

SHORT NOTE

Some breeding sites of Horus and Bradfield's Swifts
in South West Africa/Namibia

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HORUS SWIFT

The horus swift *Apus horus* is one of three "white rumped swifts" occurring commonly in southern Africa. It has a broad band of white on the rump and a slightly forked tail, differing from the little swift *Apus affinus*, which has a square tail, and the whiterumped swift *Apus caffer*, which has a narrow band of white on the rump and a deeply forked tail.

Whereas whiterumped and little swifts are common throughout South West Africa/Namibia, the horus swift was recorded only in the Eastern Caprivi (Winterbottom 1971; Maclean 1985).

Horus swifts have been recorded over the past few years in small numbers in the Khomas Hochland hills, about 40 km southwest of Windhoek (2216 Dd), e.g. three birds in January 1985 (Brown 1985), two in February, two in March, three in December 1986, three in January 1987 and one in December 1987. Also, two groups of two and four birds respectively were seen in the Otavi Mountains near Kombat (1917 Da) in December 1986.

On 23 March 1986 six horus swifts were seen flying with a flock of about 20 whiterumped swifts at a road culvert about 20 km west of Windhoek (2216 Db). The whiterumped swifts were nesting under the culvert. About 50 m downstream from the culvert the dry river bed had been deeply eroded, forming two parallel, almost vertical earth banks, 200 m long and up to 4 m high. The east-facing bank had a number of deep burrows, excavated by anteating chats *Myrmecocichla formicivora* which were still in residence in two burrows. The horus swifts were swooping past the bank, but once I had moved about 40m away, two birds entered different burrows and a few seconds later two birds left. During the 20 min that I was present, the birds visited four different burrows. I revisited the site three days later and observed the same behaviour.

On 14 May 1988, J.M. Mendelsohn (pers. comm.) observed three horus swifts on the farm Regenstein (2217 Ca) about 10 km south of Windhoek. The swifts visited vertical banks caused by erosion on an alluvial plain. One of the birds, collected for the Windhoek State Museum, was a male with regresses testes (left testis 3×1 mm). According to P.A. Clancey (pers. comm.) the specimen is typical of *Apus horus australis*, the race known to occur in southern Africa in the

southern and eastern Cape, Natal, Mozambique, Transvaal and Zimbabwe (see Clancey 1984).

From these observations I presume that the horus swifts were breeding. Their distribution in this country is more extensive than was previously thought, but they are nowhere common. This is probably because suitable vertical sand and earthen banks are scarce.

BRADFIELD'S SWIFT

Bradfield's swift *Apus bradfieldi* is a largish, uniform mousecoloured swift that ranges widely over South West Africa/Namibia (Winterbottom 1971; Maclean 1985). It is known to breed in horizontal crevices in cliffs (Dean & Jensen 1974; Loutit 1980) and Ryan & Rose (1985) suggested that it might also breed in palm trees.

Bradfield's swift has long been known to roost in the dried fronds of the exotic palm tree *Washingtonia robusta* by residents of this country (14 different sites are known to me) and it has been assumed that they also nested here. In October and November 1986 I was able to confirm this at two sites in Windhoek. Eggs and nestlings of various ages (up to fledging) of Bradfield's swift were found below palm trees that I had been opportunistically watching.

The dead fronds of the *Washingtonia* palm hang down and form a dense mass around the upper stem of the tree. The swifts make tunnels deep into the dead fronds and there build their nests. In the indigenous palms, e.g. *Phoenix reclinata* and *Hyphaene ventricosa*, the dead fronds fall off the trees and thus do not provide suitable nesting sites for Bradfield's swifts. The only other *Apus* swift in Africa known to breed in trees is the black swift *A. barbatus* which breeds in holes in trees in Kenya (Brooke 1971).

Bradfield's swifts were the only birds breeding in the palm trees during these observations, although palm swifts *Cypsiurus parvus*, house sparrows *Passer domesticus* and redheaded finches *Amandina erythrocephala* were also roosting in the dried fronds and all three species subsequently bred there. At one site, consisting of three large palm trees, 18 Bradfield's swifts were estimated to enter the dried fronds in the evening: at the other, seven trees were occupied by about 38 birds. The egg-laying months calculated for

Bradfield's swift at these two Windhoek sites were October and November.

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