

## SPINE-TAILED SWIFTS AT HAAST

By A. WRIGHT and H. R. McKENZIE

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It is not unusual for stray rare birds to be reported from the south-west coast of the South Island. At the new Haast Bridge, in the early evening of 16/11/65 a party of six Spine-tailed Swifts (*Chaetura caudacuta*) was observed hawking in wide sweeps but keeping in a loose flock. From 1730 hours to later than 1830 hours, first at the southern approach to the bridge and latterly a few hundred yards along the road towards Haast township, they worked consistently in light rain and still air. Attention was drawn to the first bird seen because of its large size, the swinging soaring flight, the swept back wings, the stumpy fore-end, the generally dark colour, and, next, the short square-ended tail. Five other birds quickly appeared. Owing to the dim background of rain and cloud it was hard to discern colour features until the swifts flew in front of large dark trees which stood in groups not far away. This they did only one at a time, so that we could not determine the amount of white on each bird. It seemed that one or perhaps two had the full amount of white while the others were thought to be darker, perhaps immature birds. All had the short square ended tail and other features of the first bird seen. When one would fly low over the car at a few feet, no further details could be observed because of its great speed. It was agreed that the most coloured bird or birds had light on front of neck and upper breast and had broad stripes from below the "shoulder" along the sides below the outstretched wings and converging to somewhere about the vent. The lower back and upper rump showed light but this was not definite. On the way back to A. Wright's Wildlife lodge up the Haast River A.W. called on a deer-meat hunter, T. F. Trevor, who had a good knowledge of the Australian back country and asked him to describe a Spine-tailed Swift. This he did without hesitation, confirming what we had seen, calling the light bands along the sides speckled, which was later found to be more correct and calling the back speckled which was not quite right as it is more a smooth off-white. He described the feeding habit, saying that it was mostly seen at evening.

Later study by H.R.McK. of mounted birds in the Canterbury Museum and Auckland War Memorial Museum further confirmed the identification. The only other swift of similar size and general colouration is the Eastern and Australian Fork-tailed Swift (*Apus pacificus*). The birds seen definitely did not have forked tails.



## REVIEWS

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*More New Zealand Bird Portraits* by M. F. Soper, A.R.P.S., Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd., 32/6.

Dr. Soper's studies and photographs of New Zealand birds, made after long hours in the field and the hide, are now so well known that they need no recommendation. This book is in every way a worthy sequel to the first, upon which it was your reviewer's happy task to comment in *Notornis* X, 307-308.