

The status of the Black Swift *Apus barbatus* in western West Africa

West of Cameroon, the Black Swift *Apus barbatus* is known from two skins, one taken at Obudu Plateau, Nigeria, and the other at Rokupr, Sierra Leone (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1970, Fry *et al.* 1988). There are no published sightings west of Nigeria (Elgood 1982). The following observations of dark swifts by the author in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Ivory Coast show that Black Swifts, termed "*Apus (barbatus glanvillei?)*" by Gatter (1988), must be regular in this part of West Africa.

Sierra Leone. In eastern Sierra Leone between Sefadu and the Loma Mts, a flock of about 20 birds was seen on 17 Mar 1984.

Liberia. On Mt Saki, north of Voinjama, just at the Guinean border, on 29 May 1984 (Gatter 1988) a breeding site with several pairs was found in a crack under an overhang on a vertical surface of a granite dome, about 600-700 m a.s.l. (together with C. Steiner).

Ivory Coast. On Mt Tonkui, near Man, at least singles were seen with European Swifts *A. apus* and numerous Alpine Swifts *Tachymarptis melba*, around the television tower on 3 Apr 1991.

Mt Nimba. On the higher ridges of Guinean, Ivorian and Liberian Mt Nimba, more than 20 records from six years between 1981 and 1993, some together with M. Behrndt and P. Gatter, show that this is the typical, but overlooked indigenous swift there. On different ridges of the mountain, flocks of up to 100 or more *A. barbatus* were seen in February, March and April on several occasions. They were the only swifts there on some days. On other days thousands of European Swifts passed by, often calling, but we never heard the calls of Black Swifts among them.

European Swifts spend nine months, from late August to late May, in Liberia. As a result of loop migration in Africa, numbers can be high in December, but lower during the dry months of January and February and enormous in March, April and May (Gatter 1987a, 1987b).

G.D. Field (*in litt.*) has unpublished observations of large flocks of swifts including Mottled Swift *A. aequatorialis* and dark *A. apus/barbatus* types in western Sierra Leone from Freetown northwards, particularly in May/June. He suggests these swifts were *A. barbatus*, although no proof was obtained.

The racial identity of these birds awaits further specimens. In all the observations, the birds were noted as being very dark, with the chin and throat without any whitish area. The voice was clearly different from that of *A. apus*. Once, trilling social calls were heard, similar to those of Alpine Swifts (not described for Black Swift by Fry *et al.* 1988). Our field notes fit quite well with *A. b. glanvillei* from Sierra Leone, but there may be several different subspecies in this western area, which includes isolated mountain ranges and hilly country in Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Guinea and northern Liberia.

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Received 28 January 1993

Revised 19 May 1993

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MALIMBUS

Journal of the West African Ornithological Society

Revue de la Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest Africain



VOLUME 15 Number 2

October 1993

ISSN 0331-3689

Malimbus 15 (2) October 1993

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