

Curious Behaviour of Spine-tailed Swifts.—Late one afternoon in January, whilst I was fishing for perch in a dam near Gosford, N.S.W., I noticed a large flock of Spine-

* Would the birds have been *Acanthiza reguloides*, which often nest in such a position?—Ed.

tailed Swifts. The birds were moving along in front of a very threatening-looking mass of storm clouds coming from the south-west. I was very interested in the flight of the birds as they swooped out from the black mass of clouds to skim at terrific speed across the orange-red background formed by the setting sun. They were very high up in the air, but their familiar twittering calls could be plainly heard floating down through the still sultry evening air. I noticed this call in particular when one bird was chasing another. They would fly at top speed, often straight towards the earth, for some distance before making a swoop upwards, when they would continue their zig-zag flight, all the time keeping up a continual "chee-chee-chee" very quickly repeated.

When the birds had arrived directly over the dam, they formed into a large circle, and, flying very rapidly, worked their way lower and lower down until they were about twenty feet above the water. The swish of wings as they raced past me was now very loud, but particularly so when they flapped their wings to speed up.

Without slackening speed much one bird suddenly swooped down to the water and with perfect accuracy skimmed the surface for about two yards making quite an audible "zip" as he touched, at the same time a large ring started to spread out over the dam. As if a signal had been given, the other birds then repeated the act, until the whole surface of the dam was a mass of expanding circles where the birds were apparently drinking. Watching very closely from my hiding place in the reeds, it seemed to me that they touched the water with their bills, but at times I thought the breast feathers also touched. All the time the birds flew in a circle from left to right, and I did not see a bird at any time break the circle to fly across the dam.

After nearly five minutes the birds rose up in the air, and, working quickly in a north-easterly direction, were almost out of sight by the time the ripples on the dam had ceased.

A few days later, while watching a few birds flying about near the same spot, a most remarkable incident was observed. As one bird was swooping down towards the ground, whilst at a still considerable height up, it suddenly "tumbled" over and over several times as though it had been shot. However, after dropping about 100 feet it quickly resumed its flight. Keeping watch on this bird I was astounded to see it repeat the performance twice in quick succession. There was no accounting for this action, unless the bird was injured in some way. After circling around for a few minutes, it flew away with the rest of the small flock.—A. F. D'OMBRAIN, R.A.O.U., West Maitland, N.S.W.