

## PALLID SWIFT – A NEW SPECIES FOR LUNDY AND DEVON

Over the summer of 2018 came news that the British Birds Rareities Committee (BBRC) had accepted the record of Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* on Lundy on 25 October 2016, representing not only the first for the island, but also the first accepted record for Devon.

Below are excerpts from the accounts written by Justin Zantboer and Chris Baillie, along with one of Simon Slade's photos which helped clinch the identification. Congratulations to all involved for their presence of mind and diligent observation; this is not an easy species to clinch!

*"Whilst counting migrants passing overhead during an indoor break, I noted a Swift descending rapidly from above Redwing and Chaffinch flocks. It was briefly holding its wings in a strong 'V' as do Common Swifts in similar descent. It levelled out and I went outside to record what I assumed to be a very late Common Swift. I quickly realised it was not that species, discounted North American vagrants and realised it was a Pallid Swift. It was separately observed by other birders, who independently reached the same identification, and Simon Slade's photos support this. I observed it intermittently between c15.00 and c15.30."* **Chris Baillie**

*"Whilst ringing in Millcombe Valley with Ellie Zantboer at approximately 1500hrs, we were talking with James McCarthy who was on a day trip, when we noticed a swift overhead with House Martins! We were all hopeful that it was going to be something good but it was quite high and, against the cloud, appeared to be dark! We all agreed though that it appeared to have broader and blunter wings and a more relaxed flight than would be expected of a Common Swift. It was obvious that we needed better views! It passed overhead a couple more times but again, we couldn't see any plumage details. We were joined by Gavin Bennett and Rob Duncan but as time was pressing, James had to leave to catch the boat. We picked the swift up again some ten minutes later and this time it made several passes, both level with and below us, at times only 30 metres away, enabling us to note some key features and identify it as a PALLID SWIFT! It spent about an hour over the island and was seen well in good light around Millcombe Valley, sometimes flying close to the ground and the cliff faces as it fed. It was also seen well flying around the church, where I assumed that it was going to roost but then at about 1630hrs, the skies cleared and it disappeared and was unfortunately not seen again. However, during its stay it was also seen well by Chris Baillie and his wife Carol, and by Simon Slade, who managed to get a photo. Both Chris & Simon identified it as a Pallid Swift before they had spoken to me and we were all more than happy with our verdict."* **Justin Zantboer**

Description (from Justin's submission):

- Underparts greyish brown, being paler than Common Swift, with pale edgings to many feathers on the breast, belly and flanks, giving the classic scaling effect. When seen close, the throat was noticeably much paler than the rest of the underparts but this feature was surprisingly difficult to see at even mid-range. The face and forehead was also paler, except for a darker eye patch, giving a slightly masked impression. The underwing showed much contrast when seen well, with the darker underwing coverts contrasting with the paler secondaries and the bases of the inner primaries. The outer primaries and the tips of the inner primaries appeared darker, creating a darker wedge, this again contrasting with the paler inner wing. Upperparts appeared mostly brownish, again paler than a Common Swift.



*Pallid Swift Apus pallidus over Millcombe on 25 October 2016 – the first accepted record for Lundy and Devon. Image: Simon Slade.*

The upperwing coverts were a few shades darker than the secondaries and inner primaries but the outer primaries were noticeable darker still so when seen against a darker background, there was a distinct contrast in the upperwing. The mantle was also darker, being a similar shade to the upperwing coverts but not quite as dark as the outer primaries so this also added to the contrasting effect. The rump appeared to be slightly paler than the mantle so with the contrast in the upperwing, gave the classic 'saddled' look.

- Shape and size as Common Swift, with a short, forked tail and long, scythe-like wings. The wings appeared very slightly broader, heavier and blunter than Common Swift. It also appeared to have subtly heavier look about it than a Common Swift. When feeding, it flew with much more gliding than normally seen in a Common Swift, with slightly slower wingbeats and at a slightly slower speed. It gave the impression of being much more relaxed.

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