

From Cook's sightings on the floes approaching the ice barrier in 1773 and Ross's securing specimens in January 1841 on to the present day, the Emperor penguin has captured and held the imagination and interest of naturalists. Skelton's locating the rookery during Scott's "Discovery" Expedition, Edward Wilson's epic winter journey with Bowers and Cherry-Garrard to find the brooding birds and Wilson's reverent and meticulous work on the species match the Emperor's own distinction. With characteristics and associations alike, one meets superlatives on every hand.

Modern work has thrown much light on the biology of the Emperor Penguin; on the mechanism for instance which enables them to brood for over two months without food in temperatures as low as 70 degrees below zero. One wonders why our bird could appear so much at home in Foveaux Strait.



SHORT NOTE

SPINE-TAILED SWIFTS NEAR KAITAIA

In the late afternoon of 28/11/67 I had a ring from Mr. Malcolm Matthews, a farmer of Awanui Road, some four miles from Kaitaia. He had noticed two strange birds flying about hunting insects in the vicinity of a clump of pine trees. He is quite familiar with the Welcome Swallow (*H. neoxena*) which since it started breeding here just ten years ago is now very common. He described these unknown visitors as being much larger and much faster in flight than Welcome Swallows. I immediately got in my car and he directed me to the spot where he had been watching them. Right enough they were still there.

Such was their speed that it was very difficult to observe their colour accurately. I had my binoculars, but they were useless, although the birds often passed within thirty or forty feet of me. Their speed was like a bullet's and the only times I could catch a glimpse of their colour was when they were flying directly away from me. Their general tone was black; but the base of the tail and possibly a portion of their underparts was white or maybe light buff. This was quite conspicuous. The tail was short and appeared to be square, not forked. The shape of their wings and their flight generally was quite different from that of a Welcome Swallow. They would make long runs, gliding, ascending high without an apparent wing-beat, bank, then swoop; repeating the procedure over and over again. Their wings were swept back like those of a jet-fighter; but were not so pointed as the wings of a Swallow. There was no ducking and diving in short manoeuvres.

By their appearance and behaviour they were Spine-tailed Swifts (*C. caudacuta*). They appeared during a strong E. to N.E. wind which had been blowing for about three days and which continued till the night of the 29th. Mr. Matthews was working nearby and reported that the two swifts were still present. During the night there was heavy rain. They had gone next morning.

— ROSS MICHIE