

---

January 1989

## An Erroneous Specimen Record of the Bahama Swallow from Florida

P. William Smith

M. Ralph Browning

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/ffn>

---

### Recommended Citation

Smith, P. William and Browning, M. Ralph (1989) "An Erroneous Specimen Record of the Bahama Swallow from Florida," *Florida Field Naturalist*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/ffn/vol17/iss2/3>

This Note is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Field Naturalist by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usf.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usf.edu).

Florida Field Naturalist 17(2): 40-41, 1989.

### An Erroneous Specimen Record of the Bahama Swallow from Florida

P. WILLIAM SMITH<sup>1</sup> AND M. RALPH BROWNING<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>South Florida Research Center, Everglades National Park, P. O. Box 279,  
Homestead, Florida 33090, and

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Museum of Natural History,  
Washington, DC 20560

As part of a review of the life history and distribution of the Bahama Swallow (*Tachycineta cyaneoviridis*), the senior author (hereafter PWS) examined existing specimens of this species. Two published specimen records from Florida (Scott 1890a, Brewster 1897) are the basis for the inclusion of this species on the North American list (A.O.U. 1957, 1983). PWS first examined these study skins in the Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ) at Harvard University. The first, an adult male (MCZ 228286) collected at Garden Key, Dry Tortugas on 7 April 1890 by W. E. D. Scott, was one of two Bahama Swallows he saw that day (Scott 1890b). The specimen is similar in every respect to the other Bahama Swallows in MCZ's series of adult *cyaneoviridis* and is an unequivocal record of this species for Florida.

The second specimen (MCZ 243428) is labeled as an immature female and was collected at Tarpon Springs on 3 September 1890 by W. S. Dickinson, a collector working for Scott along the Gulf coast of Florida. The original specimen label indicates that Dickinson or Scott identified it as a White-bellied (= Tree) Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*). However, William Brewster later acquired the specimen and reidentified it as a Bahama Swallow (Brewster 1897); it has remained as such in the literature since then. We compared MCZ 243428 to a series of *cyaneoviridis* at the U. S. National Museum of Natural History (USNM). This series included specimens of three juveniles (a male and two females) collected by J. H. Riley at Nassau, Bahamas in June 1903 (Riley 1905). Our conclusion, also corroborated by Allan R. Phillips, is that MCZ 243428 is not a Bahama Swallow. Further examination of the specimen by Browning (hereafter MRB) revealed that it is a Tree Swallow as originally identified.

The most immediately obvious reason that MCZ 243428 is not a Bahama Swallow is its dark cap that extends well below the eyes and covers the auricular region. This is a character of the Tree Swallow, whereas the Bahama Swallow's dark cap reaches barely below the eyes and extends back almost completely over and around the white auriculars. Further, the specimen has a faint breast band and broad white tips on the tertials, also characters of young Tree but not young Bahama Swallows. Although the badly worn upperparts, aside from the fresh green tertials, show little color other than brown, the hue of the upperwing coverts is greenish as in Tree Swallows, not purple or brownish as in Bahama Swallows of the same age. The underwing coverts are grayish and therefore typical of a Tree Swallow and unlike a Bahama Swallow's noticeably whiter underwing coverts. The specimen's toes clearly approximate the color and length of those of Tree Swallows, whose toes are paler and average about 10% longer than Bahama Swallows' toes (Ridgway 1904). Its wing chord (105.4 mm) compares well with wings of other immature female Tree Swallows of similar plumage (104.6, 107.8, 108.0, 109.3 mm; all measurements by MRB). The rectrices have broken or worn tips, and MRB found new green feathers, about 10 mm in length, at the upper base of the tail under the brown upper tail coverts.

Brewster (1897) was led to reidentify MCZ 243428 as a Bahama Swallow because of its narrower tail feathers and paler coloration above, as compared to typical young Tree Swal-

lows. The appearance of paleness above, however, is caused by extreme wear; we detect no consistent difference in the shade of brown on the upper side of the body between specimens of immatures of the two species. We cannot explain this individual's narrow tail feathers. PWS suspects that Brewster's misidentification was caused in part by the lack of appropriate comparative material in the Boston area at the time. The only specimens of immature Bahama Swallows available in the United States during the 19th century seem to be part of a series collected by C. B. Cory in the Bahamas in June 1879 (Cory 1890). These remained in Cory's personal collection until 1894, when he became the first curator of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. After several years in storage, his specimens became the nucleus for the Museum's collection (D. Willard, pers. comm.).

Tree Swallows are thought to migrate southward from their breeding grounds only after completion of molt (Dwight 1900). The species has not been recorded breeding in Florida. Henry Stevenson collected an immature Tree Swallow in fresh plumage at Woodville, near Tallahassee, on 26 August 1961 (Tall Timbers Research Station 3003). It apparently is the only other Tree Swallow specimen taken in Florida during the summer months. In early September 1986, PWS only observed Tree Swallows as far south as northern South Carolina; he has not seen them regularly in southern Florida before early October. However, on 6 August 1988, PWS and others carefully studied three molting Tree Swallows of uncertain age perched on wires in extreme southern Palm Beach County, Florida, further indicating that Tree Swallows occasionally do migrate before completing molt.

Thus, the second reported specimen (MCZ 243428) of a Bahama Swallow from Florida is a young Tree Swallow in partial stages of molt. The 3 September collection date represents an unusually early fall migration record for the Florida peninsula but is consistent with occasional sight records of Tree Swallows on the peninsula in late summer.

We thank Raymond Paynter for access to the collection at MCZ and for loaning MCZ 243428 to the USNM, and Allan Phillips, William Robertson, Susan Smith, Henry Stevenson, and David Willard for their assistance on various aspects of this project. R. C. Banks read the manuscript and offered helpful suggestions. Mr. and Mrs. Mark Blazis and Robert Smith provided much appreciated hospitality in the Boston and Washington areas, respectively.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION. 1957. The A.O.U. check-list of North American birds. 5th ed. Washington, D.C.: American Ornithologists' Union.
- AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION. 1983. The A.O.U. check-list of North American birds. 6th ed. Washington, D.C.: American Ornithologists' Union.
- BREWSTER, W. 1897. The Bahama Swallow in Florida. *Auk* 14: 221-222.
- CORY, C. B. 1890. The birds of the Bahama Islands. Revised ed. Boston: Estes and Lauriat.
- DWIGHT, J., JR. 1900. The sequence of plumages and moults of the passerine birds of New York. *Ann. New York Acad. Sci.* 13(2): 73-360.
- RIDGWAY, R. 1904. The birds of North and Middle America. Part 3. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. no. 50.
- RILEY, J. H. 1905. List of birds collected or observed during the Bahama expedition of the Geographic Society of Baltimore. *Auk* 22: 349-360.
- SCOTT, W. E. D. 1890a. Two species of swallow new to North America. *Auk* 7: 264-265.
- SCOTT, W. E. D. 1890b. On birds observed at the Dry Tortugas during parts of March and April 1890. *Auk* 7: 301-314.