

SWIFT ON MOTUNAU ISLAND

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From about 1930 to 2000 hours on the evening of 4 December 1968 we watched a swift flying around the western tip of Motunau Island, off the north Canterbury coast. We were on the shore and for most of the time the swift was flying around the cliff-tops about 100 ft. above us, though occasionally it flew about 150 yards out to sea. The bird was almost continuously in sight in this one area until it disappeared at dusk. Initially the light was quite good and we obtained many prolonged and satisfactory views of it through binoculars as it twisted and turned. We did not hear it call.

The bird was an obvious swift which we judged to be about as large but probably no larger than *Apus apus*, which we both know well in Europe, but Starlings were the only other birds of similar size available for comparison. It had long scimitar wings and flew fast, and the tail was seen to be quite deeply forked when occasionally it was fanned. Although always more or less overhead, the bird frequently wheeled steeply or hesitated in flight, showing its upper surfaces. We looked particularly for white or paler areas on the rump and throat but the bird appeared uniformly dark. Certainly neither the rump nor the throat was white, but either could have been slightly paler than the rest of the body; the pale throat of *Apus a. apus*, for instance, is hard to see even in a good light.

The New Zealand Checklist (Fleming 1953) includes only two species of swift, namely the Spine-tailed Swift (*Chaetura caudacuta*) which has occurred irregularly, and the Fork-tailed (or white-rumped) Swift (*Apus pacificus*) of which there are but three records (Oliver 1955, Falla *et al.* 1966); both "winter" in Australia.

The Motunau bird was obviously not *Chaetura*, and was almost certainly a species of *Apus*; indeed, in size, silhouette, colour and flight it looked identical to *Apus a. apus*. Other genera such as *Cypsiurus*, *Cypseloides* and *Collocalia* can be discounted on the grounds of size, shape of tail, colour, habit or flight (see Smythies 1953, 1960, La Touche 1931-34, Whistler 1941).

Lack (1956) reviewed the species of *Apus*. *Apus pacificus* winters in Australia, but all its races have white rumps — except for *A. p. acuticaudus*. This race, known only from Cherrapoongi in the Khasia Hills of Assam, has a dark rump and a streaky white throat. Highly unlikely as it may seem that this apparently very localised race should occur in New Zealand, it cannot be ruled out altogether. Its description seems to fit the Motunau bird, but we do not know how to distinguish between it and *Apus apus* in the field.

Of the other species of *Apus*, only *Apus apus* seems possible — and it "winters" in Africa. The eastern race *A. a. pekinensis* would seem the least unlikely to reach New Zealand, but it has a whiter throat than the nominate form and we failed to see this. Nonetheless, on balance, we are inclined to believe that the Motunau bird was *Apus apus* ? subsp., though *Apus pacificus acuticaudus* remains a possibility.

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SHORT NOTES

NIGHT FLIGHT OF THE WHITE-FRONTED TERN

During 1968 I spent eight months running between Auckland and South Island ports, the complete voyage Auckland to Auckland being made each week. It was noticed early in the year that a regular feature of the voyage was a night flight of White-fronted Terns. This flight was then looked for, and seen, throughout the year.

There is a large and definite movement of these terns away from the coast in the evening, with a return flight at first light. As a rule the birds proceed at right angles to the coast, in a fairly high and direct flight. How far they fly out is not known but with the ship ten miles off the Wairarapa Coast, the terns fly over still intent on getting seaward. It is suggested that this could be a feeding flight since it must be safer for the birds to roost on small off-shore islets than to raft at night in the open sea. Another factor supporting the feeding flight hypothesis is that on a number of occasions both Pomarine and Arctic Skuas have been seen flying out with the terns. There is very little hawking by the skuas on these occasions; it seems rather that they are heading for the same point off-shore. The skuas have never been seen returning with the terns in the morning.

— JOHN JENKINS



CATTLE EGRETS IN WESTLAND

On 26/4/69 Mr. A. J. Ure, Westland National Park, reported sighting two Cattle Egrets (*Ardeola ibis*) on the Waiho Flats a few miles south of Franz Josef. This sighting was confirmed by Mr. P. Grant, Regional Organiser, O.S.N.Z., on 4 May when he observed the two birds feeding amongst cattle. On 25 May Mr. Ure could not find the birds.

On 8 June I saw two Cattle Egrets feeding with 7 White-faced Herons (*Ardea novaehollandiae*) near a mob of calves in farmland at Kowhitirangi, inland from Hokitika.

— C. R. VEITCH