

A Swallow *Hirundo rustica* L. at Birlingham, Worcestershire on 20 November 2022

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In most years, Swallows or Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* L. as they are now usually known, have departed from Worcestershire by the end of October with occasional records into November, mostly of tardy emigrants. This is confirmed in recent issues of the West Midland Bird Club Annual Bird Reports. A few rare December records were cited by Harrison & Harrison (2005). Since the start of this century emigration has been less closely defined in time and birds began to overwinter in Britain in very small numbers from about 2009. A key factor here is the availability of chironomid midges especially at sites where warm water is discharged through industrial processes.

Overwintering in Britain is fraught with difficulty for Swallows. I have a number of November records from coastal sites, mostly of tardy emigrants. On the Somerset coast birds remained very late into the winter of 2009, persisting into December when some ran out of resources. On 15 February 2010, at Uphill, Somerset (VC6 ST3229), I chanced upon an emaciated perfectly preserved dead Swallow in its final resting position on a coastal grassy bank (2014, Avon Ornithological Group).

In some places arrival at nest sites has been somewhat earlier but not consistently so. At Broadway, Worcestershire (VC37 SP0837) birds arrived at their nest sites on 28 March 2009 and 30 March 2011 (*teste* Anthony Halling) and a bird was over the floodplain of the River Avon at Wick on 18 March 2021 (*teste* Charles Hudson).

With this in mind the appearance a juvenile bird over floodplain pools at Birlingham, Worcestershire (VC37 SO9342) on 20 November 2022 was much more unusual. The behaviour of the bird, drinking from the water surface and hawking around the pool, was not that of a bird in any way intent on migration even if it did later trend south. Most probably this bird had responded to the continuously open weather that persisted for the previous month and which enabled a very large invertebrate biomass to persist. It is also a very clear marker for the future but not one in which the British population of Swallows is guaranteed. In the uncompromising drought of 2022 some birds, quite widely, abandoned their nests and adult birds vacated some breeding sites completely without raising brood.

References

Avon Ornithological Group 2014. *Avon Bird Report 2013*, p. 103.
Harrison, G. & Harrison, J. 2005. *The new Birds of the West Midlands*, pp. 1-496. West Midland Bird Club.