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SHORT NOTES

SPINE-TAILED SWIFTS OVER KAIPARA FLATS

On 21/11/67, a calm day, after recent northerly gales and rain, I was on a 600-foot hill-top on my farm at Kaipara Flats near Warkworth. The weather was generally dull with showers and occasional thunderstorms; but at 2.30 p.m. when the hill was bathed in warm sunshine, I became aware of the presence of six strange birds, darting and circling at incredible speeds, when one began repeatedly diving at me. They flew about the knoll for about half an hour during which time they "buzzed" me and the dogs frequently. Their speed was such that at close range the eye could not focus nor register much detail. Almost instantly they would be too distant for me to observe the smaller markings.

Their flight was remarkable in that there was very little wing-beating for the speeds maintained and they seldom went where expected. They could glide in a circle of about five chains in diameter with rigid wings and not lose height or speed. It seemed they were jet-propelled. No vocal sounds were heard; only a whistling swish as they rocketed by.

Against the sky, dark colouring predominated; but when they were seen from above, a greenish brown on the head and back was visible. At a certain angle to the sun a reddish purple glint would appear. A wide dirty white bar crossing the under-tail coverts and just showing on the lower back was dull and in contrast to the iridescence of the rest of the plumage. The wings were long and narrow at the tips and curved back evenly as though to form a fifth part of a circle. The short square tail was not forked. The head was blunt and rounded. I was unable to see sufficient of the eyes, bill or legs to warrant description.

The birds finally left the hill and began to climb, still circling and flying at a fantastic speed. A three-knot breeze carried them slowly to the south-east but they disappeared from sheer height.

On consulting "Oliver's Birds of N.Z." I decided that they were "Spine Tailed Swifts" (*Chaetura caudacuta*).

— F. P. HUDSON