

Notes on the Movements of Swifts

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Considering that the two Australian Swifts, *Hirundapus caudacutus* and *Micropus pacificus* range over practically the whole of the continent, it is remarkable that so few records, comparatively speaking, are made, and still more remarkable perhaps that those flights that are recorded come from a few localities down the eastern side of Australia, including Tasmania.

A search through the bird-lists of *The Emu* for notes on these two species was rather disappointing, for, with the exception of the eastern localities, very few records were made, and in many cases the dates of the occurrences of the birds were omitted, which makes the record of little use in tracing the migration routes of these visitors.

A great advance would be made in our knowledge of the movements of these Swifts if every member who has records as yet unpublished would submit them to our Editor for publication. The late Mr. A. J. Campbell said many years ago that an isolated record of itself is useless, but many records taken collectively are of great value? Here then is an opportunity of starting on the two Australian Swifts.

APPEARANCES OF SWIFTS IN THE MANSFIELD DISTRICT, VIC.

1929.

Jan. 30.—Party of the Spinetailed species hawking.

Mar. 13.—Party of Swifts (? sp.) hawking very high.

1930.

Jan. 12.—Party Swifts (? sp.) hawking very high: weather stormy, with 40 points rain.

Feb. 10.—Party Swifts (? sp.) hawking high.

Feb. 13.—Party "Spinetails" hawking. On Feb. 12, 40 points rain.

Feb. 20.—Party "Spinetails" hawking low. Between Feb. 20-23, 107 points rain.

Mar. 12.—Party "Spinetails" hawking low.

Mar. 13.—Party "Spinetails" seen: 61 points rain recorded.

1931.

Mar. 3.—Party Swifts (? sp.) fairly high, travelling N.E., 3 p.m.: 50 points rain on Mar. 2 and 3.

Mar. 5.—Party "Spinetails" moving S.E., noon. Party moving N.W., 3 p.m.: 161 points rain.

Mar. 13.—Several odd birds (? sp.) noted flying N. during the day: 30 points rain.

Mar. 14.—Large scattered flocks (? sp.) flying N., 9 a.m.: 15 points rain fell during day.

Mar. 15.—Small flock (? sp.) very high, moving E., 6 p.m., hawking.

Mar. 17.—Large flock hawking very high, moving E., 7 p.m. Probably "Spinetails."

Mar. 25.—Party (? sp.) hawking very high, noon.

Mar. 30.—Party "Spinetails" flying rapidly, direct W.N.W., 4 p.m.: between Mar. 20 and 22, 378 points rain recorded, with a further 61 points on Apr. 1.

1932.

Feb. 25.—Large party "Spinetails" hawking: rain, 10 points on Feb. 23.

- Mar. 17.—Odd "Spinetails" flying S.E., 7 p.m.: 57 points rain on Mar. 16.
- Mar. 30.—Party (? sp.) hawking very high: 207 points rain, Mar. 27-29.
- Apr. 1.—Party (? sp.) flying N.: rain, 133 points on Apr. 2, 3 and 4.
- Dec. 6.—Large flock "Spinetails" moving S.E., noon. Few making N., 8 p.m.: 19 points rain Dec. 7.
- 1933.
- Mar. 7.—Large flock "Spinetails" moving S.E., 7 p.m.: rain, 61 points on Mar. 5.
- Mar. 9.—Large flock "Spinetails" moving N.W., 1 p.m. Hot, sultry day.
- 1934.
- Jan. 30.—Small party "Spinetails" moving E., 3.30 p.m.: 31 points rain.
- Feb. 17.—Great numbers "Spinetails" all over sky, moving N.W., 1 p.m. At 6 p.m. great numbers moving S.E.: rain, 59 points on Feb. 18-19.
- Feb. 21.—Party "Spinetails" moving S. at 3 p.m.: commenced to rain at night.
- Feb. 22.—Party "Spinetails" moving N.E., 6 p.m.: still raining, 178 points recorded to Feb. 23.
- Feb. 26.—A single "Spinetail" in a hurry, flying S., 6 p.m.
- Mar. 2.—Large flock "Spinetails" flying E.S.E., 6 p.m.
- Mar. 5.—Two "Spinetails" in a hurry, making S., 6 p.m.
- Mar. 10.—Party (? sp.) hawking, 3 p.m.
- Mar. 14.—Three birds (? sp.) flying N.N.E., 3 p.m.
- Mar. 15.—About 10 a.m. this morning great numbers of Swifts were moving N.N.E., flying rather high and direct, doing very little hawking. The glasses showed them to be the Fork-tailed species (*Micropus pacificus*). Any possible doubt about this identification was removed shortly afterwards, when a number of birds were hawking close to the ground. This flight lasted over three hours, but, curiously enough, towards 1 p.m. the birds were moving E.S.E. The number of birds that passed over must have been immense. All over the sky as far as the prismatics could pick them up the birds were in great companies, and even so high as to be quite invisible to the naked eye. Literally the whole of the upper air from horizon to horizon was thick with the birds and as the flight lasted for so long, their numbers would be incalculable. Another remarkable thing was that they were flying rather slowly, and indulging in unusually long glides. Some birds that came along about noon were hawking low down, contrary to the great mass of birds passing directly overhead. They were twisting and tumbling in a most erratic manner, quite different from another lot that passed by shortly afterwards. These latter were hawking in true Swift fashion, a strong sweep forward with rapid wing-beats, a sharp turn and a glide with an upward or a downward swoop, and off again. Set against a dark sky, the white rump was very conspicuous as the birds wheeled, and when executing a sudden twist, the tail was opened, which disclosed the fork. Two parties that passed by hawking screamed as they went. This was somewhat similar, though not nearly so loud or wild as the cry of the European Swift (*Cypselus apus*). It may be described as a long "skree-ee-ee."

The flight of *Micropus* is different from that of the Spine-tailed Swift, the wing-beats being stronger and steadier; and *Micropus* is also slimmer in build. A few

birds spread wide their tails when slowly gliding, but this seemed exceptional.

Weather report: Sky overcast, wind from N.E., 60 points rain to 9 a.m. on March 16, with a further fall of 42 points for the following twenty-four hours.

Mar. 20.—Two *Hirundapus* flying S.E. at 5.15 p.m.

Mar. 22.—Party Swifts (? sp.) flying N.W.N.: rain, 101 points on Mar. 22 and 23.

Mar. 29.—Large party of *Hirundapus* moving S. at 6 p.m.

Mar. 31.—Large flocks of Swifts (both species) flying together, moving S.E., hawking, at 4.45 p.m. to 5.50 p.m. The white rump of *Micropus* is much more conspicuous than the white under the base of the tail of *Hirundapus*.

Apr. 2.—Flock of "Spine-tails" moving N.E., hawking, 5.30 p.m.

Apr. 3.—Party of "Spine-tails" hawking, moving somewhat N.E., 4 p.m.: rain, 60 points on April 3 to 5.

Apr. 11.—The last Swift recorded. A solitary *Micropus* flying S. in a hurry, noon.

It will be seen from the above records that the appearances of Swifts usually coincide with unsettled weather, and it is noteworthy that the early part of this year (1934) and 1931, were two comparatively wet seasons in the Mansfield district and that there were many records of the birds. I have listed only those that came directly under my notice, thus omitting reported occurrences prior to 1929. Personally I have no record between January 30, 1924, when a party of Swifts was seen hawking, and January 30, 1929.

The Grey-headed Albatross (*Diomedea chrysostoma*).— A third record for Western Australia.

In Volume XX, 1921, of *The Emu*, Mr. W. B. Alexander, when writing of "The Tubinares (Petrels and Albatrosses) in the Gould Collection at Philadelphia," and after noting that there are two specimens of this bird in the collection, a male and female, both labelled "Australian Seas," the female being the actual type specimen, notes:—"These two specimens of *Diomedea culminata* [= *chrysostoma*] are labelled "Australian Seas." It is evident that Gould used this term rather loosely, and probably any bird obtained between the Cape of Good Hope and the coast of South America might have been so labelled. But in the case of this species Gould specially remarks that he found it commoner in Australian seas than anywhere else. He met with "numbers during a voyage from Launceston to Adelaide, particularly off Cape Jervis and Northumberland," and again observed them between Sydney and New Zealand (Gould, *Handbook*, Vol. II, p. 436). In view of these statements we are, I think, justified in assuming that the two specimens in his collection, one of which is the type of *Diomedea culminata* [= *chrysostoma*], were obtained in Australian waters.