

Nesting of the White-tailed Swallow *Hirundo megaensis*

The White-tailed Swallow *Hirundo megaensis* is an uncommon endemic to the lower elevation rangelands of the Borena plateau in southern Ethiopia. It is easily mistaken for the Ethiopian Swallow *H. aethiopica* but is slightly smaller, does not have the brick red spot on the forehead and has some white in the tail. In description, *H. megaensis* is glossy blue-black above with white underparts from chin to vent; the amount of white in the tail seems to vary.

The first recorded sighting of the species was in the early 1940s (Benson 1942, 1946), and while it has been seen on numerous occasions since then no one has ever observed its nest although some have speculated that it breeds in holes in tall termitaria or culverts (Keith *et al.* 1992). I have worked in the Borena region since July 1993 but it was not until 1996 that I succeeded in locating and observing a pair on the nest.

In 1996, I began making serious inquiries among the pastoral Borana about the White-tailed Swallow in March because most birds in the area began nest building in earnest at that time. First, I found out, having been led to various places only to see bats, Lesser Striped Swallows *H. abyssinica*, or Ethiopian Swallows, that the Borana do not concern themselves much with birds at all. To them, all swallows, as well as all bats, have the same name, *raree*, so there would be no way to make any distinction between the several species of swallow in the area or, indeed, between bats and swallows. Second, I learned that the White-tailed Swallow associates more than other swallows with people and cattle and only nests in huts in the villages or on the walls of the shafts of the traditional deep wells. This was confirmed in early September when I spotted a White-tailed Swallow near its nest in a deep well in Anole.

The first person I found who really seemed able to comprehend my description was a project guard at the field camp in Dubluk, 60 km south of Yabello. The fact that both Ethiopian and White-tailed Swallows visited the field camp, and a pair of the former was building a nest in the training hall there, made explanations easier. Being able to point and say, "Not that one. There, that one," was a great help.

On 3 May 1996, the guard took me to his village near Dubluk where I saw the first of two nests being reported here. Both nests were attached to a roof pole of a traditional Borana hut approximately 2 m straight in from the entrance and about 2.1 m above the floor. The nest was cup-shaped, open (hardly bigger than the cupped hand), and constructed of mud. I did not measure either of the two nests observed as there were young birds in both.

The first nest contained four chicks about 10 days old. They were crowded into the nest, and it was obvious there was no room for either of the parents. When I inquired where they stayed at night, I was told that the parents did not sleep on the nest, nor did anyone know where they slept.

The compact 35-mm camera I had was not adequate for the dark close-up conditions, but I took five black-and-white photos of the chicks and the parents feeding them. I went back on 14 May with a more sophisticated camera and slide film, but the chicks had flown: two on 12 May and two on 14th or, as described by Taro, the house owner, "They were encouraged by her over a period of several days to leave the nest

by her landing further and further from the nest, forcing them to come out in order to be fed."

The second nest was located on 15 May in another nearby village. The nest contained three eggs. Unfortunately, I had to go to Addis Ababa and was not able to return until 25 May when I found that the eggs had hatched, probably on 20th. When I was next able to visit the village on 8 June, I discovered that the young had flown the day



Photos: Jordan Holtam

Figure 1a, b. White-tailed Swallow feeding young, Ethiopia, 3 May 1996

before. The house owner said that the children had tried to detain the birds and everyone seemed genuinely to regret that they had not waited for me.

No new nests were reported after June and I suspect that the breeding season is then over.

References

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Further bird records of interest from the northern and western slopes of Mt Kilimanjaro

Several new records of birds from Mt Kilimanjaro have been made since Cordeiro (1994) went to press, and could not be included in that paper. Most of these records are from our own surveys of the south-west and north slopes of the mountain in 1993 and 1994. NJC briefly visited the Lukani area near Sanya Juu on 18 August 1993 and Kilimanjaro Timbers on the north slope on 24–25 July 1994. JMG resided at Kilimanjaro Timbers throughout 1990 and from 1992 to 1994 and made most of his observations in this area. We also take the opportunity of adding some records of Kilimanjaro forest birds from Stuart & Jensen (1981) and Fuggles-Couchman (1984) that had been previously overlooked by Cordeiro (1994).

Cordeiro (1994) indicated that some species (e.g. Narina Trogon *Apaloderma narina* and Dark-backed Weaver *Ploceus bicolor*) might possibly occur on Mt Kilimanjaro, based on the list of Kilimanjaro birds given by Williams (1967). However, according to Baker (1994), "These lists were not intended as sources of primary reference and contain species the author felt should occur (J. G. Williams, pers. comm.)." Thus those species listed by Williams (1967) and included in Cordeiro (1994) may not all have been recorded by J.G. Williams from Mt Kilimanjaro.

All locations mentioned in this note are indicated in Fig. 1 of Cordeiro (1994).

Forest species

African Green Ibis *Bostrychia olivacea* Three individuals were observed by JMG foraging in damp leaf litter below *Olea* trees at c. 1850 m below Kilimanjaro Timbers, 15 February 1994. At other times between 1990 and 1994, birds flying past Kilimanjaro Timbers were believed to be this species based on their call. Another group of African Green Ibis was seen by JMG in mixed upper Afromontane forest near Mandara Hut at c. 2700 m on the southern slope in October 1993.

Olive Pigeon *Columba arquatrix* JMG observed breeding colonies in *Podocarpus*



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