

THE FORK-TAILED SWIFT IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

By E. F. BOEHM, Sutherlands, S.A. (7/6/1944)

In my previous paper (*S.A. Orn.*; XV: pp. 54-58; 1939) on the Fork-tailed Swift (*Micropus pacificus*), the occurrence and habits of the species were discussed with special reference to South Australia. To the list of known occurrences given by me on page 57 of the above-mentioned paper, the following additions have to be made:—December, 1913, 1941; January, 1929, 1941, 1942; February, 1940, 1942, 1944; March, 1940, 1941; April, 1941. Examination of the known records reveals that this Swift has been identified in South Australia in at least twenty-eight different years. It has appeared in February in fourteen different years; January in thirteen years; March in ten years; December in nine years; November and April in three years; and in October in only one year.

The earliest seasonal occurrence remains that observed by Mr. S. Sanders, Jun. (*S.A. Orn.*, XIV: p. 173; 1938), near Moorook, Murray River, but the latest seasonal appearance previously recorded has been eclipsed by my observations near Sutherlands, in 1941. About 180 birds were seen on April 16; about 30 on April 20; and on the 23rd of that month about 50 birds were observed.

Such late occurrences in Southern Australia are remarkable in view of J. D. La Touche (*Bulletin British Orn. Club*, XXIX: p. 148) having seen the species on Shaweishan Island, 30 miles from the mouth of the Yangtsekiang River, China, in the month of April during a number of years. In Eastern Asia, eggs of the Fork-tailed Swift have been found in the months of June and July, and one may consider the breeding period as extending from about the beginning of May to the end of August.

The nests are said to be often built in narrow crannies in rocks, and are constructed of straw and feathers, agglutinated with the birds' saliva, in the form of shallow, saucer-shaped structures. Two or three eggs are laid to a clutch, and they are cylindrical-ovate in shape and dull white in colour.

During their visits to South Australia, Fork-tailed Swifts give the impression of being tireless on the wing. In the field, the tail of the birds appears relatively long and

thin, and the forked tip is not generally visible, excepting when an individual makes some difficult manoeuvre to secure an insect. At such times, if the bird is very low, the rapid flutter of its wings may be distinctly heard. Sometimes they come within about two feet of the ground and take an insect with a quick sideways motion of the head. They may touch the foliage of low trees or even pass between the wires of a fence in pursuit of insect prey.

Their call, a screeching whistle, sounds like "skree-ee-ee." P. A. Gilbert (*Emu*, XXXV: p. 27; 1935) refers to the birds uttering a monotonic "tat-tat-tat-tat," which, however, is a reasonably good description of the rhythmic sound of their wings when they pass close to an observer.

Although seeming tireless, the fact that the birds sometimes do become weary is shown by A. G. Campbell's observation (*Victorian Naturalist*, XVI: p. 54) of a solitary example settling on an orchard path at Burnley, Victoria.

Campbell (*Emu*, XXXIV: p. 313; 1935) has commented on the field identification of the Fork-tailed Swift, and states that it is distinguished from the Spine-tailed species (*Hirundapus caudacutus*) by its smaller size, more Swallow-like movements, white rump, and long tail. A. E. Bridgewater (*Ibid.* XXXIV: p. 99; 1934) says the white rump of *Micropus* is more conspicuous than the white under the base of the tail of *Hirundapus*.