

## All-white hirundines in Uganda

In May 1992, during a visit to Bugala Island, one of the Ssesse Islands at the north of Lake Victoria, I spent some time in the forest, which was then extensive. When about a kilometre into the forest, I came to a clearing where I sat for a while and then noticed a flock of white birds spiralling around above the canopy of a tall emergent tree. There were 25 to 30 birds, clearly hirundines. I watched them in sunny weather for at least an hour that first time, but they never once ventured below the canopy, not really surprising, perhaps, for hirundines. Their bills were dark, probably black. They had the outline of saw-wing swallows, and there were no tail streamers, but they had deeply forked tails. I heard no calls and they were out of range of the camera and lens I had with me. I returned several times over the next six days and must have observed these birds for around seven or eight hours in total. For part of the time I used binoculars to enable me to confirm repeatedly that they were indeed pure white, with no other plumage markings. As there is no all-white swallow in the world (del Hoyo & Collar 2016), I assume that they were most likely leucistic White-headed Saw-wings *Psalidoprocne albiceps* which they most closely resembled in form. (The Black Saw-wing *P. holomelas*, which was also seen on Bugala Island, but never at the same time as the all-white birds, has a much more markedly forked tail.) Since there were at least 25 pure white birds, it seems likely that they were of more than one generation, and that the leucism was therefore inherited. It would be very interesting to know if any more recent records exist from Bugala Island.

Readers are entitled to an explanation for the delay in the publication of these observations. About three months after I had made them, I wrote a letter to Makerere University, Kampala, detailing my observations, but heard nothing; this was not really surprising because it was not addressed to anyone in particular. Soon after, I moved away from East Africa to take up teaching posts in Botswana (five years) and Swaziland (as Eswatini was then called), for 11 years, consequently, I forgot all about following up my letter to Makerere. Earlier this year (2020) I mentioned these all-white hirundines to a friend, who asked me if I had published; when I related what had happened, he urged me to do so even though it was so long after the sightings. Thus, I have done so now. I might mention that I have been birdwatching since 1958, throughout Europe, 15 African countries, the Himalaya (Ladakh) and Australia.

### REFERENCE

DEL HOYO, J. & COLLAR, N.J. 2016. *HBW and BirdLife International Illustrated Checklist of the birds of the World*. Vol 2: Passerines. Barcelona: Lynx Ediciones.

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