

Streptoprocne zonaris (White-collared Swift)

Family: Apodidae (Swifts)

Order: Apodiformes (Swifts)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. White-collared swift, *Streptoprocne zonaris*.

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/gallery?p_p_spp=225691, downloaded 19 February 2017]

TRAITS. *Streptoprocne zonaris* is a relatively large swift (Fig. 1) with a short, fork-shaped tail, thin legs, and long acute-tipped wings (Fig. 2). It is a strong and agile flier with an average wingspan of 51cm, a length of 20cm, and a weight of 80-90g with no observable sexual dimorphism. Adults are dark brown or black with a clearly visible white collar around the entire neck with a smaller width above than below. Females tend to have narrower collars while juveniles have collars with brown spots (Fig. 3) (Restall et al., 2007; ffrench, 2012).

DISTRIBUTION. Common native to Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean (Fig. 4) in countries such as Jamaica, Hispaniola, Cuba (Raffaele et al., 2003), south Mexico to Bolivia, Honduras to Peru, Argentina and Guyana. It is a common visitor in various regions

throughout Trinidad especially from July to October, and is now believed to be a resident in Trinidad but still rare in Tobago (ffrench, 2012; Restall et al., 2007).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Mostly seen over mountain valleys and forested highlands, rather than over lowlands and open country except during bad weather (Raffaele et al., 2003; Arlott, 2010). Also spotted over old mangroves near montane forested areas such as in French Guiana coastal regions. Nests are sometimes found behind waterfalls in caves. It is very aerial and forages most of the day, often in large bands, at all altitudes (Restall et al., 2007; Raffaele et al., 2003), and is believed to sometimes spend the night on the wing, that is to sleep while flying (ffrench, 2012). They live in loosely organized groups that can range from 50-500 white-collared swifts (Restall et al., 2007).

FOOD AND FEEDING. Most of the day is spent flying in groups and searching for food. Diet comprises flying insects such as flying ants, beetles and wasps. In Trinidad, up to 50 can be seen flying together. If there is a saturation of insects that they eat in an area, they would hunt on the wing (ffrench, 2012).

REPRODUCTION. No known information has been published for reproduction in Trinidad and it is believed that they may visit post-breeding. With such a large range, differences in times for breeding are seen. In Mexico and the Caribbean (where breeding occurs) nests are built in April/May-June (Arlott, 2010) while in Argentina this occurs in October/November. Breeding usually takes a period of 81 days, with about 22 days for the eggs to hatch. The clutch is 1-2 white, oval eggs. These are laid in nests made out of mud, insect chitin and moss which are built in isolated areas such as in caves on protrusions on the walls. These caves are usually near water and frequently behind waterfalls. To enter the nest, the adult flies and lands onto the wall then climbs the wall and into the nest (Bond, 1979; Passeggi et al., 2011). Hatchlings are featherless with closed eyes. The young remain in the nests for about 44 days. At about 29 days, it would have feathers on its wings and be considered a fledgling. However, they do not completely leave the nest until an additional few days have passed. They may all return to the nest eventually but only the original adults would reuse it (Passeggi et al., 2011).

BEHAVIOUR. As fledglings leaving the nest for the first time, they are quiet and stay near the nest with the adults staying close. When they are fully ready to leave, they are very vocal (Passeggi et al., 2011). White-collared swifts are known to be extremely vocal with a high pitch ‘scree-scree’ or rapid ‘chip-chip-chip’(Raffaele et al., 2003). Especially at the end of the day, they gather and concurrently call and sing using various sounds such as clicks and whirrs (Restall et al., 2007). Very sociable thus usually seen in groups flying extremely fast. When seen in large group of about 500, especially at evening time, it is assumed that they are ‘spending the night on the wing’. Due to their high speed and almost constant flight, there is still a lot to be studied about them.

APPLIED ECOLOGY. Although the population was declining in Haiti (Raffaele et al., 2003), this species has a very large range and as a result, it is listed as a species of Least Concern (IUCN, 2017).

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. White-collared swift in flight.

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/gallery?p_p_spp=225691, downloaded 16 February 2017]

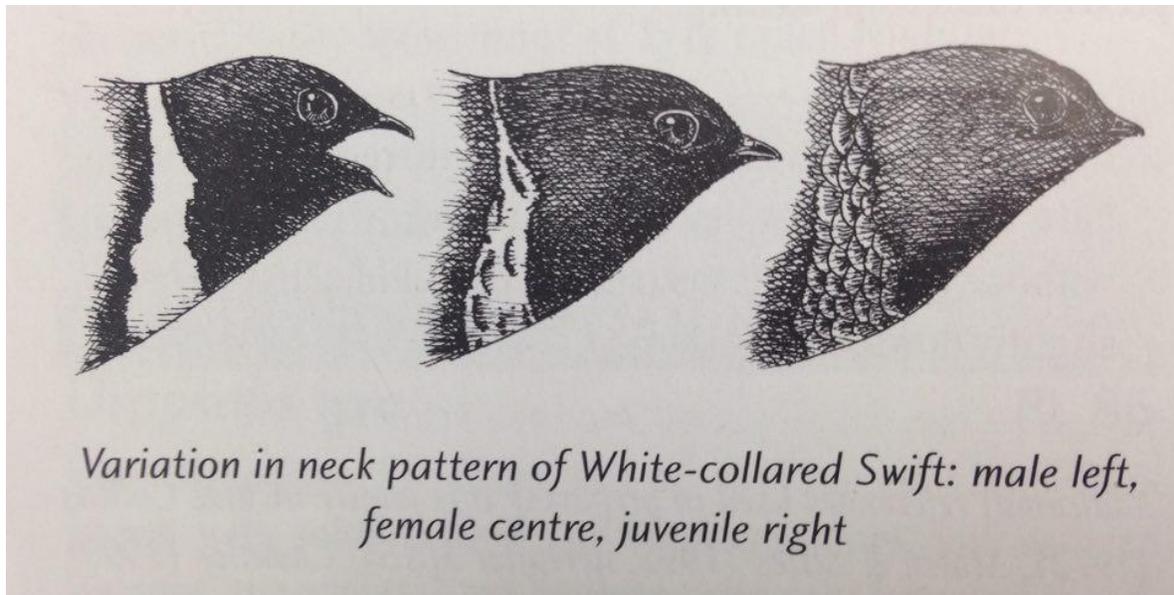


Fig. 3. Sex and age differences in the white-collared swift.

[From Restall et al., 2007]



Fig. 4. White-collared swift geographic distribution.

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/gallery?p_p_spp=225691, downloaded 16 February 2017]