

## Pallid Swift

*Apus pallidus*

Category A

Very rare vagrant

1 record

Breeds mainly in coastal areas around the Mediterranean basin with the closest in southern France and northern Italy/southern Switzerland. The wintering range is inadequately known owing to possible confusion with Common Swift, but on present evidence it is principally in the northern Afrotropics and, like other European swifts, it probably makes extensive intra-seasonal movements within this range. The population is also difficult to assess for the same reason but there are thought to be between 15,000 and 40,000 pairs north of the Mediterranean (mainly in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Greece). Pallid differs from other European swifts in being double-brooded, so it remains later into autumn in the breeding areas, and presumably accounts for the late autumn occurrences in Britain. Winter records from the breeding range are not rare.

There had been 75 British records up to the end of 2010, 8 of which were in Kent, including the first in 1978. County records fall into two distinct arrival periods, with two in May and the others between mid-October and mid-November.

The only area record is as follows:

**1999** Folkestone, two, 2<sup>nd</sup> November (D. A. Gibson)

An account of the first area record is given below.

### **Pallid Swifts at Folkestone**

**2<sup>nd</sup> November 1999**

(Dale A Gibson)

#### **Circumstances of the find:**

Lucy, my daughter, was born on the 29th October 1999 and as a result I found myself walking around like a zombie for weeks on end. The 2nd November was no different. My mother decided to sit out in the garden for a ciggie and as I needed some fresh air I joined her outside. When I wandered out I noticed two swifts feeding a short distance away to the west over the town. As it was a very late date for Common Swift I ran indoors to find my telescope, and dusted it down on the way out.

A few minutes later I was watching one of the swifts but the light was bad, as the sun was very low in the sky to the west. I searched for the second bird and located it further around to the east feeding over houses a couple of hundred yards up my road. The light was much better on this bird and it quickly became apparent that this was a very pale bird indeed. This is probably the point at which I began shaking with excitement recalling that this was the best autumn ever for Pallid Swift in Britain.

I continued to note the features on this bird and took a description which is given below. The two birds fed together for about 30 minutes but mostly in the sun, and the structure was identical so I assume that the second bird was a Pallid. They then drifted further over Folkestone and were not seen again. I phoned Ian Roberts at work and let Birdline know.

#### **Description of the bird:**

Head and upperparts: The facial pattern was distinctive with an obvious dark 'patch' around the eye on an otherwise sandy-coloured head. The throat was pale whitish and blended in gradually with the underparts, the throat patch being much larger and never as clear-cut as in Common Swift.

The upper-wings were similar to the under-wings, with paler centres and darker leading edges and primaries. The bird had a darker saddle and paler rump. The bird came as close as approximately 50-100 yards and, as I've previous experience of Pallid Swift, I looked for the 'blunter' wing-tips and although on occasion they did look to be less sharp than Common this was very difficult to see without direct comparison.

Underparts: The under-wings and especially the central part were very pale sandy coloured and contrasted with a much darker leading edge and darker primary 'patch'. The underbody had a slightly darker tone.

**Comments on the record:**

1999 saw an unprecedented influx of Pallid Swifts into Britain with 13 seen between the 23<sup>rd</sup> October and 5<sup>th</sup> November, which equalled the total previous records for the country.

There had been only three previous Kent records: at Stodmarsh in May 1978, Warden Point in November 1984 and Cliffe in May 1998.