus* appear as likely candidates. However, identification remains difficult, due to plumage similarities and the occurrence of aberrant individuals, of which seven examples were found. Two tables of data are presented, on the autumn passage through the northern Afrotropics which takes place from July to August, and on the passage through Congo, where southward migration occurs mainly from September to November. Examples of conditions influencing the visible presence of Common Swifts (e.g. rainfall, swarming of termites) are documented. Although it is presumed that the species roosts aerially in sub-Saharan Africa, the author feels that the usage of hollow trees cannot be ruled out. The assembled data confirm that the main wintering grounds of the European population lie south of the equator, below 4°S. Movements north of the equator during November-January may be prompted by food shortages and north-eastern harmattan winds.

In Congo, spring migration started in January and reached its peak in March-April, with the last birds departing in May. Over-summering in central Africa seems unlikely; the author regards the six known records from June-July as exceptions. In the majority of the 28 specimens collected by the author, the gonads were at rest until April, observations of sexual behaviour (e.g. Screaming Display) from mid-December onwards notwithstanding. Although subcutaneous fat was noted from September to April, its presence did not seem to be the rule. Average weight during August-April varied between 37.5 and 40.5 g (minimum 30 g, maximum 50 g). Primary moult was noted to start as early as August and to be completed in January-April, somewhat earlier in second-year birds than in adults.

Recoveries from 108 specimens are presented in four tables and three figures (see e.g. below). These data confirm a southward passage through central Africa in July-October and a return passage in January-May; in North Africa the latter may last until June. Over 90% of the recoveries concerned birds killed or found dead; of these birds about two thirds were killed while under four years old, while the remaining third reached the age of four to eleven years.

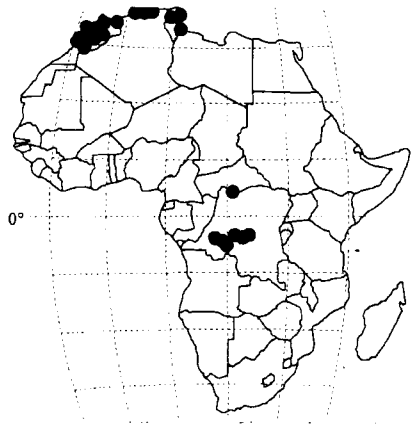

Fig. 5. *Recoveries of Common Swifts in April-June.*