

## Acknowledgements

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## Further sightings of an unnamed cliff swallow *Hirundo* sp. in Ethiopia

We watched up to 12 cliff swallows for half an hour from about 09:30 on 18 September 1993, feeding along the western cliff faces of the small gorge running north from the main Awash river gorge, immediately adjacent to Kereyou Lodge, Awash National Park, Ethiopia (8°53'N, 40°06'E). Although they were typically observed flying below the rim of the gorge, they were also noted occasionally moving up as far as the grassland and scrub beyond the rim and, much less frequently, joining the more numerous Eurasian *Hirundo rustica*, Striped *H. abyssinica*, and Red-rumped Swallows *H. daurica*, in the airspace above. African Rock Martins *H. fuligula*, occasional House Martins *Delichon urbica*, Sand Martins *Riparia riparia* and Alpine Swifts *Apus melba*, were also seen for comparison.

### General impression

A dark hirundine with pale underparts and pale rufous rump. Smaller than Striped Swallow with more triangular wings and short notched tail. Flight very martin-like with periods of gliding, sharp turns and fluttering along a relatively short flight path. This contrasted with longer, steadier, sweeping glides of the other swallow species. Although we watched them for half an hour with 7 x 42 and 10 x 40 binoculars, they



never came closer than 30 m and were often 50 m or more away. We looked for them again on 19 September 1993 at the same point, but they were not present. The following is a detailed description.

#### Upperparts

Head, neck, wings, mantle and tail dark blue-black, not as dark as *Delichon urbica* but darker than all the *Hirundo* species present. Some birds were duller, perhaps browner. There was no obvious iridescence. Rump square and variable in colour ranging from buffy cream to pale rufous. Possibly the duller-backed birds had the paler rumps. Certainly this variation was not a factor of light. No pale mirror spots on the tail.

#### Underparts

Extensive dark cheeks and dark sides of neck extending well down, thereby restricting whitish throat to a narrow but noticeable central area. Rest of underparts dirty white, possibly with a buffy tinge. Underwings not well seen. Flight feathers certainly dark underneath. Coverts perhaps paler but overall affect much darker than *H. abyssinica*.

#### Discussion

The birds were clearly cliff swallows of the same species recorded from Awash National Park by Madge & Redman (1989) and hitherto unrecorded in Ethiopia (Urban & Brown 1971). We agree with Madge and Redman that they appear not to be Red Sea Swallow *H. perdita*. The type specimen of this species is described as showing a bluish-black throat and upper breast with a pale chin spot. It also had a grey rump (Turner & Rose 1989). These characters were absent on the birds we saw. The birds we observed are, in fact, most like the South Africa Cliff Swallow *H. spilodera*, from which they differ in the lack of black breast markings, apparent lack of rufous on forehead and lores and in having a blacker crown and nape (Maclean 1984).

#### Subsequent observations

A group of cliff swallows of the same species was also watched for about 5 min from about 13:00 on 25 September 1994 by the authors and J. Harjula, flying along the inner rim of the northern wall of the crater of Fantalle Mountain, some 25 km from the sighting at Kereyou Lodge (9°00N, 39°54E). The birds were observed alongside two Red-rumped Swallows. Interestingly, both the Red-rumped and the cliff swallows exhibited very pale buff to off-white rumps, though the cliff swallows were readily distinguishable by their flight pattern, the absence of a chestnut nape, dark cheeks and sides of throat, lack of tail-streamers and much smaller size. It is worth noting here that numbers (up to 20) of very pale-rumped Red-rumped Swallows of unknown origin were also seen from the same site on Fantalle Mountain and at the Kereyou Lodge gorge in September 1993. The origin of these birds would be interesting to establish.

The dates of observation—19 September 1993 and 25 September 1994—extend the period when this species has been recorded in Ethiopia by two months. JDA has checked the area up to 25 times on different dates covering most months from 1991 to 1994, but has had no other sightings. The other site from which the species is known, at the south end of Lake Langano (7°35N, 38°45E) in the Rift Valley, has also been frequently checked by JDA, Per Ole Syvertsen and others, but without success.



There have been two other sightings of individual hirundines identified as cliff swallows, probably of this species, elsewhere in Ethiopia: one near Gibe over grassland not far from the Gibe river gorge on 18 October 1993 (JDA), the other from near Jimma on 24 March 1994 (J. Harjula, pers. comm.).

Observers visiting Ethiopia should certainly be alert for cliff swallows in any apparently suitable habitat: gorges and cliffs with nearby water and grassland, particularly in the central and northern parts of the Rift Valley and apparently usually with other hirundines.

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## An isolated population of the Olive-bellied Sunbird *Nectarinia chloropygia* in Ethiopia

The Tepi–Mizan Teferi forests of South-West Ethiopia are poorly known ornithologically. During a visit there from 12–16 February 1993, I found sunbirds with olive bellies in two localities near Tepi (7°12'N, 35°25'E). There was a male in secondary forest growth at c. 1200 m on 14 February near Gezmarete (7°07'N, 35°26'E) along the Tepi–Mizan road. Later that day there was a possible male at Tepi airstrip (7°12'N, 35°25'E) at c. 1250 m. On 16 February there was a male with a female close to the site of the bird seen two days earlier. These birds were eventually identified unquestionably as Olive-bellied Sunbirds *Nectarinia chloropygia*.

In appearance the males were reminiscent of Eastern Double-collared Sunbirds *N. mediocris*, with a distinctive olive/yellow-olive belly, but they had the straighter bill typical of *N. chloropygia* and the upper tail-coverts were green rather than metallic blue. The female had noticeable streaking on the chest. The first bird was in secondary growth at the forest edge, and the others in neglected cultivation with rank grasses, immediately adjacent on one side to the airstrip and on the other to degraded forest/secondary forest growth. The habitat and altitude at which these birds occurred match the habitat preferences (forest edges, moist bushland, secondary growth) and known altitude preferences indicated in Britton *et al.* (1980), Lewis & Pomeroy (1988) and Williams & Arnott (1980) for *N. chloropygia*.





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