



COMMONWEALTH of the
NORTHERN MARIANAS ISLANDS

- Farallon de Pajaros (Uracas)
- Maug
- Asuncion

• Agrihan

• Pagan

• Alamagan

• Guguan

• Sarigan

• Anatahan

• Farallon de Medinilla

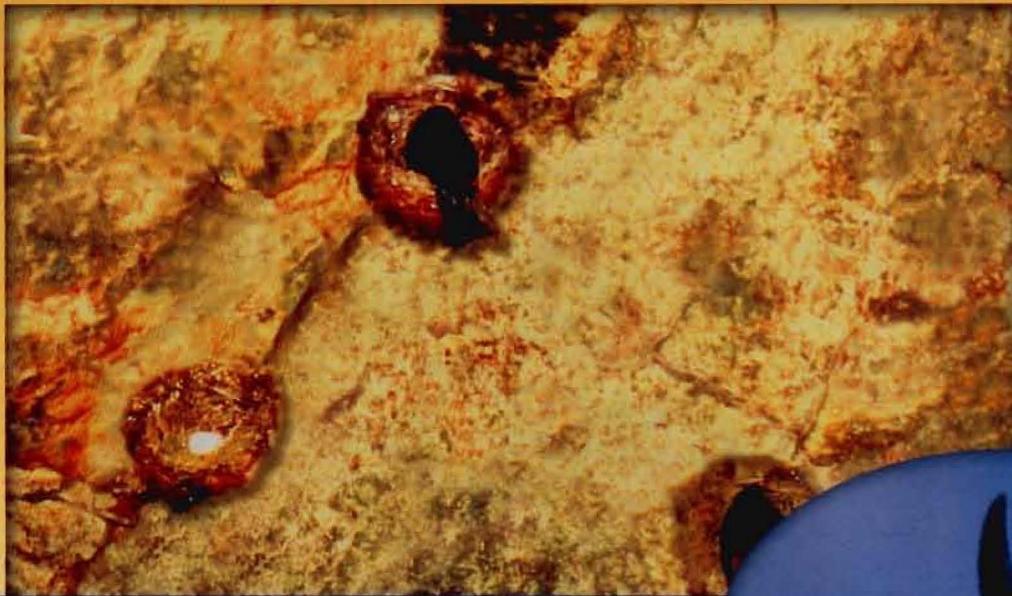
• Saipan

• Tinian
• Aguiguan

• Rota

★ Distribution in the CNMI

★ Locally Extinct



PHOTOS BY GARY WILES and SCOTT VOGT



ENDANGERED • ENDEMIC

MARIANA SWIFTLET

Chachaguak *Chamorro* Leghe'kiyank *Carolinian*

IDENTIFICATION

Swiftlets are small, black birds with slightly lighter breasts. They have long, narrow pointed wings to help them fly quickly. They have a dark line through their eye and a square shaped tail.

HABITAT and FEEDING

The Mariana swiftlet is endemic to the Marianas Islands and exists today only in Saipan and Aguiguan. Swiftlets use echolocation to find their way in and out of the limestone caves where they roost and nest. They make very fast clicking sounds that bounce off the walls of the caves, helping them maneuver in the dark.

They leave their caves in mass at dawn to forage for insects over grasslands and high cliff ridges. Swiftlets are constantly in motion, flying and swooping down on insects, catching them in mid-flight. The entire flock returns to the cave at sunset. They do not rest or perch unless they are in their caves.

REPRODUCTION

Swiftlets build their nests on the walls of limestone caves. The nests are built out of moss and fastened to the sides of caves with the bird's saliva. Swiftlet nests are very small, just over two inches in diameter. The female usually lays only one egg.

THREATS and CONSERVATION

Swiftlets are vulnerable to disturbances in their nesting caves. WWII cave occupations and bombings, vandalism, cockroaches, rats and other feral animals have caused disturbances to swiftlet habitat. Other threats to nesting areas include visits by cavers, collectors of war memorabilia, worshipers and naturalists. A few caves are visited by Japanese tourists who bring prayer sticks for relatives that have died there. On Guam, the Brown treesnake (*Boiga irregularis*) climbs to cave ceilings to eat birds, eggs and chicks. On other islands, cockroaches feed on the saliva that adheres nests to ceilings and walls, causing nests to fall and destroy the contents.

The Mariana swiftlet is a protected native forest bird in the CNMI. It is listed as an endangered species by both the US Fish and Wildlife Service and locally by the Division of Fish and Wildlife. It is illegal to hunt, kill or possess the swiftlet without a permit issued by the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife. The taking of eggs or nests is also prohibited without a permit.

Biologists have been placing cockroach poison bait traps inside the caves to help reduce the number of cockroaches. Efforts are being made to keep the Brown treesnake out of the CNMI.



ARTIST DOUGLAS PRATT

ECHOLOCATION

Swiftlets find their way in and out of dark limestone caves by making clicking sounds and judging the distance as sounds bounce back.

FACTOID!



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