

ANTILLEAN PALM SWIFT *TACHORNIS PHOENICOBIA* NESTING IN SEA CAVES
IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

GUY M. KIRWAN¹, ROBERT S. R. WILLIAMS², AND CHRIS G. BRADSHAW³

¹74 Waddington Street, Norwich, Norfolk NR2 4JS, UK; ²Casilla 17-21-40, Quito, Ecuador; and ³6 Collet Walk, Park-wood, Gillingham, Kent ME8 9QL, UK

Abstract.—We report the first instance of Antillean Palm Swift (*Tachornis phoenicobia*) breeding in a sea cave, based on observations in the Dominican Republic in April 1996. Breeding data for this species and its congeners are comparatively sparse but, with the exception of the location, our data appear to conform to previously published observations of *T. phoenicobia*. The only report of this species from Puerto Rico concerned a single individual observed in somewhat similar circumstances to the small breeding colony detailed here, raising the interesting possibility that *T. phoenicobia* may breed or have bred on the latter island.

Key words: Antillean Palm Swift, Dominican Republic, nesting, *Tachornis phoenicobia*

Resumen.—Se reporta la primera instancia de Vencejillo Antillano (*Tachornis phoenicobia*) nidificando en una cueva marina, con base en observaciones de la República Dominicana en abril de 1996. Los datos de nidificación de esta especie y sus congéneres son comparativamente escasos pero, con la excepción de la localidad, nuestros datos parecen concordar con observaciones previamente publicadas de *T. phoenicobia*. El único registro de esta especie en Puerto Rico concierne un individuo solitario observado en circunstancias algo similares a la pequeña colonia de nidificación detallada aquí, planteando la interesante posibilidad que *T. phoenicobia* pueda nidificar o haber nidificado en esta isla.

Palabras clave: nidificación, República Dominicana, *Tachornis phoenicobia*, Vencejillo Antillano

THE AVAILABLE LITERATURE suggests that the genus *Tachornis* is wholly reliant on palms for nesting (Chantler 1999, Chantler & Driessens 2000). Data for the range-restricted Pygmy Swift (*Tachornis furcata*) are very few, though Collins *et al.* (in press) report that it is closely tied to *Mauritia* (and possibly *Copernicia*) palms in the Maracaibo Basin, while those for Antillean Palm Swift (*T. phoenicobia*) suggest it is wholly reliant on *Roystonea* (Chantler and Driessens 2000) and, at least in Cuba, *Washingtonia* (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000), although Raffaele *et al.* (1998) mention the species nesting in 'thatched roofs of tobacco sheds', and Fork-tailed Palm Swift (*T. squamata*) is very closely tied to *Mauritia* and *Bactris* palms (Chantler and Driessens 2000).

On the morning of 21 April 1996, RSRW drew CGB and GMK's attention to a number of Antillean Palm Swifts repeatedly entering a rather open and small sea cave at Cabo Rojo, just southeast of Pedernales, in the extreme southwest Dominican Republic. The cave was approximately 10 m in diameter and its roof was about 3 m above ground. We eventually counted c.10 pairs of swifts nesting in this cave, along with several pairs of Caribbean Martin (*Progne dominicensis*) and Cave Swallow (*Hirundo fulva*). In most respects the nests accorded with the literature (Chantler and Driessens 2000), being a globular construction of soft materials with a shallow interior cup, and situated within small

crevices in the rock. In many respects the nests were similar in their position and aspect to those described and illustrated for *T. squamata* by Sick (1993), with the crucial exception, of course, that they were attached to a rock surface rather than a palm frond. Judging by calls emanating from within at least some of the nests, young were present, but we were unable to ascertain their approximate age due to the difficulties of accessing the site. As mentioned above, published data concerning the species' breeding biology are strikingly few, but clutch size is apparently 2–5 eggs, which are laid in March–July (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000, Raffaele *et al.* 1998). Low elevations within the extreme southwest of the Dominican Republic are generally rather arid and palm trees notably few, with comparatively few Antillean Palm Swift, perhaps necessitating the use of such apparently unusual habitats for nesting.

Interestingly, Kepler (1971) in describing the first observation of Antillean Palm Swift in Puerto Rico, at Cabo Rojo, in the extreme southwest of the country, mentions that Caribbean Martins and Cave Swallows also accompanied this individual. We are unaware of whether subsequent observers have visited Cabo Rojo, and the nature of the habitat at the site, but speculate that, in light of the above, it may be worth observers re-visiting this part of Puerto Rico to discover whether the species nests in similar habitat there to the observations described above.

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