

SWALLOWS

Order HIRUNDINIDÆ

WITH the swallows we come to the first family of true passerine or perching birds. The group has a superficial resemblance to the swifts, but this is strictly external, and is due to the similarity in food and general conditions of life.

For purposes of identification the family may be characterized by the possession of a broad and much flattened bill, a long and pointed wing with nine primaries; tarsi and feet, feeble; toes, either bare or feathered. Tail, very variable, sometimes deeply forked, with the outer feathers much narrowed, sometimes nearly square. No species has any brilliant primary colours in the plumage though some have the upper parts strongly metallic. The sexes are alike, but the plumage of the young differs considerably from that of the adults.

The nesting habits are various: some species make cup-shaped nests against buildings, rocks, etc., others build retort-shaped ones; some species nest in holes in trees, others again in cliffs and rocks. The eggs are equally varied and may be white or blotched with colour.

The distribution of the family is world-wide except in the polar regions, but depending as they do on a purely insectivorous diet the species breeding in colder countries migrate to the warmer zones in winter. In the tropics many forms are strictly resident. In the Malay Peninsula there are two resident species while the eastern form of the English chimney swallow visits the country in winter in very large numbers. Other species, including the English swallow itself, are rare and occasional visitors.

KEY TO THE SPECIES HERE DESCRIBED

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|---|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | { | Tail almost square | 2 |
| | { | Tail very strongly forked | 3 |
| | { | Rump, uniform with back | <i>Hirundo javanica abbotti</i> , |
| | { | Rump, white | p. 173 |
| | { | Beneath, uniform chestnut | <i>Delichon dasyopus</i> , p. 175 |
| | { | Beneath, below the breast, whitish or pale buff | <i>Hirundo hyperythra badia</i> , |
| | { | Smaller—beneath whiter; black throat band | p. 174 |
| | { | usually interrupted | 4 |
| | { | Larger—beneath more russet, black throat | <i>Hirundo rustica gutturalis</i> , |
| | { | band usually continuous | p. 172 |
| | { | | <i>Hirundo rustica rustica</i> , |
| | { | | p. 173 |

*Hirundo rustica gutturalis***The Eastern Swallow**PLATE 15 (*lower figures, immature and adult*)

Hirundo gutturalis, Scop., *Del. Flor. et Faun. Insubr.*, ii., 1786, p. 96 (Philippine Islands); Kelham, *Ibis*, 1881, p. 372; Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, x., 1885, p. 134; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 277.

Hirundo rustica gutturalis, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 241.

Malay Name.—Layang layang : nok-i-en (*Siamese*).

Description.—*Adult.*—Sexes similar. General colour above, including the wing coverts, glossy purplish blue; the bases of the feathers of the hind neck and mantle, white; primaries black, beneath duller; axillaries and under wing coverts sooty brown, the outermost of the latter mottled with whitish. Tail feathers, black, with a bluish gloss, all but the centre pair with a white rounded spot on the centre of the inner webs, becoming larger and broader on the outermost pair. Forehead, chin and throat, deep chestnut; lores, blackish; ear coverts, black, with a slight greenish gloss; on the chest an incomplete blackish collar, broken in the centre by the chestnut of the throat. Remainder of the under surface, white, with a very faint pinkish tinge; the flanks and under tail coverts with a dusky wash.

Immature.—General colour above, duller and less glossy; chestnut of the forehead much more restricted, in some cases hardly visible; throat and chest rather paler, and flanks without the dusky tinge; outer tail feathers much shorter than in the adult.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark; bill and feet, black.

Dimensions.—Total length, 5'1 to 5'6 in.; wing, 4'4 to 4'8 in.; tail, 2'5 to 3'5 in.; tarsus, 0'45 to 1'45 in.; bill from gape, 0'55 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout its length and on all the islands.

Extralimital Range.—Breeding in Northern Asia, Japan, the Himalayan countries and in Cachar and Manipur. In winter, over the whole of Southern Asia from the Mekran coast east to New Guinea and North Australia.

Nidification.—The eastern swallow is not a breeding bird in the Malay Peninsula. In China and elsewhere it builds on houses, etc., as does the English swallow. The eggs are similar to those of the European bird, but perhaps very slightly smaller.

Habits.—A winter resident in the Malay Peninsula from about the end of August to as late as the first week of April, though the great majority of the birds arrive about the end of September, while very few are left after the first half of March. In Malaya a very large proportion of our visitors are quite young, and really old birds, with the lengthened and narrow outer tail feathers as depicted in the plate, are not at all common.

In the winter the birds are common everywhere from the coast to the tops of the highest mountains, though they are not, of course, in evidence in heavy jungle country. On arrival and before departure they are seen in immense

numbers perching on the telegraph wires in long rows of many hundred individuals so close as to touch each other. The general habits are precisely those of the English swallow.

Note.—Very rarely the English swallow (*Hirundo rustica rustica*) may occur in Malaya. It may be recognized by its slightly larger size, with a rather longer tail, the outer feathers in fully adult birds distinctly narrower and more filiform. The black collar on the breast is, as a rule, complete, not interrupted by the chestnut of the neck, and the colour of the under parts is pale pinkish fulvous, not almost white.

The adult bird figured is a male from Malacca, about nine-tenths natural size; the immature is a male from Kampong Jalor, Patani States, 4th November 1901.

Hirundo javanica abbotti

The Resident Malay Coast Swallow

PLATE 15 (*upper figures*, adult and immature)

Hirundo javanica (part), Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, x., 1885, p. 142; Oates and Blanford, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 279; Oates and Reid, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, iii, 1902, p. 239; Oates, in Hume's *Nests and Eggs Ind. Birds* (2nd ed.), 1900, ii., p. 188.

Hirundo javanica javanica, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 243.

Hypurolepis javanica abbotti, Oberholser, *Bulletin U.S. Nat. Mus.*, No. 98, 1917, p. 32 (Anamba Islands).

Malay Name.—Layang layang.

Description.—*Adult male.*—Forehead, frontal band to level of the eyes, deep rusty, region between lores and eye, black. Upper surface, black, with a steely green lustre. Primaries as the upper surface, brownish black on the inner webs; tail feathers as the back, all but the centre pair with a white spot on the inner webs near the tip, decreasing in extent inwardly and forming a diagonal bar on the tail. Chin, throat, sides of the head and upper breast, rich, rusty bay, not so deep as the frontal band; rest of the under surface smoky brown, darker on the flanks, much paler on the centre of the abdomen; under tail coverts, mainly black, with broad fuscous edges; lining of the wing and axillaries, sooty brown, darker than the flanks.

Adult female.—Slightly duller than the male, especially the chestnut-bay of the forehead and throat.

Immature.—Much duller above, with only an indication of the frontal band; chin and throat, pale rufous; rest of under surface paler smoky brown than in the adults; under tail coverts without the lustrous black centres; spots on the tail feathers, smaller and more sullied white.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark brown; bill and feet, black; gape, yellow in immature birds.

Dimensions.—Total length, 5 to 5.5 in.; wing, 4 to 4.5 in.; tail, 1.75 to 2 in.; bill from gape, 0.6 in.; tarsus, 0.5 to 0.55 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout the whole length of the Peninsula and all the islands adjacent thereto.

Extralimital Range.—Throughout Indo-China, Borneo and Sumatra. Closely allied races are found in Southern India, Java and Bali, and eastwards to Fiji.

Nidification.—A regular breeding bird throughout the Malay Peninsula, though there are no very detailed notes about it locally. In the Malay Peninsula it is not a town bird, but builds a nest compacted of mud and straw under the eaves of native houses and against rocks. I have known a pair repeatedly attempt to start housekeeping under the awning of a launch lying at anchor. As it is so common in channels of the mangrove it probably breeds largely in these forests, and in this connexion Mr Theobald's notes on the bird in Tenasserim are of interest :

“Lays in the second week of April. Eggs, three in number, long ovals, pyriform ; size, 0·77 by 0·52 in. ; colour, white, spotted and ringed with amber. Nest, a saucer of mud ; inner part coarse roots profusely lined with feathers and vegetable down, attached to the under part of snags, projecting some four feet above the water ”¹ (*cf.* below).

Habits.—Nearly always met with in pairs, and not in flocks. A bird of not very strong flight, which is seldom long continued but is very direct. In Malaya it is far commoner along the coasts and on small and rocky islands, and is also very abundant along the channels which intersect the mangroves in certain places. A pair nearly always attach themselves for many miles to a passing launch, leaving it for short flights after insects and returning to perch under the awning. Like the bee-eaters, this swallow is especially fond of the large biting horseflies (*Tabanidæ* ; Mal., pikat.) that are such a nuisance in these localities.

In the Peninsula this bird is not usually found far inland, and, unlike the very closely related bird in Java and Sumatra, is not, at least so far as my experience goes, met with at any elevation on the mountains.

Note.—The birds figured are from Penang Island.

Hirundo hyperythra badia

The Malay Cliff Swallow

Cecropis badia, Cass., *Proc. Philad. Acad. Sci.*, 1853, p. 371 (Malacca).

Hirundo badia, Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, x., 1885, p. 166. Sharpe and Wyatt, *Mon. Hirundinid.*, ii., part xi., 1889, p. 393.

Malay Names.—Layang layang, goa.

Description.—*Adult.*—Sexes alike. Tail, very deeply forked ; outermost feathers narrowed abruptly to a point at 1·5 in. from the end. Upper surface, wings externally and tail, glossy blue-black ; the bases of the feathers of the hind neck, whitish, suffused with rusty ; rump and upper tail coverts, chestnut,

¹ Mr Williamson found it breeding in caves on rocky islands in the inner Gulf of Siam from March to June (*Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, iii., 1918, p. 23).

the longer ones glossy blue-black. Lores, dull black; a very narrow line of chestnut over the eye. Under surface, chestnut, most of the feathers with very narrow black shaft lines; a steel-blue patch on each side of the breast; lesser lateral under tail coverts, chestnut; longer and central ones, glossy black. Tail above, glossy black; beneath, brownish black, as in inner aspect of wings; axillaries and under wing coverts, chestnut-bay, less rich than the under surface.

Immature.—Black shaft stripes much broader, outermost tail feathers shorter. The shaft stripes are a character of age, and in very adult birds tend to disappear completely. Ogilvie Grant (*Fascic. Malay. Zool.*, iii., 1906, p. 95) appears to have come to a contrary conclusion.

Soft Parts.—Iris, hazel; bill, black (yellow at the gape in immature birds); feet, fleshy brown.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 7 in.; wing, 5 in.; tail (middle feathers), 2.2 in., outer feathers, 4 in.; bill from gape, 0.6 in.; tarsus, 0.6 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—From the northern extremity southwards as far as Kuroo, in the territory of Malacca. Common in the Langkawi group of islands; not known from any of the other islands but probably occurring on those in the Bandon Bight.

Extralimital Range.—This form is confined to the Malay Peninsula,¹ and has not yet been recorded from Tenasserim. A closely allied race is found in Ceylon, to which it is restricted.

Nidification.—I have not seen eggs, but the birds make large untidy nests of a cup-shaped form, with a deep base, attached to the face of cliffs and at the entrance of caves. Near Klang Gates and Batu Caves in the neighbourhood of Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, where it is now, for some unexplained reason, much rarer than formerly, it bred in May and June, and in the caves of the Patani States at the end of June and in July.

Habits.—This handsome swallow is chiefly associated with the precipitous limestone hills and quartzite ridges, which occur throughout the Malay Peninsula but cease at Kuala Lumpur. Though Davison obtained the bird near Malacca, occurrences south of Selangor are certainly rare and accidental.

In Terutau and Langkawi we found it very common, associating with bee-eaters (*M. erythrocephalus*), and hawking for insects in the evening, occasionally swooping right down and taking an insect from the surface of the sea. At night they retired to the cliffs to roost. The note was the usual low twittering, continually uttered when on the wing.

Delichon dasyopus

The Japanese Martin

Chelidon dasyopus, Bp., *Consp.*, i., 1850, p. 343 (Borneo); Sharpe and Wyatt, *Mon. Hirund.*, i., p. 23, pl. 4; Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, x., 1885, p. 91.

Chelidonaria dasyopus, Oates and Reid, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1903, p. 230.

¹ There are doubtful records from Sumatra.

Malay Name.—Not recorded.

Description.—*Adult female.*—General colour above, black, with a steely blue gloss, the bases of the feathers, excepting those of the head, white, forming an ill-defined collar on the hind neck; rump and upper tail coverts, brownish white, with dark shaft stripes, the longest coverts, black. Lores and region round the eye, ear coverts, and chin, brownish black, a clear white patch on each side of the neck; throat, breast and sides of the body, smoky brown; centre of the abdomen, white. Under tail coverts with smoky brown centres and broad pale edges. Wings, glossy black in their external aspect, the inner webs brown, the secondaries with very narrow pale tips. Wing lining, axillaries and under wing coverts, dark sooty brown. Tail, glossy black above, dark sooty brown beneath; thighs, whitish; toes, thinly feathered to the claws, whitish.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark; bill, black; claws, bluish horn.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 5 in.; wing, 4·2 in.; tail, 2 in.; bill from gape, 0·55 in.; tarsus, 0·45 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—At present known only from a single bird obtained on the screw-pile lighthouse on the One Fathom Bank, in the centre of the Straits of Malacca, on 20th November (described above), and a male obtained by Mr F. N. Chasen, on Gunong Angsi, at about 2000 ft. elevation, in Negri Sembilan, on 29th November 1923. Martins of this type, with white rump, have, however, been seen on several occasions hawking over the higher summits of Malayan mountains.

Extralimital Range.—A breeding bird in Japan. Known in the winter months from Borneo and, doubtfully, Java and the Rhio Lingga Archipelago, south of Singapore.

Nidification.—Not a breeding bird in the Malay Peninsula. Eggs from Japan are plain white, rather glossy, oval in shape and average 0·77 by 0·54 in.

Habits.—Nothing is known of the habits of this bird locally, but they probably are those of the common European martin. I have inserted the species here only in the hope of obtaining additional information. It will probably be found for a few days in the commencement of November at such places as Port Dickson and Penang Hill on the west, and at Kuantan and Pekan on the east coast of the Peninsula, and also at similar seasons on the high hills of the central range.