

ON AN
OVERLOOKED INDIAN SWIFT

BY
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In 1865 Blyth described in the *Ibis* for the first time a Swift, under the name of *Cypselus acuticauda*. The original description is not a very good one, but two of the principal characters are mentioned, *i. e.* the deep black colour of the plumage and the much pointed lateral rectrices. The majority of recent ornithologists have either passed this species over with silence, or placed Blyth's name as a synonym among the literature on the Common Swift (*Apus apus*) or its eastern representative form (*Apus apus pekinensis*). Hume in his once famous *List of Indian Birds* placed *Cypselus acuticauda* as a separate species, but the specimens in his collection labelled, and mentioned in his writings as that species are merely birds of the year of *Apus apus pekinensis*. Probably this latter fact has been the principal reason which led me to place Blyth's name as a synonym of *Apus apus pekinensis* on p. 445 of vol. XVI of the *Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum*, but more recently, in 1897, on p. 85 of no. 4 of the *Tierreich*, I added a query. At about the same time Dr Blanford in vol. III of his series on Birds in his *Fauna of British India* quoted *acuticauda* without a query as a synonym of *Apus apus*. Doubtless Dr Blanford and I overlooked the sentence of Blyth saying that his type was in Liverpool, or either of us would most probably have tried to see the type.

When arranging the more recent additions to Dr Rothschild's Museum in Tring, I was not a little surprised to come across a Swift which I did not know at all! I soon began to read Blyth's description and as I found it to agree with the Bird in hand I wrote to Dr Forbes, who most readily sent me Blyth's type, which I find in every detail to agree with the Bird in question. The latter has been shot at Cherrapunji in the Khasia Hills in India by captain H.-J. Elwes, at an elevation of 4500 feet above the sea, on September 24th 1886, while the type was from Nepal. The comparison of the two Birds shows clearly that ***Apus acuticauda*** (Blyth) is a most distinct species, which is probably spread over a considerable portion of India.

Its rectrices (specially the outermost pair) are much more pointed than in *Apus apus* and its subspecies. The colour of the upperside is not at all brownish black, but deep steel-blue or bluish black. The throat is white with blackish shaft-lines; the rest of the underside from the foreneck to the belly is black with wide white borders to the feathers, the under tail-coverts blue-black. The wings are longer than in the subspecies of *Apus apus*, but in the specimens examined they are moulting, and quite exact measurements can therefore not be given. On the underside *Apus acuticauda* resembles much more the well-known *Apus pacificus* than *Apus apus*, but the rump is blue-black, not white!

It is most extraordinary that none of the numerous energetic collectors of Mr. Alan O. Hume, nor others, have come across this swift, and it is, I think, possible, that its breeding grounds are in the north, and that it is only a winter visitor to India, but more information is required about it in any case.

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