

A PROBABLE SWIFT-CACTUS COLLISION

In the normal scheme of things swifts fly high above the ground in search of various arthropods, mostly insects, which are carried aloft. They also utilize several less typical foraging tactics on some occasions. These would include sweeping up against forest trees (Collins, 1968; Fischer, 1958) or dropping helicopter-fashion down through the foliage (George, 1971) to gather food items, as well as low level foraging flights over ground or water. The latter tactic is frequently utilized during particularly cold and/or stormy weather when few flying insects are available (Lack and Owen, 1955).

On several days, between 24 April and 6 May 1971, numerous Vaux's Swifts *Chaetura vauxi* and an occasional White-throated Swift *Aeronautes saxatalis* were noticed foraging low over the surface of a small pond near the mouth of Big Morongo Canyon in Morongo Valley, San Bernardino County, California, amidst a mixed flock of five species of swallows.

A total of 37 Vaux's Swifts were captured at the pond as a part of bird banding operations. One of these birds (no. 72-00513), captured on 3 May 1971, was found to have a spine partially embedded in the breast musculature near the furcular area. This spine, about 15 mm long, was embedded for about half its length in the musculature and had the basal portion extending slightly through the bird's plumage. The spine was identified as coming from a cactus of the genus *Opuntia*, probably *O. phaeacantha*, or a member of the *O. littoralis* species complex (Philip C. Baker, pers. commun.). The bird showed no obvious signs of discomfort due to the spine and appeared to be in good health. Its weight, 15.0 grams, was similar to that of 35 others weighed between 25 April and 6 May (14.1 to 17.4 grams averaging 15.41 grams.). I suspect the spine became embedded in the swift during a low-level foraging flight of the type mentioned earlier, when the bird struck a cactus plant. The impact presumably tore the spine from the plant, leaving it embedded in the swift, and thereby giving graphic proof that low-level foraging is not without its dangers, even to so maneuverable a bird as a swift.

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