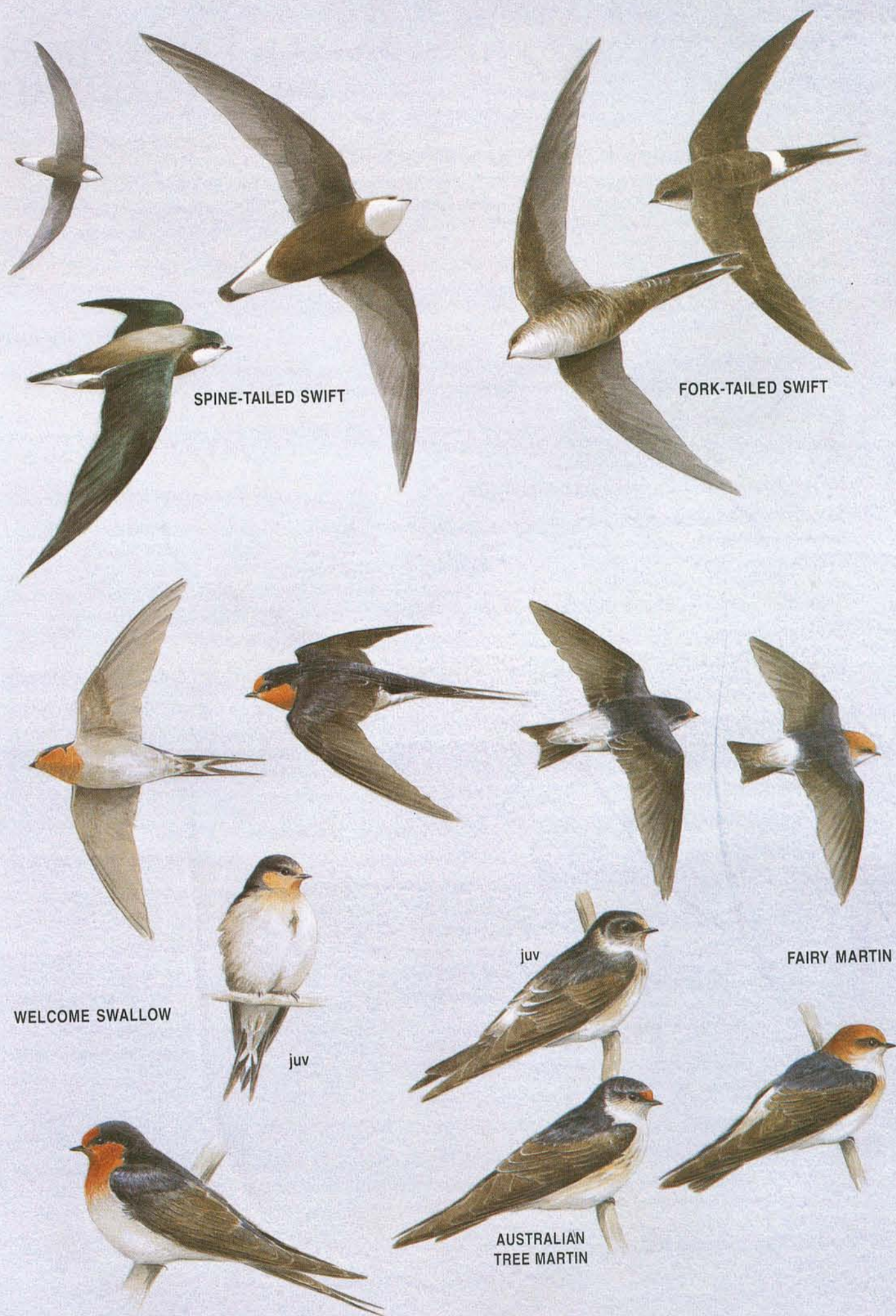


Swallows and martins are small birds with rapid erratic darting and gliding flight in pursuit of flying insects or snatching them from the surface of water or the ground. NZ species mostly blue above, pale below; each species has distinctive combination of pattern of red on head, colour of rump, and shape of tail. Sexes alike. Juveniles duller. Perch and come to ground readily; often seen gathered on powerlines, fences, shed roofs and riverbed shingle. Build distinctive mud nests under bridges, in caves or rock outcrops, trees or around buildings. Lay 3–5 pale pink eggs, speckled brown.

FAIRY MARTIN *Hirundo ariel*

Rare Australian vagrant

12 cm. Much smaller than Welcome Swallow. *Whole head pale chestnut; back blue-black; rump bright white; underparts dull white; tail short, almost square.* **Habitat:** Rare vagrants reach NZ in Nov–Mar, mainly in open country. Distinctive bottle-shaped nest found in shed near Lake Wairarapa in 1970s. [Sp 289]



SWALLOWS and MARTINS Hirundinidae

74 species worldwide; 1 is a recently self-introduced native, and 2 are vagrants to New Zealand.

Swallows are usually larger than martins, but the two terms are interchangeable and follow no taxonomic differences. They are generally small, graceful, dark blue and white birds, with variable amounts of rusty red on their head and breast. They have a streamlined body with short neck and long, pointed wings with 9 primaries. Most have a deeply forked tail, but some have a square tail. Their flight is graceful and rapid as they wheel and dart

to catch aerial insects in their short, wide bill. They are birds of open country, especially hunting over lakes, rivers and grassland; on warm, calm days they often fly high, but in poor weather they hunt close to the ground or water surface where flying insects are concentrated. Their feet are very small, and they shuffle about when they rarely land on the ground; they usually perch between feeding bouts on posts and on powerlines. Swallows and martins build distinctive mud nests, formerly mainly in trees or in cliff overhangs, but now often under bridges or culverts or under the eaves of buildings.

289. FAIRY MARTIN *Hirundo ariel*

Plate 64

Size: 12 cm
Distribution: Endemic to mainland Australia but only a straggler to Tasmania. Birds breeding in southern states migrate north in winter and stragglers reach New Guinea, whereas vagrants reach Lord Howe Island and New Zealand. Fairy Martins were first recorded in New Zealand in December 1978, when two unusual bottle-shaped nests were found in a pumping shed near Lake Wairarapa. No birds were seen, but the nests had been built in 1977 or 1978. Subsequently seen at Farewell Spit (November 1982), Totaranui (possibly 5 in February 1983), Taieri (2 in February–March 1983 and 1 in December 1983), Cape Reinga (November 1983), Leigh

(November 1984), Papakura (January 1985), Kawerau (January 1998), near Cape Reinga (August 2001) and Rahoitu (4 in September 2001).

Behaviour: In Australia, Fairy Martins nest in colonies and construct distinctive large bottle-shaped nests of mud pellets against the wall or ceiling of a cave, culvert, building or cliff. They form large flocks in open country in late summer to winter, often resting on powerlines by day. They hawk insects on the wing as Welcome Swallows do, but tend to glide more.

Reading: Bell, B.D. 1984. *Notornis* 31: 172–173. Nevill, A. 1984. *Notornis* 31: 173–175.