

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

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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<sup>5,7</sup>, except the largest, White-collared Swift *Streptoprocne zonaris* which, however, possesses quite different, largely deep black plumage<sup>7</sup>. The only species to obviously accord with my description is Alpine Swift<sup>5</sup>, with which I have experience from one observation in India. There have been four records of this species in the Caribbean<sup>3</sup>: one on 20 September 1955 in Barbados<sup>1</sup>, which was collected; one on 14 April 1987 on Guadeloupe<sup>4</sup>; one on 20 July 1987 on Desecheo Island, Puerto Rico<sup>6</sup> and one on 19 August 1992 on St Lucia<sup>2</sup>, 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<sup>5</sup>.

#### References

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