

First photographic documentation of a live White-collared Swift (*Streptoprocne zonaris*) from the United States

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THE WHITE-COLLARED SWIFT (*Streptoprocne zonaris*) is resident from southern Tamaulipas, Mexico, south to Argentina. The species is also found on many of the Greater Antillean islands, including Cuba. Prior to 1987 this swift had been recorded in North America north of Mexico on only four occasions. We are reporting the fifth record of the species from the United States and providing the first photographic documentation of a live White-collared Swift in this country.

At 0945 hrs CST on December 19, 1987, while participating in the annual Freeport Christmas Bird Count, we observed a large, dark swift flying northeastward along the coastline of the Gulf of Mexico near Surfside, Texas. The bird traveled along the duneline, with the flight path ranging laterally from the water's edge to only 150 meters inland. At maximum, the swift's altitude did not exceed 30 meters, and while diving for insects often dropped to within one or two meters of the ground. We pursued the bird by automobile for 45 minutes, traveling a total distance of 40 kilometers. Ultimately we and the bird reached land's end—the northern end of Follet's Island. At that point we ended our chase, and watched as the swift unhesitatingly crossed the waters of San Luis Pass to continue its journey northeastward along the dunes of Galveston Island.

Our thoughts at the moment of discovery ran to the Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*). The swifts of the genus *Chaetura* were discounted because of

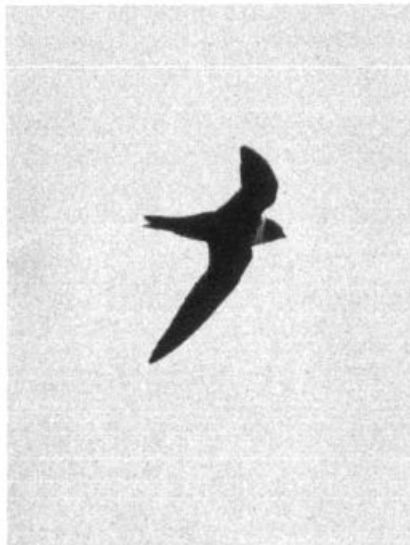


Photo 1. This ventral view of the large, dark swift found on the Freeport, Texas Christmas Bird Count clearly shows the complete white band around the upper breast conclusively identifying it as a White-collared Swift.

their small size and characteristically rapid wing beats. Once the bird circled over our heads, however, we saw the broad white ventral collar that ultimately established the bird's identity. In subsequent observations we noted that this collar completely encircled the neck, becoming narrower dorsally. Additional field marks recorded during these direct observations were the long narrow wings, which bowed prominently in flight, a deeply notched tail (though not nearly so dramatically as in one of the swallow-tailed swifts,) and the overall sooty-black plumage (excluding the white collar). No calls were heard.

In the 45 minutes we trailed the swift we were able to take more than 25 color and black-and-white photographs. Although lighting conditions were less than favorable with a heavy overcast and light, intermittent mist, the best of these photos clearly establishes the identity of the bird (Photo 1). Additional photos (Photo 2) document the physical location of the sighting (note the Gulf of Mexico and the condominium in the background). We believe these photos to be the first photographic documentation of a live White-collared Swift in the United States.

The status of the White-collared Swift as a member of the United States avifauna has heretofore rested upon four reports. The two White-collared Swifts observed near Rockport, Texas, on December 4, 1974 (*Am. Birds* 29:84), were the first reported from the United States. Documentation for this sighting, however, is limited to the observers' field notes. An additional unsupported sight observation occurred on May 21, 1982, in Del Norte County, California (*Am. Birds* 36:890).

A dead White-collared Swift found clinging to a screen door on Perdido Key, Escambia County, Florida, on January 25, 1981 (Hardy and Clench 1982), represents the first substantiated record for the United States. A dead White-collared Swift picked up on a beach near the Padre Island National Seashore, Texas, on March 8, 1983 (*Am. Birds* 37:889) furnishes a second specimen record. Until now, the status of the species in the United

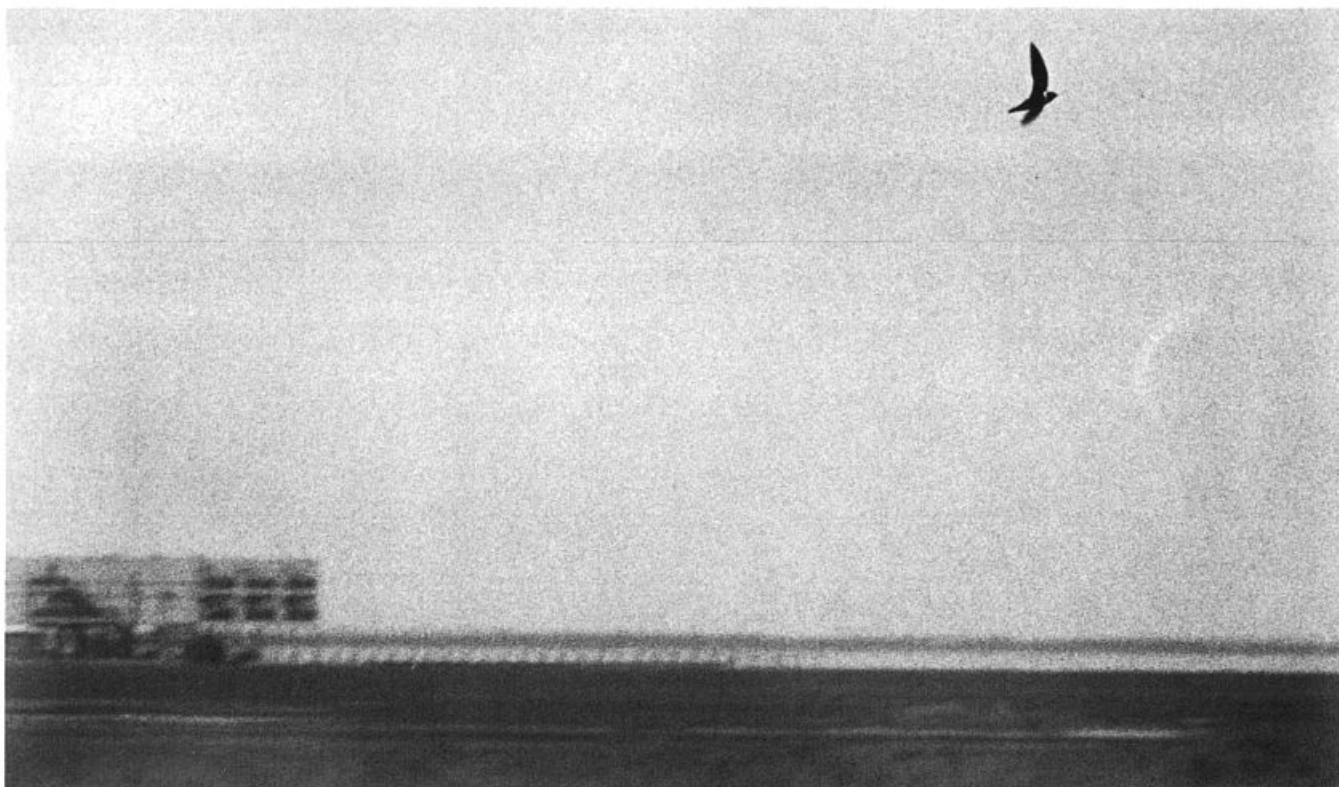


Photo 2. *White-collared Swift seen flying along Gulf of Mexico near Surfside, Texas.*

States has thus been based upon two undocumented sight records and two dead birds.

We are also providing anecdotal evidence suggesting that additional White-collared Swifts may have been present in Texas at the time of our sighting. On the same day as our observation, two parties participating in the Freeport Christmas Bird Count observed a White-collared Swift approximately five kilometers southwest of the point of our original sighting. Given the time of their observation (0900 hrs CST) and the flight direction of the swift (along the coast to the northeast), we believe this to be the individual sighted by us shortly afterward.

However, on December 18, the day before the Freeport Christmas Bird Count, a "large, black swift" was spotted near Odem, Texas (pers. comm., Jesse Grantham, National Audubon Society, Corpus Christi, Texas). The sighting occurred at 1645 hrs CST, and the swift flew in a north-to-south direction. Considering the distance between Odem and Freeport (450 kilometers), and the flight direction reported by Grantham (north to south), it appears unlikely that the swift at

Odem was the individual we discovered near Surfside the following morning.

We are aware of two additional reports in December 1987 from Texas. Scott Holt observed a black swift between Aransas Pass and Engleside on December 22 (*vide* J. Grantham), and William Clark reported one near Mission on December 25 (*vide* J. Grantham). We believe that these reports of "large black swifts," combined with our own documented observation, suggest the possibility of a small number of White-collared Swifts widely dispersed along the Texas coast during mid-December 1987.

It is difficult to identify the Freeport bird to subspecies on the basis of photographs. The race *S. z. pallidifrons*, resident in the Greater Antilles, can safely be eliminated because it has a white forehead, lores, and eye stripe, and the birds occurring from Costa Rica southward through South America have a narrower white collar (Hardy and Clench 1982), which would probably be evident in the field. The Freeport bird has a broad ventral collar and would appear, again judging from the comments of Hardy and Clench (1982), to most closely match

the race *S. z. mexicana*, the subspecies found in Mexico and northern Central America.

The White-collared Swift colony in southern Tamaulipas, Mexico, at the El Salto waterfalls, is apparently the closest to the upper Texas coast. This colony is 500 kilometers south-southwest of Brownsville, Texas, and 1400 kilometers southwest of Freeport. Hardy and Clench (1982) reported radio-tracked White-collared Swifts traveling over 250 kilometers a day while foraging. Certainly it is conceivable that small flocks of White-collared Swifts might periodically disperse northward out of the mountains of Mexico into the south Texas lowlands in search of productive foraging areas.

LITERATURE CITED

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- 2701 Amherst, Houston, TX 77005 (Eubanks) and 12107 Broken Bough Dr., Houston, TX 77024 (Morgan).