

## TWO OBSERVATIONS OF ALPINE SWIFT (*APUS MELBA*) ON BARBADOS

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**Abstract.**—An Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*) observed at St. Bernards Village from 21 June to 9 July 2003 and another at Newcastle on 31 July 2005 represent the second and third occurrences on Barbados. These are the sixth and seventh observations for the Western Hemisphere.

**Key words:** *Alpine Swift*, *Apus melba*, Barbados, observations

**Resumen.**—DOS OBSERVACIONES DEL VENCEJO COMÚN (*APUS MELBA*) EN BARBADOS. Un Vencejo Común (*Apus melba*) fue observado en la villa de St. Bernards del 21 de junio al 9 de julio del 2003 y otro en Newcastle el 31 de julio del 2005. Estos constituyen el segundo y tercer reportes en Barbados y el sexto y séptimo del hemisferio occidental.

**Palabras claves:** *Apus melba*, Barbados, observaciones, Vencejo Común

TWO RECENT OBSERVATIONS of Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*) on Barbados are presented in this note, together with a summary of other Western Hemisphere occurrences.

### OBSERVATIONS

The first observation occurred while Frost was watching up to six Black Swifts (*Cypseloides niger*) feeding over the valley adjacent to St. Bernards Village, St. Joseph (13°12'N, 59°34'W, ca 300 m elevation) in the late afternoon of 21 June 2003. He was surprised to observe, at 18:25 hr for several seconds, a much larger swift fly close over the tree tops nearby. His initial impression was of a bird almost one and a half times the size of a Black Swift, with proportionately longer wings and tail, and chest area which appeared paler than the darker anterior and posterior underparts. The viewing conditions were poor with fading light and the sun behind the bird. However, Alpine Swift immediately sprang to mind as a possible candidate. About 3 min later the large swift reappeared, this time flying much higher over the trees and then almost overhead. The large white oval area on the underparts, which contrasted with the chocolate-brown breast and vent areas, gleamed as it flew along a shaft of sunlight for several seconds. The bird was clearly an Alpine Swift. The bird made two more passes overhead in the next five minutes but it was getting too dark to make out further details. Frost left at 18:40 hr wondering whether it would be there in the morning.

Frost and Edward Massiah visited the site the following morning and spent several hours watching and photographing the Alpine Swift. The bird often obliged, making a circuit which brought it within a range of 10-15 m, including close overhead, before flying down into the valley below allowing good dorsal views. The large white patch on the underparts extending onto the flanks was prominent, visible at a considerable range in good viewing conditions, with the remaining underparts ap-



Fig. 1. Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*) at St. Bernards Village, St. Joseph, Barbados, 22 June 2003. Photo by Martin D. Frost.

pearing dark brown at a distance. At very close range the white throat area was discernible although this feature was difficult to see unless the bird was almost directly overhead. The upperparts were gray-brown, palest in the mantle and rump area and slightly darker on the wings. Its flight appeared more powerful and direct than that of the Black Swifts, with shallower wing beats giving an overall more graceful impression. The tail was usually closed, giving an attenuated appearance, but when opened was moderately forked.

The Alpine Swift was observed on 7 out of 8 subsequent days that this site was visited. It was present on 3 July when Frost and Burke visited the site together and was last seen on 9 July, making its stay at least 19 days long. It and the Black Swifts were absent from this location on 7 July when a moderately strong tropical wave was affecting the island with the swifts presumably feeding at lower elevations. Initially, the Alpine Swift loosely associated with the Black Swifts, but eventually settled into a different routine, feeding closer to the tree tops, farther down in the valley. It came less frequently to the ridge at the top of the valley than the Black Swifts.

The second observation was at 17:43 hr on 31 July 2005 at Newcastle, St. John (13°11'N, 59°29'W, ca 180 m elevation). Burke and Renata Goodridge were watching for the Black Swift flight when an Alpine Swift appeared, passing within 10 m to the northeast. The large size, flight aspect and plumage characteristics were seen well—backlit in the afternoon light. The bird was observed through ca 150 m of flight as it continued on a direct path to the southeast.

#### DISCUSSION

These are the second and third observations of Alpine Swift for the island and the sixth and seventh occurrences for the western hemisphere. The first occurrence for the island was a specimen (ANSP 169868) assigned to the African race *tuneti*. The front of the specimen tag is labeled “Barbados 9/55 after hurricane Janet” while the back of the tag pro-

vides further details: “at Gibb’s on west coast of Barbados; 1st seen on 20 Sept., collected 27 Sept 1955 by Mr. Webster.” The other western hemisphere occurrences are from the Caribbean region with one exception and also involved single individuals: Grande Anse, Guadeloupe, on 18 April 1987 (Feldmann and Pavis 1995), Desecheo Island, Puerto Rico, on 20 July 1987 (Meier *et al* 1989); Moule a Chique, St. Lucia, on 19 August 1992 (Burke 1994), and St. Laurent, French Guiana, on 16 June 2002 (Ottema 2004).

Given the wide-ranging daily movements of Alpine Swift estimated to be 600 to 1,000 km (Snow and Perrins 1998), the recent spate of New World records is perhaps not altogether surprising.

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