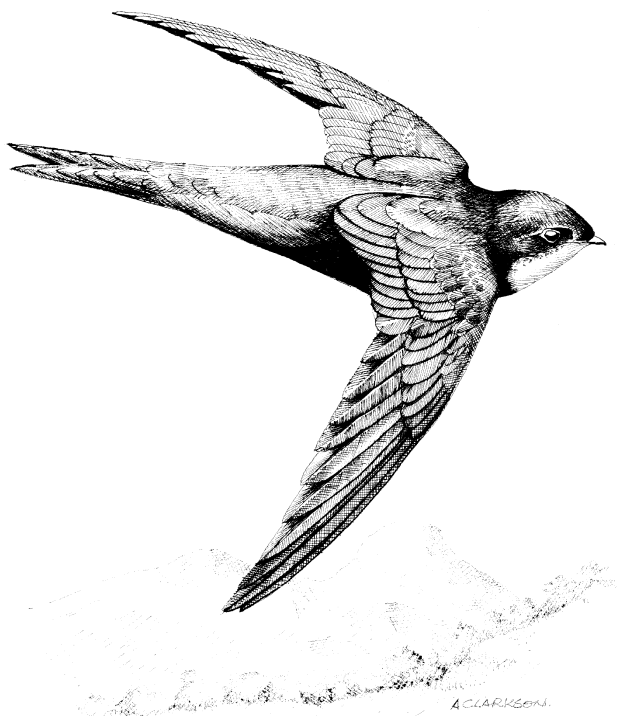




Black Swift

Swartwindswael

Apus barbatus

The Black Swift breeds in mountainous areas from the Cape to Kenya, with isolated races (perhaps separate species) in Angola, Cameroon, Madagascar and the Comoro Islands (Brooke 1970).

It is strikingly absent from the Kalahari plains. The many claimed sight records from Namibia and the northern Cape Province were all vetted out because they were largely misidentifications, chiefly of European and Bradfield's Swifts *A. bradfieldi*, possibly even of Pallid Swifts *A. pallidus*. There are two opposing views on its status in Namibia: either it is replaced by the congeneric Bradfield's Swift and the two species are largely allopatric (Chantler & Driessens 1995), or the Black Swift occurs in mountainous habitats such as the Waterberg (2017A) and along the escarpment (C.J. Brown pers. comm.) and overlaps extensively with Bradfield's Swift. Its status in Zimbabwe is also unclear and bedevilled by misidentifications (A.J. Tree pers. comm.). This is a problem awaiting a thorough field study. See the text for European Swift *A. apus* for discussion of confusion with other plain dark swifts.

Habitat: This is predominantly a montane swift and most often reported from such habitat. Breeding normally takes place in dry horizontal cracks under overhangs of cliffs or in caves, and is known from the mountains of the south and east, north to about Klawer (3118DC) on the west coast, and inland west to Kimberley (2824DB) in flabelliform *Washingtonia* palms (Anderson, M.D. 1994b; specimen examined by R.K.B.), and Roodepoort (2627BB) (Brooke 1971g). Foraging usually takes place over open country.

Movements: As with other mountain-breeding swifts, it often forages gregariously in adjacent lowlands. It is not known how far breeding birds travel to forage. Immature and nonbreeding birds may travel great distances (>1000 km): two immature birds were collected at Walvis Bay far from the known breeding range (Brooke 1970, 1971g).

The nominate race of South Africa is a partial migrant to somewhere in equatorial Africa: one specimen, probably on northern passage, is known from northern Mozambique and was taken in late April (Brooke 1970). A juvenile, probably also on northern passage, was found in Maun (1923C) in mid-June (Muller & Herremans 1995). Northward passage occurs chiefly in April–May, and southward passage July–August. Overwintering birds are found chiefly in the southern Cape Province, KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland and the Transvaal. The two Zimbabwean races, *A. b. oreobates* breeding in the east and centre and *hollidayi* breeding in the Victoria Falls gorges (1725DD), are probably not migratory.

Breeding: Only a few breeding data have been substantiated (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), but the main egg-laying season is September–February.

Interspecific relationships: Irwin (1981) suggested that the Black Swift may avoid competition with the Mottled Swift *A. aequatorialis* by different choice of habitat. (See also European Swift.)

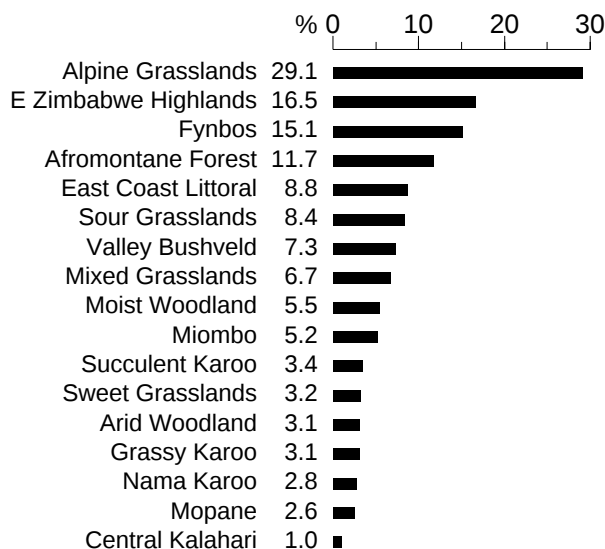
Historical distribution and conservation: This is not known to have differed from the present distribution, not least because breeding hardly ever takes place in man-made structures. However, the population breeding in palm trees in Kimberley (2824DB) is evidence of a recent expansion, as well as the adoption of a non-natural nest site, perhaps owing to their normal nest sites being occupied in Kimberley by the similarly sized Bradfield's Swift which colonized the city's abandoned diamond mines earlier.

Its rocky nest sites are usually difficult of access, and there are only minimal threats in southern Africa. Like all insectivores, the Black Swift is at risk from consuming invertebrates contaminated by agricultural insecticides.

R.K. Brooke

Recorded in 1094 grid cells, 24.1%
Total number of records: 9630
Mean reporting rate for range: 9.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in Okavango.

