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Eurasian Hobby

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Recently, towards the end of the Barn Swallow season, we had a couple of nets up in our garden in Umzumbe, South Coast, KwaZulu-Natal, in the hope of catching a few swallows before their migration north. We live on the top of a hill (187m asl) in the direct flight path of the swallows coming from inland to the roost site on the Umzumbe River. This roost hosts in excess of 1 million birds and we suspect that it is used by swallows from further south during their migration, as is the Mt. Moreland roost north of Durban.

The swallows started flying over the house towards the nets, saw the nets and flew over or around them much to our disgust. One swallow, however, flew straight towards the middle of the net and at the last minute turned and missed the net by millimetres. A bird, with swept back wings, chasing it wasn't so lucky and it hit the net and was caught. One of us immediately jumped off the patio and ran towards the net expecting to see one of the resident Lanners in the net. Not to be as it was dramatically smaller and with a black crown, not rufous. Peregrine was discounted by size. Then it was out with the books to confirm that what we had was a Eurasian Hobby.

Personally it was worth more than catching 20 Barn Swallows to see this magnificent little raptor in the hand. It was a first sighting of the bird for both of us. We have since seen a pair of them flying around even having a little scrap with the Lanner. We hope to find them returning next summer and hopefully catch the other one, as well as confirming if the ringed one has returned. I have subsequently found out that according to SAFRING's computerized records this is now the third one ringed in southern Africa, making the catch that much more special, as I am sure most people would feel the same.



