

BLACK-FACED WOOD-SWALLOW, *ARTAMUS CINEREUS*, AT WAU (MOROBE PROVINCE)

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On Sunday 15 July 1990, at 1 pm, I observed two adult plumaged Black-faced Wood-Swallows (*Artamus cinereus*) in a field at Wau, Morobe Province. This field was located close to the store at the turn-off to Wandumi village (on the Mount Missim Road). It contained short grassland and was backed by an extensive coffee plantation. Other vegetation in the vicinity included another coffee plantation, this time overgrown with grass (probably lowland pitpit, *Saccharium edule*) and a field of rank grassland from which a pair of Brown Quail, *Cortunix australis*, were flushed later the same day. The following description is based on notes taken at the time and scrutiny of two transparencies of one of the individuals which were also obtained. The photographic equipment used consisted of a Kowa TSN-4 telescope connected to a Minolta x-300 SLR camera by means of a camera attachment. Primary observations were made with a pair of Zeiss 7x42 BGAT binoculars.

At the time of the day the temperature was in the upper twenties centigrade. Both birds were observed sitting on the topmost strand of a barbed-wire fence on the far side of the field, some 50 m away. They remained motionless for much of the time, although they occasionally sallied forth from their perches, returning to approximately the same position soon afterwards. This behaviour was similar to that typically observed in bee-eaters, and is also typical of many members of the Artamidae.

The bird's underparts were a uniform light grey with slightly darker grey mantle and back. The wings were darker grey. Underparts were a uniform light grey. Mandibles were off-white with scarcely visible dark tips, making their thin bills appear strangely curtailed. The mandibles contrasted markedly with the dark grey/black facial masks which extended to encompass the eye - this gave the characteristic black-faced appearance referred to in the name. The dark chin, clearly visible in many illustrations of this species (e.g., Slater *et al.* 1986) was not particularly noteworthy in itself, serving only to give the impression that the breast was in a deep shadow apparently cast by the head. The tails were uniformly dark although the outer terminal white feather tips were infrequently highlighted as the light caught them. Although the birds were mostly perched with their backs to me it was sometimes possible to see the under tail coverts; these appeared to be pale, thus conforming to the description of race *albiventris* given by Day & Simpson (1986) and Slater *et al.* (1986). No vocalisations were noted from the birds, both of which appeared to be about 15 - 20 cm long (slightly hunched when perched). It was perhaps noteworthy that a number of horses were present in the immediate area.

Beehler *et al.* (1986) notes that *A. cinereus* is "a vagrant to the trans-Fly from Australia". Australian populations are regarded as being sedentary or only partially nomadic. The observation of the two birds, apparently of the north-east Queensland race, in Morobe Province therefore represents a considerable expansion in the known range of this species.

Based on the lack of records from the Torres Strait, Coates (1990) speculates that this species may maintain a small population on the southern New Guinea mainland. This may indeed be the case as the species favours "savannas and open plains studded with patches of *Pandanus* and scrubby trees" (Beehler *et al.* 1986). Certainly large areas of Wau's original climax rainforest have been replaced with anthropogenic grassland and scrub; in the valley bottom this growth may approximate the poor sedge grassland referred to by Coates (1990) as being a secondary habitat.

Beehler, B.M., T.K. Pratt & D.A. Zimmerman. 1986. *Birds of New Guinea*. Princeton University Press.

Coates, B.J. 1990. *The Birds of Papua New Guinea*. Vol. 2. Dove Publications.

Day, N. & K. Simpson. 1986. *The Birds of Australia*. 2nd Edition. Christopher Helm.

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