

Nocturnal feeding by Welcome Swallow.—Autumn breeding of the Welcome Swallow, *Hirundo neoxena*, is practically unknown in the Buronga area in extreme south-west New South Wales. In mid-April 1965, the district enjoyed a prolonged spell of fine, warm weather. The local Swallows were noticeably affected by this and much courtship activity and nest-site examination took place. One pair completed a nest under the eave of the local service station and on April 21 the nest contained its full complement of five eggs. Four of these hatched on May 5, one egg disappearing during incubation. In the ensuing days the young developed satisfactorily. The weather remained fine but the nights became more chilly. Casual observation during the day showed little feeding to be taking place, the young birds resting quietly in the nest. To the human eye there appeared to be little flying insect food available and I puzzled how the young birds could continue to grow so well.

Employees at the service station gave me the solution. Each night the fluorescent lights surrounding the petrol bowsers were turned on and the whole area became an island of light in the darkness. Hordes of moths circled around, attracted by the light, and amongst these sped the Swallows. The young birds stood in the nest urging on their parents with excited cries and beakful after beakful of moths was crammed down their throats. Feeding would continue until 2 a.m. and possible later (at that hour ornithological research loses its attraction!).

The nights became colder and the first frost of winter arrived. On the morning of May 21 I found a dead fledgling below the nest. That night there was another frost but still there were moths, if in diminished numbers, under the lights. At midday on May 23 there were three dying young underneath the nest. They appeared fat and well fed. Their stomachs were crammed with the wings of moths. They appeared to be suffering from some respiratory disease. Despite warmth and food, all had died by evening. The parents attacked me as I removed their young but two days later the whole Swallow colony had left the immediate area. Young employees at the service station told me they had seen the adult birds "teaching the young to fly by carrying them from the nest each holding a wing-tip". A pretty picture, but one difficult to believe, although the parents did leave shortly afterwards and may have been impatient to get under way. A more logical conclusion is that the young were killed by the frosts, or possibly the constant diet of moths with its indigestible residue of wings proved too much. Whatever the explanation, it is apparent that Buronga will never boast an autumn breeding stock of Welcome Swallows, with or without artificial sunshine.—J. N. HOBBS, Buronga, N.S.W.