

Comments on the indigenous races of *Delichon urbica* (L.) occurring in Europe and North Africa.

by

P. A. CLANCEY, Glasgow.

Material of the Palaearctic Martin *Delichon urbica* (L.) recently assembled from both private and public collections has revealed the necessity of a revision of the races resident in the breeding season in Europe and North Africa. A critical analysis of the material available shows that in the geographical area under consideration the examples with the largest dimensions are those from the extreme north (Lappmark), and the smallest those collected in North Africa. The populations of *D. urbica* inhabiting the British Isles and the most of continental Europe south of the Baltic Sea are sufficiently distinct from the clinal extremes as to justify their classification under an additional racial name (These populations form a reasonably homogeneous race, and I cannot see how Rhineland birds can be separated, *vide Hirundo vogti* Kleinschmidt 'Katalog meiner ornithologischen Sammlung', 1935, p. 53). Italian breeding specimens collected in Emilia in April 1945, and now in my collection, resemble no known race, having the mantle distinctly greenish in tone and the rump sullied by strong buffish suffusions. I provisionally consider the Italian breeding *D. urbica* to be a new race to science.

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I propose to recognise four geographical races in Europe and North Africa, as follows:

1. *Delichon urbica urbica* (Linnaeus).

Hirundo urbica Linnaeus, 'Syst. Nat.', ed. 10, 1758, p. 192: Sweden.

Upper-parts glossy steel-blue with slight violet tinge; rump and underparts white; wings and tail blackish (ten examined).

Measurements: ♂♀, wing 115—123 (118.7), culmen from base 9.5—10 (9.7), tarsus 11—12 (11.5), tail 60.5—69.5 (63.8) mm.

Distribution: Norway, Sweden, Finland, N. Russia, ? Baltic States.

Remarks: Lappmark birds have the wing up to 123 mm in length but the majority of Swedish birds is scarcely so large, and the Martins of Sweden (? and Norway, Finland, etc.) would appear to be on a cline, those from the south with wings generally between 115 and 119 mm, while those from the northern limits of the species' breeding range have the wing-length mostly longer than 120 mm. There is no geographical break and I propose to unite the entire Finno-Scandian group of populations under *D. u. urbica*, using the Baltic Sea, Skagerak, Kattegat, etc. as

the dividing line between the nominate race and *D. u. fenestrarum* in the west. In European Russia (? and further east) no such geographical break in the distribution of the two races occurs, but material available does not permit of a delineation of the ranges of *D. u. urbica* and *D. u. fenestrarum* in Russia at the present juncture.

2. *Delichon urbica fenestrarum* (Brehm).

Chelidon fenestrarum Brehm, 'Handb. Naturg. Vög. Deutschland', 1831, p. 140: Germany.

Synonyms: *Chelidon rupestris* Brehm, 'Handb. Naturg. Vög. Deutschland', 1831, p. 140: Carinthia, Austria. *Chelidon tectorum* Brehm, 'Vogelfang', 1855, p. 47: Germany. *Hirundo vogti* Kleinschmidt, 'Katalog meiner ornithologischen Sammlung', 1935, p. 53: Rhine.

Upper-parts brighter steel-blue than in *D. u. urbica*. Smaller. (Fifty examined).

Measurements: ♂ ♀, wing (103) 107—115 (110.0), culmen from base 9—10.5 (9.9), tarsus 10.5—12 (11.3), tail (54.5) 58.5—65 (61.4) mm.

Distribution: British Isles, France, ? N. Spain, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland, Germany and central European countries east to Russia and in the S. E. certainly as far as Bulgaria (Burgas) and Greece, but material not available from many districts and precise range limits not known.

Remarks: As stated above, *D. u. fenestrarum* is reasonably constant throughout its entire ascertained range. British breeding birds, of which I have examined a comprehensive series, agree intimately with those of Continental origin, but it should be remarked that juvenile examples from Scotland generally tend to be darker above, especially on the head. Juvenile specimens from many parts of England are in no way separable from topotypical *D. u. fenestrarum*.

A single specimen from Holland (Zoölogisch Museum, Amsterdam) with no precise locality and date has the wing 103 mm. This is well within the wing-measurement range of *D. u. meridionalis*, but I am inclined to consider it as an aberrant example of *D. u. fenestrarum* and not as a migrant of the North African and Spanish race. No other specimen of *D. u. fenestrarum* measured has a wing of less than 107 mm.

DEMENTIEV, 'Systema Avium Rossicarum', 1, 1935, p. 275, places *Hirundo urbica orientalis* Somow, 1896: Kharkow, as a synonym of *D. u. urbica*. On the evidence available to me I am unable to decide of which race SOMOW's name *orientalis* is a synonym — the position of the name is complicated by the fact that it is based on migratory birds. Kharkov is within the range of *D. u. fenestrarum*.

3. *Delichon urbica* ? new race.

Similar to *D. u. fenestrarum* but differs in having the mantle distinctly greenish, the rump buffish white, and under-parts less pure white and noticeably suffused with buff.

Smaller than *D. u. fenestrarum*.

Measurements: ♀ only (two examined), wing 106, 109, culmen from base 10,10, tarsus 12,12, tail 58,58 mm.

Distribution: Italy.

Remarks: I hesitate to append a new name to these very distinct birds owing to the meagre nature of my material (2 specimens). It only need be stated here that they are unlike anything available in western European collections at the present time.

The two specimens were collected near Lugo, Ravenna Province, Emilia, N. Italy, on 15 and 17 April 1945. In both instances the birds were shot while repairing old nests in a colony of about ten pairs on a farmhouse, and there is no reason to doubt that they represent the indigenous race of the area.

4. *Delichon urbica meridionalis* (Hartert).

Hirundo urbica meridionalis Hartert, 'Vög. pal. Fauna', 1, 1910, p. 809: Hammam R'Hira, Algeria.

Precisely similar to *D. u. fenestrarum* in colour. Smaller. (Nine examined.)

Measurements: ♂♀, wing 100—107 (104.5), culmen from base 8—10 (9.3), tarsus 10—11.5 (11.0), tail 55.5—60 (57.9) mm.

Distribution: Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, also in S. Spain, Balearic Islands, ? Cyrenaica.

Remarks: WARDLAW RAMSAY, 'Birds of Europe and North Africa', 1923, p. 145, claims that in this race the secondaries are longer in proportion to the primaries than is so in the typical subspecies. I cannot support this distinction, but the constantly small dimensions are a reliable criterion of the race.

4 ♂♀ from Boughzoul, Boghari, Algeria, taken between 18 and 22 April 1949 (coll. SILLEM-VAN-MARLE) have wing-measurements 100, 103, 104.5, 106 mm., agreeing perfectly with HARTERT's measurements in the original description (100—106 mm). 5 ♂♀ from Tangier, Morocco, in the collection of Lieut. Col. W. A. PAYN range a little larger than the Algerian specimens, thus — 102.5, 105, 106, 107, 107 mm.

DEMENTIEV, 'Systema Avium Rossicarum', 1, 1935, p. 276, implies that all Mediterranean *D. urbica* are referable to this form, as well as specimens available in western Europe are insufficient to test the validity those from the Crimea, Caucasus, Persia and Turkestan. Actual breeding specimens available in western Europe are insufficient to test the validity of this finding. DEMENTIEV, (l. c.), places *Chelidon urbica alexandrovi* Zarudny, 1916, Pamir-Alai, as a synonym of *D. u. meridionalis*, but HARTERT, 'Vög. pal. Fauna', 3, 1922, p. 2175, considers it maintainable. Clearly the whole question of the racial status of the Mediterranean, Crimean, Caucasian, Persian and Turkestan Martin populations requires careful analysis with recently-taken breeding series. In the meantime, I prefer to

restrict the use of *D. u. meridionalis* to the North African and south Iberian populations, maintaining *D. u. alexandrovi* for those from further to the east. But this latter race does not strictly enter into the present review. I have been unable to examine specimens from the Crimea and the Caucasus but feel convinced that they will prove to be intermediate between *D. u. fenestrarum* and *D. u. alexandrovi*.

Zur Rassengliederung der europäischen und nordafrikanischen Mehlschwalben
(*Delichon urbica*).

Die Mehlschwalben der westlichen paläarktischen Region lassen eine gleitende Abnahme der Flügellänge von Nord nach Süd erkennen. Die Extreme sind gut kenntlich: *D. u. urbica* in Skandinavien und Nordrußland — *D. u. meridionalis* in Südspanien, Balearen und Nordafrika. Auch die in Mittel- und Westeuropa heimischen Vögel sind so deutlich von den beiden genannten Rassen geschieden, daß sie einen eigenen Namen (*D. u. fenestrarum*) führen müssen. — Die in Italien brütenden Mehlschwalben sind durch grünlichen Mantel, nicht rein weißen Bürzel und Unterseite deutlich als besondere Rasse gekennzeichnet, der jedoch in Anbetracht des geringen Materials kein Name gegeben wird.

Anschrift des Verf.: P. A. CLANCEY, 9, Craig Road, Cathcart, Glasgow.

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