

Seaward Movements of Swifts 1956-1957

Title

Seaward movements of Swifts 1956-57

Description and Summary of Results

Following some preliminary observations of Swifts *Apus apus* flying out to sea from the Suffolk coast in late evening and dusk in mid summer, BTO members were requested to send in any observations they had of a similar behaviour in 1956 and 1957 to discover more about this curious habit. Unfortunately, extremely few observations were sent in, and more than half by non-members independently of the BTO enquiry. But the observations received were of value in extending our knowledge of this remarkable habit.

Swifts were seen going out to sea at dusk from the coasts of Yorkshire, Suffolk, Devon and from Holland, and coming in at dawn on the coast of Northumberland. Records of the behaviour were from late May to mid August, and often followed feeding near the coast or a weather movement. It was suggested that the birds involved were not local to the district and that they spent the night over the sea.

In summary four points were of special interest: a) as expected, seaward flights at dusk were not confined to East Anglia; b) a large gathering near the coast at dusk did not necessarily fly seawards together – sometimes, smaller groups detached themselves and left separately; c) the birds returned to land soon after dawn; d) seaward flights at dusk apparently occurred not only during weather movements but also during the spring and autumn migrations, though this was not confirmed.

Methods of Data Capture

Casual records of seaward flights in the evening or early morning were requested. Observers were asked to note the number of birds involved, time of departure, compass direction and angle to coast, the weather at the time, including wind, also whether Swifts had been moving along the coast just beforehand and, if so, what proportion left seawards, or if the birds had been feeding locally. Notes on weather movements were also asked for to try to aid identifying the reasons for the behaviour and, if a place was found where such flights were regular, it was requested that a full record of evenings when they did and did not occur was made. Any past records were also requested.

Purpose of Data Capture

To determine the occurrence and scale of seaward movements of Swifts at dusk along the coast.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain, although in the event very few reports were received and almost all from the east coast.

Temporal Coverage

The summers of 1956 and 1957 although any past records were accepted.

Other Interested parties

It was set up as a Request for Information following some personal observations.

Organiser(s)

David Lack

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Lack, D. 1958. Swifts over the sea at night. *Bird Study* 5: 126-127.

The proposal for the survey and which contains some preliminary observations is:

Lack, D. 1956. Seaward flights of Swifts at dusk. *Bird Study* 3: 37-42.

The survey was noticed in all *Bird Study* issues for 1956 and 1957.

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

None.

Computer data -- outline contents

N/A.

Computer data -- description of contents

N/A.

Information held in BTO Archives

Nothing found.

There is an item (no. 124) in the David Lack archive in the Edward Grey Institute in Oxford which appears to be the results of this survey.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis