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First sight record of Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* for South America, in French Guiana

Otte Ottema

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Se reporta el primer registro de Vencejo Alpino *Tachymarptis melba* para Sudamérica, con base en un individuo observado el 16 de junio de 2002 en St. Laurent, Guyana Francesa, cerca del límite con Surinam. Se describe al mismo y se discute la identificación.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* is an Old World species which is a long-distance migrant breeder in the Palearctic. Whilst known from observations in the Caribbean region, it has not been reported in South America.

On 16 June 2002, at St Laurent in French Guiana (2 km from the border with Suriname), I observed an individual of this species from the road between St Laurent and Cayenne (the RN1) over the dirt road opposite the Route de Fatima. Over a field and adjacent forest, c.60–80 m above ground, were many Fork-tailed Palm-swifts *Tachornis squamata,* swallows, several Short-tailed Swifts *Chaetura brachyura* and a much larger swift with a wingspan at least four times that of *T. squamata*. The upperparts were pale brown, the back appearing lighter than the wings, while the large oval-shaped belly and small throat patches were white, separated by a dark breast-band, and the undertail-coverts and short, shallow-forked tail were also dark. It was observed from five minutes before sunset until ten minutes after dusk.

The observation conditions were ideal, the clear sky and low angle of the sun providing optimal

lighting. The bird's size excludes all New World swifts[5,7], except the largest, White-collared Swift *Streptoprocne zonaris* which, however, possesses quite different, largely deep black plumage[7]. The only species to obviously accord with my description is Alpine Swift[5], with which I have experience from one observation in India. There have been four records of this species in the Caribbean[3]: one on 20 September 1955 in Barbados[1], which was collected; one on 14 April 1987 on Guadeloupe[4]; one on 20 July 1987 on Desecheo Island, Puerto Rico[6] and one on 19 August 1992 on St Lucia[2], which was photographed. Mottled Swift *Tachymarptis aequatorialis*, the only congeneric, has a longer, more deeply forked tail and lacks the large white oval belly patch. Furthermore, the latter has not been reported from the Americas[5].

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Feeding observations on Scarlet Macaw *Ara macao* in Costa Rica

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Observamos un grupo familiar de cuatro individuos, dos adultos y dos jóvenes, de Lapa Roja *Ara macao* alimentándose de los frutos de dos especies de árboles. Los adultos consumían los frutos de la Palma Royal *Scheelea rostrata*. Los dos juveniles, aparentemente carentes de habilidad para alimentarse de éstos, consumían al mismo tiempo los frutos del Jobo *Spondias mombin*. La disponibilidad de diferentes recursos alimentarios puede incrementar la supervivencia de juveniles, los cuales aún no han perfeccionado sus diferentes técnicas de alimentación.

On 7 September 1995, from approximately 14h00–14h15, four Scarlet Macaws *Ara macao* were observed feeding near the Carara National Park guard station, Costa Rica (09°47'N 84°35'W). They were feeding on the edge of partially deforested pasture, along the Costañera highway. Two adults and their two juveniles were concurrently feeding on two different tree species, both common in the region. The two adults were eating from a Royal Palm *Scheelea rostrata*, of approximately 30–35 m height, which contained large bunches of mature palm nuts. *S. rostrata* has been observed with abundant nut clusters at various times throughout the year, and is also common in seasonally inundated areas in central Pacific Costa Rica (pers. obs.)[2]. *Scheelea rostrata* is a well-known, abundant food source for *A. macao* in the region, and is high in nutritional value[2,3]. The nuts hang inverted from the top of the tree, and must be removed by *A. macao* in mid-air. Within the same flight, the nuts are carried to a nearby tree for consumption. Therefore, the removal of palm nuts requires advanced skills, probably still under-developed in the two juveniles (estimated at 3–4 months old).

The juveniles were feeding c.20 m off the ground in a nearby Jobo *Spondias mombin*, which provided many perches as well as nuts surrounded by visible, yellow fruits[3]. The base of the *Spondias mombin* tree was within 10–20 m of the *Scheelea rostrata*, and all four birds vocalised throughout the observation; the juveniles emitted soft, single-syllable calls while the adults shrieked loudly. We have observed both juvenile and adult *A. macao* consuming *Spondias mombin* at various times throughout the year. The adults flew repeatedly to the *Scheelea rostrata* to remove fruits swiftly from the tree,