

## THE SWIFT PARROT — SOME NOTES ON ITS OCCURRENCE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA AND A RECENT RECORD

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Received 25 September 1981; accepted 20 November 1981

### INTRODUCTION

Swift Parrots *Lathamus discolor* breed in Tasmania from September to December and migrate in March and April to the Australian mainland where they spend the remainder of the year (Forshaw 1981). In South Australia, Condon (1969) described the species as rare, occurring in small numbers at irregular intervals. It had been recorded intermittently until 1945 from the Mount Lofty Ranges and Adel-

aide Plains in numbers ranging from one to small flocks of up to 20. Since 1945 there have been three records from the Mount Lofty Ranges: six birds at Blackwood in October 1963 (Ashby 1963), six at Hawthorndene in September 1964 (Glover 1965) and an unspecified number at Happy Valley in October 1963 (Jenkin *et al.* 1964).

Rix (1938) reported more than 300 between Hawthorndene and the south-west corner of

Belair Recreation Park in May 1938. Although this large number is inconsistent with other South Australian records, a specimen was taken and is now in the care of Dr. J. M. Bonnin. Specimens taken from a flock of 60 recorded at Parkside in April 1945 (Cleland 1945) are in fact Musk Lorikeets *Glossopsitta concinna* (S. A. Parker, pers. comm.) so this record is questionable but illustrative of the possibility of confusing Swift Parrots and Musk Lorikeets.

Elsewhere in the State, Boehm (1952) closely observed two at Sutherlands in the Murray Mallee in May 1927 and Attiwill (1944) recorded one at Naracoorte feeding with Purple-crowned Lorikeets *G. porphyrocephala* in May 1944. Austin (1951) mentioned a sighting by E. Simpson near Nelson in extreme south-western Victoria near the South Australian border.

#### RECENT SIGHTING IN THE SOUTH-EAST

On 1 September 1979 in an area adjacent to the eastern boundary of Bangham Conservation Park, ca 12 km N of Frances, more than six Swift Parrots were encountered in Brown Stringybarks *Eucalyptus baxteri*. They were similar in size to Musk Lorikeets but had long, narrow tails. A description based on my field notes is presented:

Back, rump and part of the head bright green; crown blue but not markedly so. Forehead and throat and part of face red, the latter being finely outlined with yellow. Underparts bright yellowish-green, contrasting particularly with the vivid green wing. Primaries dark, appearing bluish or brown in different light conditions. A thin yellowish-orange line visible where the secondaries folded over the back. Thin brownish tail, undertail-coverts distinctly pinky-red. Bill and leg colours not determined. Red under the wing close to the body seen in flight.

The habitat in the area was undulating scrub dominated by *E. baxteri* with little understorey in the swales but *Banksia ornata* on the rises. There were occasional patches of Blue Gum *E. leucoxylon*.

The birds were spread over a number of trees so a complete count was not made. They were mostly in the outer foliage, sometimes hanging upside down. While feeding, the birds maintained a quiet chatter. The song of

one parrot that was not feeding had an extensive range of notes and was pleasant sounding; it continued for over five minutes.

#### DISCUSSION

A number of earlier authors recorded Swift Parrots feeding on seeds of the Peppermint Gum *E. odorata*. What the Bangham birds were feeding on could not be determined but it was not a seed item. There must have been flowering eucalypts in the area because Musk and Purple-crowned Lorikeets were both common. Possibly the birds were feeding on lerps and scales for which they are said to have a particular liking (Hindwood and Sharland 1964).

Mrs P. Bowie saw a single Swift Parrot on 12 December 1980 at Blackwood in the Mount Lofty Ranges (field notes seen by the author). After checking with leading Adelaide aviculturalists, the Adelaide Zoological Gardens and the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, it seems unlikely that this bird was an escapee from an Adelaide aviary. It would therefore appear to be an anomalous summer record.

The appearance of Swift Parrots in South Australia cannot be safely predicted. Some past reports are of doubtful validity. Observers unfamiliar with Swift Parrots should note both the possibility of confusing them with Musk Lorikeets and the need for accurate observations on plumage and behaviour where photographic or specimen evidence cannot be obtained.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks Shane Parker and Leo Joseph for help given.

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