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NATURE NOTE

Traditional Nest-site Use by Chestnut-collared Swifts

It is well known that birds may return to nest year after year at the same site. Long-term use of a particular nest site or colony site has been termed "traditional nest-site use" (Dobkin *et al*. 1986). Many seabird breeding colonies have been documented as being at the same location for decades or even longer. Gannets *Sula bassanus* have nested on Scotland's Bass Rock since 1447 (Nelson 1978). Physical stability of the nest site and continued reproductive success are thought to be important factors contributing to the return of successive generations to breed at the same location (Austin 1949; McNicholl 1975). Protection from predators, a nearby food supply and scarcity of other suitable nest sites may also be important (Blancher and Robertson; Dobkin *et al*. 1986).

In Trinidad, the presence of nesting colonies of Yellow-rumped Caciques *Casicus cela* in the centre of Sangre Grande and Cumuto for many years are graphic examples of this. Individual nest sites as well as colony sites may also be occupied for extended periods; this seems to be characteristic of many species of swifts (Lack 1956; Snow 1962; Collins 1968; Dobkin *et al*. 1986; Collins and Foerster 1995). This may be particularly true for the Chestnut-collared Swift *Cypseloides rutilus* and other members of the subfamily Cypseloidinae, which have particular nesting habitat requirements that may be in short supply. These swifts nest on damp, dark rock surfaces near or over water and often behind waterfalls (Lack 1956; Knorr 1961; Snow 1962; Collins 1968). In Trinidad, Chestnut-collared Swifts have been reported nesting in the same Guacharo Gorge (= Dunstan Cave) for about 70 years. This site, in upper Arima Valley on the grounds of the Asa Wright Nature Centre, was first mentioned by Belcher and Smooker (1936) and the swifts nesting there were extensively studied by Snow (1962) and Collins (1968, 1974). Snow recorded one particular Chestnut-collared Swift nest used in four successive years and, after being washed away, rebuilt the following year near the original position. My observations between 1961 and 1967 similarly recorded individual nests to be present at the same positions in the gorge for up to six years, albeit relined with some fresh material each year. On a visit to the centre in October 2004, I observed one Chestnut-collared Swift nest on an overhanging ledge near the mouth of the Dunstan Cave which was the exact site of a nest during my 1961-1967 studies 40 years ago! I had also noted a nest at this site on a later visit in 1972. R. ffrench (pers. com.) informed me that one has been observed there consistently for the past 18 years. Discussions with the nature centre naturalists indicated that 2-3 more of the sites lower in the cave where David Snow and I observed swift nests years ago still had active nests in 2004. Although Chestnut-collared Swifts have a low adult mortality rate and some individuals may live in excess of 20 years (Collins 1974), it is almost certain that these nests have been utilized by a sequence of different individuals over the years.

These observations serve to reinforce the earlier suggestion (Dobkin *et al*. 1986) that traditional nest-site use is widespread in the Apodidae and is to be expected in the Chestnut-collared Swift in particular. It is important to note that this pattern of traditional use also extends to specific individual nest placements and not just colony sites involving several to many individual nests in one more generalized location.

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