

*Micropus pacificus*, Fork tailed Swift.

By J. Sutton.

Referring to the notes on this species in connection with its visit to the Adelaide Plains on 11th, 12th, and 13th January last (see "South Australian Ornithologist," Vol. IX, Part 2, p. 68), I have received a further record of their appearance this year from Mr. Edwin Ashby, as shown below. I also give all previous appearances mentioned either in the "South Australian Ornithologist" or in the minutes of our monthly meetings prior to the first issue of our journal in January, 1914, and from other sources. At the same time I have inserted after each dated record the shade temperatures in Adelaide at the times of the visits of the birds; the figures in parentheses show the dates.

Mr. Ashby writes:—"At Christmas-time during a hot spell about the year 1909 I saw these Swifts hawking at a rather high altitude in the valley of the River Sturt in the property called Craighburn, near Blackwood. Some time about 1923 these birds

were hawking fairly low over my house and property, "Wittunga," Blackwood, but in less than half an hour they had moved on. On 11th February, 1927, numbers of these birds were hawking over the scrub between the houses at Beachport. I should estimate there were several score of birds, but as only five or six were visible at one time the estimate must be but a guess. The birds came down low over or along the margin of the seabeach, between the lighthouse and the jetty, but further away from the beach they were hawking above gunshot. I was only able to watch these birds between 6.30 a.m. and 8 a.m., as immediately after breakfast we started for Mount Gambier. Temperatures, (9th February, 1927) 89.8°, (10th) 102°, (11th) 107.2°, (12th) 73.1°. I only remember seeing these Swifts on one other occasion, but cannot recall the date. They were then flying low. I believe that on every occasion on which I have noted these Swifts it has been at the end of a heat spell or "Low," and I have long been of the opinion that these birds follow these depressions, or, more correctly, they pick up these depressions at that particular part where the hot current of air from the north is shortly to be replaced by the cold westerly current, and I judge the birds follow the westerly movement of the disturbance, continuing to make the same portion of the disturbance their hunting area. This action is probably due to the large number of flying insects that hatch or are in flight at that particular stage of these disturbances, i.e., the birds follow their food supply, which coincides with the approaching change in each meteorological disturbance."

11th February, 1887, at Edithburgh, Yorke Peninsula. Mr. J. G. McDougall in his diary wrote on that day:—"The sixth day of heat—surely this is the climax. The sea a sheet of glass, baths three times a day and an hour at a time, people bathing who had not done so for years; at night all doors and windows open and a sheet unbearable. Hot winds in the mornings, but very light, and heavy fires to the north. The sky was filled with hundreds of Swifts, glancing hither and thither, displaying their white necks and tail band and their wonderful power of wing. At dinner-time they played above the cliffs like swarms of gnats, but not one was to be seen at 3 p.m., when I went out with my gun. I have never seen these birds before, and am certain they are not residents. Where do they come from and whither do they go? Has this been solved? 12th February, 1887.—Another scorching day. Swifts fewer and flying higher; shot twice and missed. 13th February, 1887.—A few Swifts in the morning, and in the afternoon a total change, very cold at night and a gale from the south-east. Field crickets very

abundant, flying to lights and suddenly tuning up from most unexpected places."

(February 8), 100.7°; (9), 101.7°; (10), 99°; (11), 99.6°; (12), 99°; (13), 95.7°; (14), 78.1°.

February 15, 1918.—Captain S. A. White stated that he had seen this species at Fulham on that date. (February 14), 78.1°; (15), 90.1°; (16), 87.2°.

December 9, 1918.—Mr. S. Sanders, near Brighton Beach, noted Swifts flying about and heading north about 7.40 a.m. A rather warm day and fairly calm. (December 6), 104°; (7), 89.8°; (8), 101°; (9), 107.8°; (10), 83°.

February 16, 1919.—Mr. S. Sanders, at Sturt, noted a small flock of Swifts passing over the house and flying towards the west. Close and warm. (February 14), 103.4°; (15), 101.6°; (16), 88.3°; (17), 71.6°.

December 21, 1919.—Morning close, hot, and cloudy. Mr. S. Sanders, at Sturt, saw a great number of Swifts. On 23rd December a couple of Swifts were seen in the morning. In the early morning of 24th December a great number of Swifts were hawking low down over the paddock in front of his house. (December 20), 101.8°; (21), 90.7°; (22), 79.1°; (23), 96.3°; (24), 84.8°.

January, 1920.—Mr. S. Sanders reported at the monthly meeting held on 30th that he had seen this species on several occasions at Sturt during this month, at times flying very low, a few feet from the ground.

February 12, 1921.—Mr. S. Sanders reported having seen this species at Sturt flying at a great pace. (February 8), 93.6°; (9), 98.8°; (10), 101.9°; (11), 99°; (12), 107.8°; (13), 96.9°; (14), 93.4°; (15), 85.6°.

February 14 and 15, 1921.—At Moolawatana Station, near Lake Frome, Mr. L. K. McGilp reported :—"On the evening of 14th February a very large number of Swifts arrived here. A heavy downpour of rain ceased falling about 5 p.m., and shortly afterwards flock after flock of Swifts congregated at a hut on the station where I was camped. They circled round and round at a very low elevation for about an hour, twittering all the while. They appeared to arrive from a northerly direction, and departed on a south-westerly course, or towards Copley (on the railway line to Oodnadatta, and 373½ miles north of Adelaide). The next day on my returning to the station homestead, my brother and I saw another large flock flying low and circling round, but they did not remain long and I was not able to state

the direction in which they disappeared, as they left whilst I was indoors."

February 6, 1922.—Mr. J. W. Mellor reported that numbers of these Swifts were about Fulham on that date. They were flying low and passing on as they hawked after gnats and flies. (February 4), 90.9°; (5), 98.8°; (6), 96.6°; (7), 97.3°; (8), 102.3°; (9), 101.5°; (10), 91.8°; (11), 106°; (12), 99.2°.

A specimen in the S.A. Museum was taken at Laura by W. Wilson on 21st February, 1896. A number was seen. (February 20), 82.2°; (21), 101.9°; (22), 72.6°; (23), 91.9°.

From the undoubted records it appears that the species was seen in South Australia in December, 1909, 1918, 1919; January, 1920, 1927; and February, 1887, 1896, 1918, 1919, 1921, 1922, 1927; on twenty days in all, and generally when high temperatures were recorded.

---