

## *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis* (Southern Rough-winged Swallow)

Family: Hirundinidae (Swallows)

Order: Passeriformes (Perching Birds)

Class: Aves (Vertebrates)



**Fig. 1.** Southern rough-winged swallow, *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*.

[[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p\\_p\\_spp=525516](http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p_p_spp=525516), downloaded 4 March 2017]

**TRAITS.** *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis* adults have stiffened short barbs with serrated edges on the outermost primary feathers on the wings, hence the name rough-winged (Stiles, 1981). An adult male weighs 14-18g and is 13cm in length. The mean wing length is 109mm in males and 100mm in females, which are slightly smaller (Turner and Rose, 1989). They have dark brown eyes with mostly dark greyish brown head and upper body, slightly darker crown, back, rump and mantle with a pale brown or buff throat merging into yellowish-white belly, and black bill, legs and feet (Fig. 1).

**DISTRIBUTION.** The southern rough-winged swallow has an extensive range over most of South and Central America (Fig. 2), with the exception of heights above 2000m (Turner and Rose, 1989). They also extend into Costa Rica and Panama (Turner, 2017). The southern populations migrate in the austral winter, between February and mid-August, to northern South America in countries such as Colombia. However, it is not clear where the full extent of the wintering range is.

**HABITAT AND ACTIVITY.** This species is found in habitats ranging from open areas to forest clearings, but is typically seen in lowlands and near waterbodies (Johnson, 2010). Southern rough-winged swallows are seen foraging in flight during the day time (Fig. 3). They are diurnal aerial insectivores and primarily feed on comparatively small insects (Johnson, 2010). They are either found in small groups or pairs, often resting on wires or on dead branches (Fig. 4). Their nests are made by digging holes into banks (Wetmore, 1984), or they use existing holes along rivers and banks or former kingfisher burrows (Ridgely and Gwynne, 1992).

**FOOD AND FEEDING.** For foraging, they usually fly low over water and open ground. Their flight involves less turning and twists than other swallows. This species typically flies in small groups and their diet includes beetles, flies, flying ants, heteropteran bugs and other insects (Turner, 2017). Plant bugs and beetles comprise 15% of the southern rough-winged swallow's diet whereas flies make up a third (Turner and Rose, 1989).

**REPRODUCTION.** Breeding usually occurs around March to June in Panama and April to June in Trinidad and Costa Rica (Wetmore, 1984). Chasing around nesting sites occurs at the beginning of the breeding season as males defend their territories. After the breeding season they form large flocks. Each year only one brood is raised; a replacement clutch may be laid if something occurred to the first, though these are in different burrows (Stiles and Skutch, 1989). The clutch is usually 3-6 white eggs in Trinidad, and 3-5 in southern South America. These eggs are laid at intervals of one or two days and are incubated by the female. Incubation occurs for 15-18 days, with a nestling period of 10-21 days.

**BEHAVIOUR.** The southern rough-winged swallow has distinct flight; wavering with shallow wing beats, almost bat-like. They nest in small groups or solitarily depending on availability of nests. Even though they may nest together, the nest sites are metres apart, not close like barn swallows (Turner and Rose, 1989). Territorial behaviour is seen in males, they are the first to arrive at a nesting site and establish a territory. Fights may occur if there are limited nesting sites available. The nestlings are fed by both parents and during the day each family stays together near the nesting site, though the fledglings and parents may separate to go to different communal roost sites. Fledglings usually do not return to the burrows and move to nearby perches, where their parents feed them for several days.

**APPLIED ECOLOGY.** This species is recorded as Least Concern as it is widespread (Vieillot, 2017). This species is present even in human-modified habitats and it feeds opportunistically. Thus, there is little reason to believe that it is currently threatened (IUCN, 2017), and there are no major threats to this species.

## REFERENCES

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**Fig. 2.** Southern rough-winged swallow geographic distribution.

[<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/southern-rough-winged-swallow-stelgidopteryx-ruficollis/distribution>, downloaded 5 March 2017]



**Fig. 3.** Southern rough-winged swallow in flight.

[<http://www.hbw.com/ibc/photo/southern-rough-winged-swallow-stelgidopteryx-ruficollis/southern-rough-winged-swallow-2>, downloaded 5 March 2017]



**Fig. 4.** Adult southern rough-winged swallow perched on a branch.

[<http://www.oiseaux.net/photos/michel.giraud-audine/hirondelle.a.gorge.rousse.1.html#espece>, downloaded 6 March 2017]