

FIRST RECORD FOR THE CAVE SWALLOW (*PETROCHELIDON FULVA*)* IN ALABAMA AND SUMMARY OF SUBSEQUENT RECORDS

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On 22 April 1984, while birding Fort Morgan at the tip of the Morgan Peninsula, I discovered a swallow feeding in a mixed flock of swifts and swallows in the trench surrounding the historical fort. Closer inspection of what I assumed to be a Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) revealed a light buffy unmarked throat and a dark cinnamon forehead. The bird, in fact, was a Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*), the first ever discovered in Alabama. After studying the bird for several minutes, I left it to find Dwight Cooley, with whom I was birding that day, but found that he was temporarily in another part of the park. After locating him, we returned to the trench approximately thirty minutes later and had no problem relocating the swallow.

We studied the bird for the next 2 hours. The vertical distance from the floor of the trench to the top of the walls surrounding the trench is approximately 17 meters (50 feet). With Cooley positioned against the north wall on the floor of the trench, and I atop the wall on the opposite side, we had excellent views of the bird from every angle. The trench was rather wet this day and there was a good supply of flying insects on which the flock was feeding. The flock composition was approximately 65 Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), 40 Northern Rough-winged Swallows (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*), 40 Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*), 20 Purple Martins (*Progne subis*), and 3 Bank Swallows (*Riparia riparia*). There were no Cliff Swallows present.

We were able to again verify all identifying characteristics and had excellent comparative views with all other species present. The forehead of the bird was a dark chestnut sharply bordered by a dark blue-black

*The Cliff Swallow and Cave Swallow are sometimes placed in the genus *Hirundo* (A.O.U. Checklist of North American Birds, 1983, 6th ed., p. 498)

crown. The ear coverts, chin, and throat were light buffy-orange and lacked any dark feathering. The buffy-orange throat faded into a very light gray breast and underparts which approached white over the bird's nape, giving it a somewhat collared look. The collar washed into a dark blue-gray back, which was marked with fine streaks of dirty white. The light peach-colored rump was sharply demarcated from the back and was very conspicuous as the bird maneuvered up and down the trench. The retrices, primaries, and primary coverts were slate-gray with the secondaries and their coverts having a slightly more bluish tint. The tail shape was square with a very slight notched appearance.

The bird fed actively for the duration of our study, often flying by us as close as 2 meters (5 feet). Several times, as the bird would ascend from the trench in pursuit of an insect, it would stall in mid-air providing excellent head-on views of the crown, forehead, lores, ear coverts, chin and throat simultaneously.

After 2 hours of extensive observation, we went to the nearest telephone to alert area birders in Mobile and Pensacola of this rare bird's presence. The bird, however, was not subsequently reported and was probably present only the one day we observed it.

Since our initial observation, there have been at least 4 more reports of this species from Alabama, all during April of 1987. On 14 April 1987 one bird was observed, again at Fort Morgan, by Robert Duncan and Bill Brown. On that same day, Greg Jackson observed one at the Dauphin Island Shell Mounds. The fourth record came on 22 April 1987 when John Fulton and Jerome Carroll discovered a dead Cave Swallow at the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge headquarters building on the Morgan Peninsula, thus providing the first tangible proof of this species' occurrence in the state. The specimen was sent to the National Museum of Natural History and was identified as belonging to the race *fulva* of the West Indies. The fifth record was of a bird observed again on Dauphin Island on 25 and 26 April 1987, by Paul Franklin, Bob Sargent, and Tom Imhof.

Recent literature indicates that the Cave Swallow is expanding its range in the United States and that closer scrutiny might turn up more records along the Alabama coast. Those birding the better vagrant traps of Alabama, such as Fort Morgan and Dauphin Island, should be alert to the possible occurrence of this tropical swallow. *D. Mark Brown, 5414 Beverly Hill No. 51, Houston, Texas 77056.*