

## CORRESPONDENCE

### SIGHT-RECORDS OF SWIFTLETS

Sir,—Schodde and McKean (1972, *Emu* 72: 116) pointed out that my sight-record of the Uniform Swiftlet *Collocalia vanikorensis* from Atherton, northern Queensland, could refer to any one of three species-groups within *Collocalia*: *C. vanikorensis*, *C. hirundinacea* and the *C. whiteheadi*-group. I think that the following points could usefully be made.

By 'forms at present referred to *C. whiteheadi*', Schodde and McKean possibly mean to include *C. nuditarisus* Salomonsen and *C. papuensis* Rand, two forms separated from *C. whiteheadi* by Somadikarta (1967, *Proc. U.S. natn. Mus.* 124, 1–8), who re-described *C. papuensis* as follows:

'Three toes (hallux lost) instead of four; a character unique in the genus. Tarsus densely feathered; upperparts dark fuscous brown, slightly iridescent; crown and back with white concealed barbs; feathers around the neck paler than back and crown; bases of feathers forming supraloral spot, light brownish grey, contrasting with their black shafts and tips; throat silvery grey, abdomen greyish brown; dark shafts pronounced on feathers of abdomen, and under-tail coverts, tenth primary shorter than eighth . . .'

Salomonsen (1963, *Vidensk. Meddr. dansk naturh. Foren.* 125: 509–512) described *nuditarsus* as differing from *papuensis* 'in having a bare tarsus, completely devoid of feathers; also in having the upperparts dull black, almost without any iridescence, the feathers of the nape with blackish grey bases, not—or almost not—contrasting with the black tips; the colour of throat not differing from that of breast and abdomen, but the entire underparts being uniform sooty-brown darker than in *papuensis*'.

*C. hirundinacea* is described by Rand and Gilliard (1967, *Handbook of New Guinea Birds*: 276) as: 'upperparts black, underparts silvery grey', whereas

*C. vanikorensis* is there described as 'upperparts bronzy brown or greenish black; underparts smoky or brownish grey'.

As I indicated in my note, the birds seen by me at Atherton were 'uniformly coloured, the colour being dark above and a little lighter below with no white or grey on the rump or underparts'. This would rule out *C. hirundinacea* with its silvery grey underparts and *C. papuensis* with its silvery grey throat. A point that I did not make in my previous description was that the Atherton birds were markedly sleek and glossy above, which would rule against *C. nuditarisus* with upperparts 'dull black, almost without any iridescence'. Thus, we are left with *C. vanikorensis*, a species with which my description of the birds seen at Atherton agrees. I therefore conclude that my sightings were most likely, but not conclusively, of *vanikorensis*. The remarks of Schodde and McKean (*op. cit.*) and Parker (1972, *Emu* 72: 119) make it clear, however, that further records of *Collocalia* spp in Australia should be backed up by specimens.

Schodde and McKean refer to an alleged specimen of *C. vanikorensis* from Cape York. This specimen (type of *Collocalia fuciphaga yorkei* Mathews, 1916, collected by Robin Kemp at Cape York on 10 September 1913) is in the American Museum of Natural History, and its identity as *C. vanikorensis* has recently been confirmed (M. LeCroy *in litt.* to S. A. Parker). It seems to represent the only other record of this species in Australia, and I appear to have been in error in implying that *vanikorensis* was previously known south to Cooktown.

JAMES A. BRAVERY, *Box 178, Atherton, Q 4883.*  
31 August 1972.

Mr Bravery's letter was shown to Dr R. Schodde, who commented as follows:

'Though we agree that *Collocalia vanikorensis* is on distributional grounds the most likely of the dusky New Guinean swiftlets to occur in north-eastern Queensland, we remain unconvinced that it can be distinguished, say, from *C. hirundinacea* in the field. The differences between the species quoted by Bravery are again of characters which we know from much personal experience to be discernible only in the hand and then with some difficulty. Disparities such as the glossiness of the back and the tints of the throat and

breast have been somewhat over-emphasized in the literature, to assist the student, and should not be interpreted in too extreme a way; in any case, they do not hold in the immatures of several species.

Somadikarta's (*op. cit.*) and Salomonsen's (*op. cit.*) respective descriptions of *C. papuensis* and *C. whiteheadi nuditarisus* are not borne out on all characters by our series in the CSIRO collection in Canberra, at present the largest combined collection of these forms in the world. The affinities of these species I am at present reviewing; at the moment it can be said that '*C. nuditarisus*', which in fact was

not formally recognized as specifically distinct by Somadikarta, is clearly a race of *C. brevirostris* (see Medway, Proc. Linn. Soc. Lond. 177 (1966): 151 for uniting *C. whiteheadi* with *C. brevirostris*), while *C. papuensis* is apparently the New Guinean vicariant

of the Black-nest Swiftlet, *C. maxima*.

This rejoinder gives me the opportunity to correct a misprint in the earlier communication: *C. papuensis* and *C. whiteheadi nudatarsus* are c. 25 mm, not 2.5 mm, longer than *C. vanikorensis* and *C. hirundinacea*.

---