

White-rumped Swifts

(*Micropus pacificus*).

By J. Sutton.

The following observations of this species have been recorded during this summer season:—

On 31st December, 1929, at the Grange, Mr. F. Storr saw "several hundreds flying northwards between 6 p.m. and 7.45 p.m. The flight was most continuous, and some of the birds were very high up, whilst others were quite low."

The temperature on that date in Adelaide only reached 74°, and the average for the five preceding days was 74.1°; but on the 28th December there was heavy north-west monsoonal rain over almost the whole of South Australia and lower Central Australia. Presumably these birds were working about the monsoon.

On 7th January, 1930, Mr. H. H. Newell, at Hindmarsh Island, writes:—"A large number of White-rumped Swifts were to be seen to-day. Some were flying high in the air, others close to the trees. They did not appear to be travelling in any particular direction."

On 8th January, 1930, at Beaumont, Burnside, Professor J. B. Cleland observes:—"On the evening of 8th January, at about 7.45 p.m., some time after the sun had set, but whilst there was a considerable amount of light, a flock of about 40 White-rumped Swifts suddenly appeared hawking at a moderate height at Beaumont (between Burnside and Glen Osmond). They circled round in an irregular way for about five minutes, gradually ascending to a greater height. They disappeared for a couple of minutes, and then turned up again and moved slowly southwards out of sight. This occurred in the midst of a heat wave, the highest shade temperatures recorded officially at Adelaide being—94.3° for 5th January, 99.6° for 6th January, 105° for 7th January, 108° for 8th January, and 108.2° for 9th January (76.9° for 10th January). It will be noted that the birds were about twenty-four hours before there was a definite cool change. It would be interesting to know where these birds spent the night that was so shortly descending upon them. Would they search for a suitable resting-spot before the light failed, or can they choose such in the dark or at dusk? Would they just cling to the trunk of any suitable tree that happened to be near? Again, how do Swifts "pick up" a heat wave travelling over a belt of country? A sense of barometrical

pressure cannot be of much assistance, as this will vary, apart from weather disturbances, according to the height at which the birds may fly."

On 8th January, 1930, Mr. W. P. Cleland, at Encounter Bay, saw "a few birds at 8.30 a.m. They were flying at a moderate height. No more were seen until the evening, between 6 and 7 p.m., when hundreds were hawking not very high up. On the morning of the 9th January some birds were seen flying at moderate heights. At midday the change arrived. The fishermen know the Swifts as 'storm-birds.'"

On 9th January Mr. F. E. Parsons, at Glen Osmond, observed "from 6.45 p.m. until 7.45 p.m. some 30 Swifts. At times they flew up so high that they seemed no larger than bees, and at other times they were quite low." (He rang me up on the telephone at 6.50 p.m., saying that the Swifts were flying between Glen Osmond and Mitcham, about a mile apart, and close to the foothills of the Mount Lofty Ranges. I searched the sky with a field-glass for half an hour, but could not find them.)

On the same date and time Mr. W. W. Weidenbach also saw the Swifts at Glen Osmond.

On 9th January, at the Grange, Mr. R. C. Beck states:—"From 6.30 p.m. to dark many Swifts were seen, at times very high up, and occasionally close to the ground. They were constantly appearing and disappearing in flocks of thirty to forty."

From 30th January, 1930, to 11th February we had a heat wave in which the shade temperatures ranged from 94.2° to 112.4°, but no reports came to hand that Swifts had been seen.