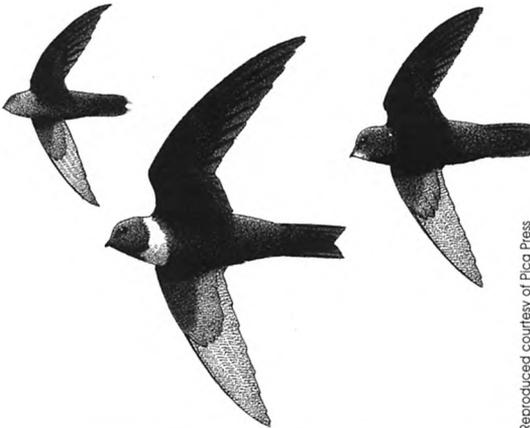


# Identification of three *Chaetura* swifts; Band-rumped Swift *Chaetura spinicauda*, Grey-rumped Swift *Chaetura cinereiventris* and Pale-rumped Swift *Chaetura egregia*

Phil Chantler

Identification of swifts in the Neotropics is no easier than in any other region. However, with careful observation, most species can be separated. The genus *Chaetura* comprises a group of nine New World species which possess a very distinctive “jizz”, although the plumage is typically indistinct. All species have relatively short tails, distinctive “butterknife” shaped wings (i.e. narrow secondaries, bulging inner primaries and long outer primaries) and relatively protruding, broad heads. Figure 1 depicts Band-rumped Swift *Chaetura spinicauda* next to representatives of the two other Neotropical genera that have square tails, *Cypseloides* and *Streptoprocne*.



**Figure 1.** Band-rumped Swift *Chaetura spinicauda* (left), White-collared Swift *Streptoprocne zonaris* (centre) and White-chinned Swift *Cypseloides cryptus* (right). Note structural differences between genera.

Two of the three species treated in this article, Grey-rumped Swift and Pale-rumped Swift form, together with Lesser Antillean Swift *Chaetura martinica*, the *martinica* superspecies. Members of this superspecies and Band-rumped Swift differ from other

*Chaetura* in having rump bands that are paler than both the mantle and the uppertail-coverts and tail. This is illustrated in Figure 2.



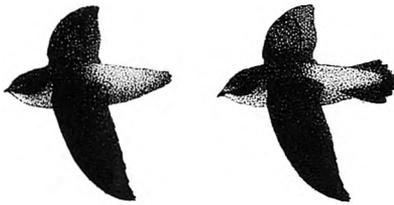
**Figure 2.** Upper parts of Grey-rumped Swift *Chaetura cinereiventris* (top) and Chimney Swift *C. pelagica* (bottom). Note uniformity of rump and uppertail-coverts in Chimney Swift and the contrast between the rump and distal uppertail-coverts in Grey-rumped Swift.

**Plate:** *Chaetura* swifts (see Tables 2 and 3 for more details). Reproduced courtesy of Pica Press from Chantler, P. & Driessens, G. (1995) *Swifts: a guide to the swifts and treeswifts of the world*.

1. Band-rumped Swift *Chaetura spinicauda*
  - 1a. Adult nominate
  - 1b. Adult *aethalea*
  - 1c. Adult *fumosa*
2. Grey-rumped Swift *Chaetura cinereiventris*
  - 2a. Adult *guianensis*
  - 2b. Adult *sclateri*
  - 2c. Adult *phaeopygos*
  - 2d. Adult nominate
3. Adult Pale-rumped Swift *Chaetura egregia*



For the purpose of this paper “rump-band” will be an all inclusive term comprising the pale area centred on the rump and the area of the uppertail-coverts that may be similarly pale in the taxa concerned). It must be noted that in the *Chaetura* species that have the rump and uppertail-coverts uniform, a similar impression can be gained when the tail is fully exposed and some contrast can be seen between the tail and the tail-coverts. This can be particularly apparent in Vaux’s Swift *Chaetura vauxii* (Figure 3), which has a tail that is a little darker than the uppertail-coverts.



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Figure 3. Vaux’s Swift *Chaetura vauxii* showing contrast between uppertail-coverts and tail when spread.

### Descriptions

These focus on differences between the species and subspecies especially with regard to the upperparts and underparts, but do not look in depth at the finer feather detail.

### Wings

In all three the upperwings are very uniform, both between the innerwing and outerwing and between the wing and mantle. In the underwing the remiges appear paler and greyer than above and also rather uniform with the greater coverts, which contrast with the darker median and lesser coverts. These darkest coverts appear darker than the adjoining area of the underbody.

### Upperparts

All three species have dark upperheads and mantle with paler rumps. The uppertail-coverts are variably paler in each and contrast with the darker tails and at least some of the uppertail coverts.

The band is typically palest and most distinct in Band-rumped Swift, especially in the races *spinicauda*, *aetherodroma* and *latirostris*. In these three forms the band is comparatively

narrow and does not extend far onto the uppertail coverts, with which it strongly contrasts. In the races *fumosa*, and *aethalea* the rump patch is slightly greyer and extends further onto the uppertail-coverts with the consequence that the “band” is more rectangular. However, the mantles of these races are very black and therefore the rump patch still appears whitish as opposed to greyish as in Grey-rumped.

The most troublesome race of Grey-rumped, with a view to separation from Band-rumped, is *cinereiventris* as the patch is whiter and extends less on to the uppertail-coverts than the other races. In addition the uppertail-coverts of this race are somewhat blacker emphasising the rump patch further. However, even this race has a greyer rump than *fumosa* or *aethalea*. In the races *guianensis*, *lawrenci* and *schistacea* there is considerable contrast both between the rump-band and the darker blackish distal uppertail-coverts and also between the central uppertail-coverts and the darker lateral ones (see Figure 4).

In conclusion Band-rumped Swifts have narrower white or grey-white rumps that contrast with uniformly darker uppertail-coverts (proximal uppertail-coverts may be pale in some races but there is never contrast between the central and lateral uppertail-coverts). Grey-rumped Swifts have darker, greyer rumps, that are more extensive. In some subspecies there is contrast both between the rump-band and the darker distal uppertail-coverts, and the paler central. uppertail-coverts and the lateral uppertail-coverts.



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Figure 4. Rump and tail of Grey-rumped Swift *Chaetura cinereiventris* of the race *guianensis*, showing extent of rump patch and feather pattern.

Rob Clay (pers. comm.) usefully phrases the difference in the extent of the rump patch between the two species. He states that due

to the more restricted rump band of Band-rumped Swift “there is an obvious long projection of the dark brown tail beyond the pale rump” and a “much shorter tail projection beyond the rump patch in Grey-rumped Swift”.

The general tone of dark areas of the upperparts in Band-rumped is a rather sooty black-brown in *spinicauda* and *aetherodroma*, and a more pure black in *fumosa*, *latirostris* and *aethalea*. In Grey-rumped the tone is very black often with a bluish sheen that gives the plumage a “steely” or “cold” quality.

Pale-rumped Swift is most similar in upperpart pattern and colouration to Grey-rumped Swift. The general tone of upperparts is black but with a bronze rather bluish gloss. The “rump-patch” like Grey-rumped extends onto the proximal upper-tail coverts. There is also some contrast between the central upper-tail coverts and the lateral ones. The colour of the rump is whiter than in Grey-rumped Swift, being closer to Band-rumped Swift.

### Underparts

The underparts of Band-rumped Swift are generally darker than the other two species (Figure 5). Typically the chin and mid-throat is the palest part of the underparts. The lower-throat and upper-breast appear darker grey-brown with the underparts uniformly grey-brown from breast to vent and then blackish on the undertail-coverts. This is the case for *spinicauda*, *aetherodroma* and *latirostris*. The underparts of *fumosa* and *aethalea* are darker but both races have more pronounced pale throat patches (Figure 5).

In Grey-rumped Swift the underparts are pale grey from the throat to the upper-breast where the plumage becomes darker grey and then progressively darker until there is an abrupt change to black on the undertail coverts (Figure 5). This is the case for *guianensis* and *lawrenci*. Other races vary in underpart coloration as follows; *phaeopygos* is darker grey on the underparts but with less contrastingly dark undertail-coverts, *schistacea* is quite uniformly grey beneath with dark slaty

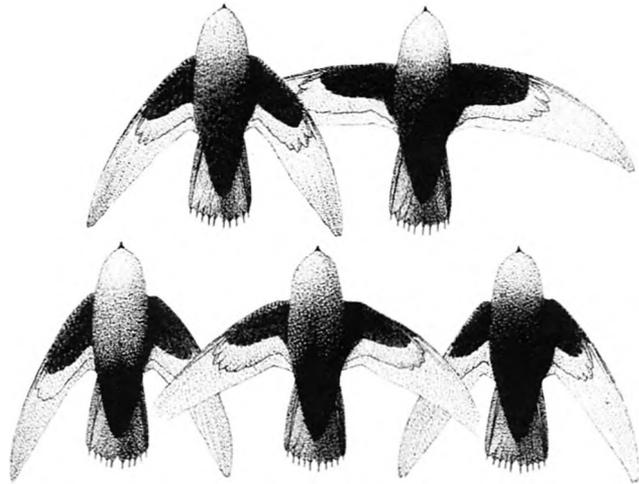


Figure 5. Underparts of Band-rumped Swifts *Chaetura spinicauda* of nominate race (top left) and race *fumosa* (top right), and Grey-rumped Swifts *C. cinereiventris* of nominate race (bottom left), race *guianensis* (bottom centre) and race *lawrenci* (bottom right).

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undertail-coverts, *occidentalis* is uniformly grey beneath, *sclateri* is blackish-grey from the upper-breast not just the undertail-coverts and *cinereiventris* has the palest underparts (especially the throat) and is only dark on the undertail-coverts. In some individuals, in any of the races, dark bases to the throat can be exposed and a darker patch can be seen, even in the field.

The underparts of Pale-rumped are similar in pattern to Grey-rumped, but the plumage becomes dark from the belly as opposed to from the vent in most races of Grey-rumped Swift.

### Contrast between upperparts and underparts.

The generally darker upperparts and paler underparts of Grey-rumped lead to great upper/under contrast and a distinctly capped appearance. This is a contrast to the appearance of Band-rumped Swift where the overall impression is of less upper/under contrast and a more uniform head. For both species this is a slight generalisation. Within Grey-rumped Swift the races *cinereiventris*, *guianensis*, and *lawrenci* show the greatest contrast with the others showing somewhat, less especially *occidentalis*. In Band-rumped Swift there is less racial variation in this feature, but *fumosa* and *aethalea* both have clearly paler throats

and this can cause a more capped appearance (though even in these races this is less apparent than in Grey-rumped Swift).

Pale-rumped retains the rather capped appearance of Grey-rumped, but is darker on the underparts, though not to the extent of the darker races of Band-rumped Swift.

### Structure

All three species are amongst the smallest of the *Chaetura*. Band-rumped and Grey-rumped Swifts are both a little longer tailed than the other species and are less "robust" in body structure when compared to the larger species. The structure of both is very similar although R. Clay (pers. comm.) suggests that Band-rumped may be a little more "slender and rakish". According to Parker & Remson<sup>1</sup>, Pale-rumped Swift differs from Grey-rumped Swift (and presumably Band-rumped Swift) in its longer wings. They also state that this is notable in the field and in conjunction with Grey-rumped Swift's darker rump the two could be "readily distinguished" when seen in direct comparison.

Table 1. Measurements. All measurements are maximum and minimum for the species, and do not look at racial variations.

	Wing	Tail
Band-rumped Swift <i>C. spinicauda</i>	100-115.4	34.6-43
Grey-rumped Swift <i>C. cinereiventris</i>	102-117	34.8-42.5
Pale-rumped Swift <i>C. egregia</i>	120	40

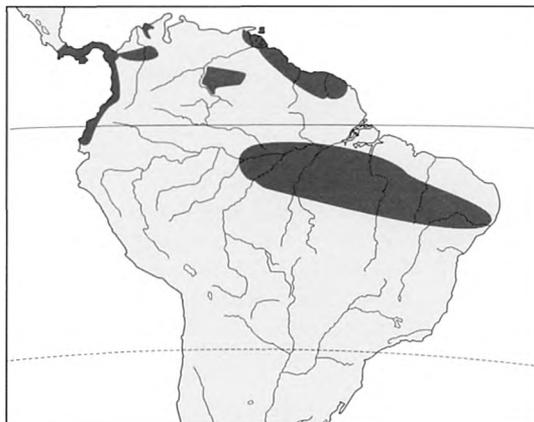
### Calls

A variety of calls are uttered by each of the *Chaetura* species. Different observers transcribe these calls in a number of ways, but to the author, the typical call of Band-rumped Swift is a high-pitched ripple *tsoo-si-si-si*, whereas the typical call of Grey-rumped tends to be a slightly slower insect-like twitter *che-che-che-chee* with the emphasis on the fourth note. The call of Pale-rumped has not been recorded.

### Distribution

#### Band-rumped Swift

Extensive south central and northern South American range. Occurs from the Golfo Dulce region of the southern Pacific slope of Costa Rica, south through to west Panama, most of northern Colombia, to Valle on the Pacific



Coast and across the northern lowlands to the lower Cauca valley in the south and Santa Marta and Guajira in the north and east. In Colombia east of the Andes occurs in west Caqueta, west Putumyo and Guainia. In Ecuador found in the west south to north Manabi and western Chimborazo. Further east found in southern and eastern Venezuela at Jobure in Delta Amacuro, throughout Amazonas and in Bolivar along the lower Río Cauca, lower Río Paragua and the Cerro Paurai-tepuí. North of the Orinoco at the base of the Paria Peninsula in Sucre, and on nearby Trinidad. Through the Guyanas and north-east Amazonian Brazil from Purus eastwards to east Pará and Alagoas.

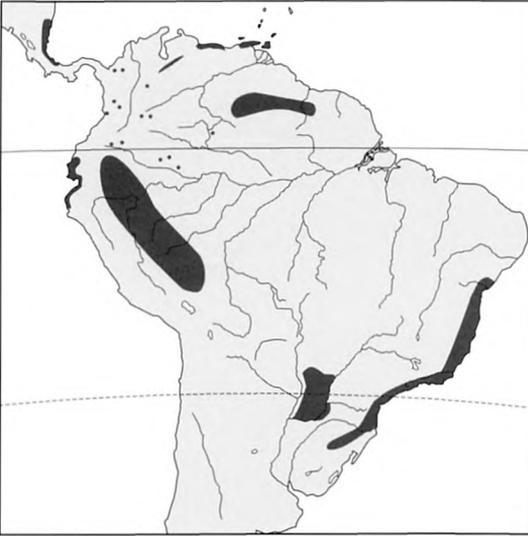
#### Grey-rumped Swift

Extensive range in southern Caribbean, Central and South America. In the north from eastern Nicaragua through the Caribbean slopes of Costa Rica and into Caribbean western Panama in the foothills and lowlands of Bocas del Toro. In the southern Caribbean on Grenada, Margarita, Trinidad and Tobago.

In Colombia the range is rather broken. It is found in the lowlands of all three Andean ranges and both the Pacific slope and lowlands and also the eastern Amazonas. West of the Andes from Colombia south through western Ecuador into north-west Peru. The distribution in Venezuela is similarly broken where it is found in southern Táchira and Mérida, the northern serrianas and cordilleras in Yaracuy, Aragua, Miranda, Animate and Sucre. In Venezuela south of the Orinoco in Bolivar across the cerros of the Gran Sabana and Cerro Guaiquinima, Río Paragua, and also in south-

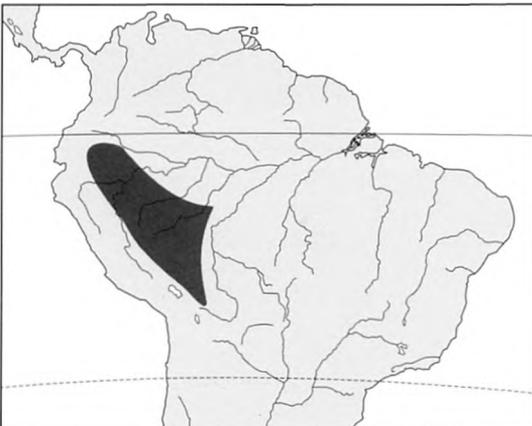
Table 2. Subspecific plumage characteristics

	Rump-band; Colour and extent	Dark upperparts; Colour and gloss	Underparts
<b>Band-rumped Swift</b> <i>Chaetura spinicauda</i> <i>spinicauda</i>	White with light grey tinge. Narrow, only some proximal uppertail-coverts grey.	Black-brown. Faintly glossed when fresh.	Grey-brown, only throat paler. Darkest on undertail-coverts.
<i>C. s. fumosa</i>	Darker grey than <i>spinicauda</i> . Broader band extends further on to uppertail-coverts.	Blacker than <i>spinicauda</i> . More glossy.	Dark brown. Contrastingly pale throat.
<i>C. s. aetherodroma</i>	White, grey tinged. Narrow.	Blacker than <i>spinicauda</i> . More glossy.	Grey-brown, throat not notably paler.
<i>C. s. latirostris</i>	White with light grey tinge. Narrow, only some proximal uppertail-coverts grey.	Black. Faintly glossed when fresh.	Duskier underparts than <i>spinicauda</i> , but less than <i>fumosa</i> .
<i>C. s. aethalea</i>	Grey-white. Extends onto proximal uppertail-coverts and lower-back.	Black. Faintly glossed.	Dark-brown. Contrastingly pale throat.
<b>Grey-rumped Swift</b> <i>Chaetura cinereiventris</i> <i>cinereiventris</i>	Pale grey-white. Extends to proximal uppertail-coverts. Remainder of uppertail-coverts deep black	Black. Gloss.	Light grey. Only darker on undertail-coverts.
<i>C. c. guianensis</i>	Pale grey. Extends onto proximal and central distal uppertail-coverts.	Black. Bluish gloss.	Pale grey throat to upper-breast. Progressively dark-grey to vent. Undertail-coverts. black-grey.
<i>C. c. phaeopygos</i>	Grey. Extends to proximal uppertail-coverts.	Black. Blue gloss.	Grey. Undertail-coverts show little contrast.
<i>C. c. lawrenci</i>	Pale grey. Extends onto proximal and central, distal uppertail-coverts.	Black. Bluish gloss.	Similar to, but darker than <i>guianensis</i> .
<i>C. c. schistacea</i>	Pale grey. Extends onto proximal and central, distal uppertail-coverts.	Deep black with steely blue gloss.	Deep grey with darker more slaty undertail-coverts.
<i>C. c. occidentalis</i>	Dark grey (still contrasts). Extends to proximal uppertail-coverts.	Black. Blue gloss.	Uniformly grey.
<i>C. c. sclateri</i>	Grey. Extends to proximal uppertail-coverts.	Black. Blue gloss.	Black-grey with paler throat.
<b>Pale-rumped Swift</b> <i>Chaetura egregia</i>	Pale grey-white. Extends to proximal uppertail-coverts.	Black. Bronze gloss.	Pale grey from throat to upper-breast, becoming darker on lower-breast. Belly to vent dark brown. Undertail-coverts black.



west Amazonas. East of Venezuela in Guyana. Occurs from eastern Ecuador, into eastern Peru south into northern Bolivia and western Amazonian Brazil as far as the Rio Ituxi, eastern Acre. A separate population occurs in western Ecuador from western Esmeraldas in the north to north-west Guayas, El Oro and west Loja in the south. Widely distributed in the Orient region of Paraguay where it was discovered in 1991<sup>1</sup>. In south-east South America there is an isolated population in south-east Brazil, from Bahia to Rio de Janeiro, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, and north-east Argentina in Misiones.

#### Pale-rumped Swift



Restricted west-central South American range. East of the Andes in; Loreto, San Martin, Ucayali and Madre de Dios, and western Brazil as far as the Rio Ituxi in eastern Acre and northern Bolivia in Pando and Santa Cruz. A specimen was collected in 1987 and others seen at Morona-Santiago in Ecuador and since this date three more specimens have been collected from the eastern Napo as well as several more sightings throughout the Ecuadorian Oriente<sup>3</sup>.

#### Acknowledgements

Thanks especially to Jack Chantler, Robert Clay, Guy Kirwan, Manuel Marin and Gunter de Schmidt for their comments on *Chaetura* species accounts and Robert Clay in particular for sharing his considerable knowledge about these species with me. Special thanks to Jane Lyon who showed me the superlative site at which to watch large numbers of *Chaetura* swifts and the Geography Department of Canterbury Christ Church College for allowing me to use their facilities for “non-geographical” purposes (and John Hills for showing me how to use them!). Nigel Redman at Pica Press has been extremely helpful in facilitating the use of the plate, drawings and maps from the *Swifts* book.

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Some of the information presented in this article, along with a wealth of interesting facts about other swift species can be found in the recently published *Swifts: a guide to the swifts and treeswifts of the world* by Phil Chantler and Gerald Driessens, and published by Pica Press.

**Table 3. Subspecific biometrics and range.**

	Wing	Tail	Range
<b>Band-rumped Swift</b> <i>Chaetura spinicauda</i> <i>spinicauda</i>	101-108 (104.5)	38-42 <sup>8</sup>	Eastern Venezuela, Guyanas, northern Brazil.
<i>C. s. fumosa</i>	107.7-115.4 (109.8) <sup>5</sup>	37.7-42.2 <sup>5</sup>	Western Costa Rica, western Panama, northern Colombia.
<i>C. s. aetherodroma</i>	100.2-107 (103.5) <sup>5</sup>	36.3-41.8 (38.8) <sup>5</sup>	Eastern Panama south to Ecuador.
<i>C. s. latirostris</i>	100-105 <sup>8</sup>	38-43 <sup>8</sup>	Eastern Venezuela from lower Orinoco to Delta Amacuro south to Cerro Paural-tepuí. Possibly also in Sucre.
<i>C. s. aethalea</i>	107-111 (109)	40 <sup>7</sup>	Central Brazil.
<b>Grey-rumped Swift</b> <i>Chaetura cinereiventris</i> <i>cinereiventris</i>	109-115 (112)	42 <sup>6</sup>	Eastern Brazil.
<i>C. c. guianensis</i>	102-108 (105)		Eastern Venezuela and the Guyanas.
<i>C. c. phaeopygos</i>	108.3-112.6 (111.1) <sup>5</sup>	36.5-40.3 (38.6) <sup>5</sup>	Eastern Nicaragua to Panama.
<i>C. c. lawrenci</i>	103-110 (106.5)	40-42.5 <sup>6</sup>	Northern Venezuela, Margarita, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago.
<i>C. c. schistacea</i>	113 <sup>6</sup>	36 <sup>6</sup>	Eastern Colombia, east to Táchira and Mérida, western Venezuela.
<i>C. c. occidentalis</i>	114-117 <sup>2</sup>	40-42 <sup>2</sup>	Western Colombia and western Ecuador.
<i>C. c. sclateri</i>	106-112 (108.5)	39 <sup>2</sup>	Upper Amazonia in northern Brazil, southern Venezuela and southern Colombia.
<b>Pale-rumped Swift</b> <i>Chaetura egregia</i>	120 <sup>6</sup>	40 <sup>6</sup>	East Peru, western Brazil, northern Bolivia, eastern Ecuador.