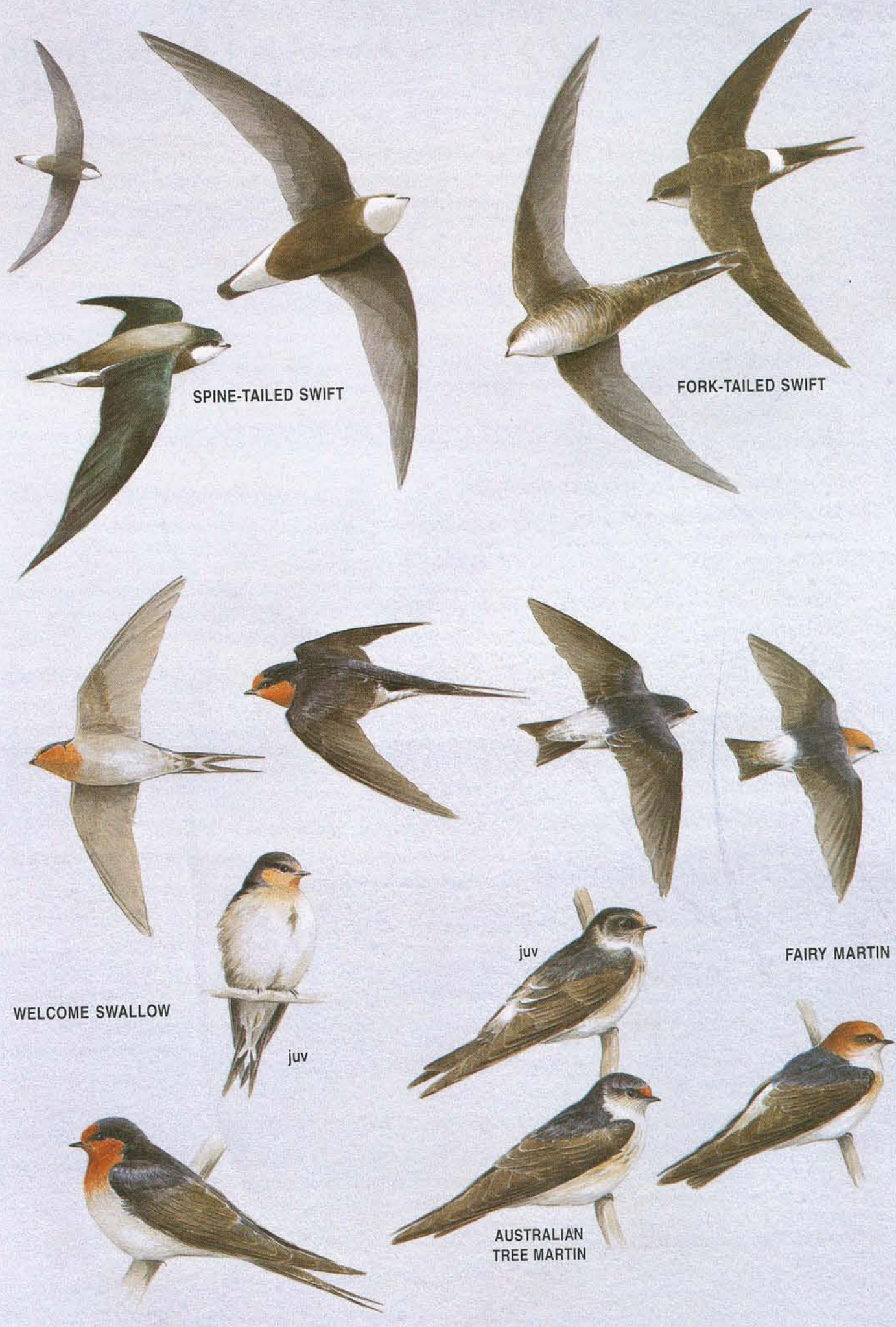


Swifts are reminiscent of swallows but designed for aerial feeding and speed, with wide flattened bill and very long thin swept-back wings. Generally black, with white patches and distinctive tail shape. Sexes alike. They fly high, with bursts of rapid wingbeats alternating with long swift glides, dives and banking turns; at dusk and in bad weather, they fly low over water or circle headlands, hilltops and stands of tall trees. Rarely land (clinging to side of tree or building) except when breeding. Voice an excited twittering.

FORK-TAILED SWIFT *Apus pacificus*

Rare tropical straggler

18 cm. Slightly smaller and slimmer than Spine-tailed Swift, with long *deeply-forked tail*. All dark except for *white rump and pale throat and lightly barred upperbreast*. **Habitat:** Breeds E Asia. Migrates to Australia. Stragglers to NZ seen over open country, mainly Oct–Feb, but some in winter. [Sp 279]



SWIFTS

Apodidae

71 species; 2 are stragglers to New Zealand.

The swifts are somewhat swallow-like in appearance and behaviour, but are larger and have very long narrow scythe-like wings and short tails. They are the most aerial of all birds, some only landing at their nest sites. They fly rapidly and wheel in broad arcs. In fine weather, they fly high and so easily escape

notice, but at dusk and in poor weather they often fly low over open water or around headlands, hilltops or stands of tall trees. They have short, broad bills that open extremely wide for catching aerial insects. Their feet are tiny and their toes point forward, so swifts rest by clinging to the sides of trees, rocks or walls, not on branches or the ground.

279. FORK-TAILED SWIFT *Apus pacificus*

Plate 64

Size: 18 cm, 35 g

Geographical variation: Four subspecies, of which *pacificus* of northeastern Asia and Japan is a straggler to New Zealand.

Distribution: Breed in eastern Asia from Siberia to Korea and Japan, and from north India to Malaysia. The subspecies *pacificus* migrates south through China and the Philippines to winter in New Guinea, Australia and Tasmania from October to April. They occasionally reach New Zealand, probably carried along ahead of storm-fronts. Since the first record of four birds in Taranaki in 1884, there have been about 15 records of Fork-tailed Swifts in New Zealand, from

Northland to the Antipodes (2002), and at Pitt Island, Chathams (1991). Mostly single birds or small flocks in October–February, but others have been seen unexpectedly in May–September, when they are usually breeding in the Northern Hemisphere.

Behaviour: Usually seen alone or in small flocks circling hilltops or clifftops. Swifts fly rapidly and wheel around in sweeping glides as they catch insects in mid-air. They feed high in fine, calm weather, but in windy or stormy weather they feed close to the ground and so are more easily seen. They are usually quite vocal, with a shrill whistle or excited chattering.

Reading: Turbott, E.G. 1964. *Notornis* 11: 107–109.