

Ornithological Observations



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Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

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HYBRID: BARN SWALLOW X COMMON HOUSE MARTIN

Andrew Pickles

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HYBRID: BARN SWALLOW X COMMON HOUSE MARTIN

*Andrew Pickles**

Citizen Scientist
Umzumbe, KwaZulu-Natal

* Corresponding author: barbet@venturenet.co.za

During my Barn Swallow ringing this season I have managed to capture quite a few other species besides the target species in the mistnets. Other than the usual weavers and widows, there have been a couple of Red-headed Quelea males (in full breeding plumage) as well as a female (with brood patch).

Other Hirundine species and relatives that were captured included Lesser Striped Swallows (being the most common), a single Greater Striped Swallow (a first sighting for me on the coast of southern KZN, common from about 20 km inland), Black Saw-wings, White-throated Swallow (adult and immature birds), Sand Martin, a couple of Banded Martin (also a first record for the coast, normally only seen 60 km inland), Common House Martin, Little Swift and White-rumped Swift.

On 19 February 2014 I mistnetted a Barn Swallow x Common House Martin hybrid. To the eye this particular bird appeared to be more House Martin than Barn Swallow even though the measurements fall exactly between those of the two species. In the hand the bird felt substantially smaller than the Barn Swallow.

Table 1: Measurements of the two parent species and a hybrid

	House Martin	Barn Swallow	Hybrid
Mass	15 g	17-20 g	16 g
Wing	107-113 mm	117-124 mm	115 mm
Tail	57 mm	>65 mm	60 mm

The bird was blue on the back which was to be expected from both parent species. The tarsus and hind claw of the hybrid had partial feathering compared to the House Martin with full feathering on the tarsus and all claws. The tail had no sign of any streamers (even though the bird was in moult) and the tail feathers had no white windows characteristic of Barn Swallows. The rump had a mottled white band compared to the House Martin's full white band. The biggest give-away however was the throat which was a paler colour of the Barn Swallow and a very small (virtually undetectable) dark band below the red colour. The red patch on the fore-crown was absent.

This hybrid is not uncommon as there are numerous records of the parent species interbreeding – however this was a first capture for me. A friend who has between 10 and 12 Barn Swallow nests in his barn in Finland recorded his first hybrid 2 seasons ago. Out of 250 000 Barn Swallows ringed in Finland over the last 10 years a total of 236 hybrids were ringed.

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