

SWALLOWS

Family HIRUNDINIDÆ

Vol. I., p. 171; Vol. II., p. 124.

THE swallows and the swifts are much alike in appearance and often confused by the uninitiated, but the resemblance, no doubt due to adaptation to the same mode of life, is only superficial, and the two families are not related.

A brief glance at the general form of the body of a swallow is enough to indicate that the bird is essentially a creature of the air, and indeed its insect-food is captured on the wing. The wing is very long and pointed and has nine primaries. The tail is rather variable in shape, but often it is long and deeply forked, with the outer feathers especially lengthened, narrowed and pointed. The legs and feet are small and weak. The tiny, short, broad bill is much flattened in the manner of most flycatchers, and the gape is very large.

Although the plumage is often highly glossy, the actual colours are never very bright. The sexes are much alike in colour, but young birds are somewhat different.

A large number of the known species are migratory, and the breeding habits show considerable diversity. It will, for instance, be recalled that the common swallow and the house-martin of England make mud nests which are attached to houses, whereas the sand-martin deposits its eggs at the end of a tunnel which it digs in a bank.

The family is a large one and is represented in most parts of the world. In the Malay Peninsula only two species are resident. Two others occur as winter migrants.

KEY TO THE MALAYAN SWALLOWS

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| 1 | { | Under parts and rump entirely chestnut | <i>Hirundo hyperythra badia</i> , p. 206 |
| | | Throat, chestnut; breast and abdomen, white to grey; rump uniform with back | |
| | { | Under parts with no chestnut; rump, white | <i>Delichon dasyopus</i> , p. 207 |
| 2 | { | A black band across the lower throat; breast and abdomen, whitish | <i>Hirundo rustica gutturalis</i> , p. 206 |
| | | No black throat band; breast, etc., grey-brown | |

*Hirundo rustica gutturalis***The Eastern Swallow**

Vol. I., p. 172, pl. 15.

The sexes are alike. Forehead and throat, chestnut; a black band, patched with chestnut, across the upper breast, next to the chestnut throat; remaining under parts, white, sometimes suffused with chestnut. Upper parts, glossy blue-black. The tail is deeply forked and the outer pair of feathers are long and narrow. All the tail quills except the centre pair are patched with white.

Total length, about 6·5 in. ; wing, 4·6 in.

From its breeding-grounds in China, etc., this swallow moves to the south in winter, during which season it is common almost everywhere in the Malay Peninsula. In Perak (Taiping Hill) Mr A. T. Edgar has met with the species as early as 27th July (an immature bird).

*Hirundo javanica abbotti***The Resident Malay Coast-Swallow**

Vol. I., p. 173, pl. 15.

The sexes are alike. Forehead and throat, chestnut; upper parts, glossy blue-black, all the tail feathers except the centre pair having white patches. The outer tail feathers are not lengthened as in adults of the preceding species. Remaining under parts, pale brownish grey with thin, obsolete, darker streaks. Under tail coverts rather darker, with pale edges.

Total length, about 5·3 in. ; wing, 4·3 in.

A common breeding bird in the Malay Peninsula (April to June). It is especially numerous along the coasts generally and in the mangrove areas in particular. It also occurs at most of the hill stations in the interior, sometimes as high as 5000 ft., a point overlooked by Robinson.

*Hirundo hyperythra badia***The Malay Cliff-Swallow**

Vol. I., p. 174.

Rump, upper tail coverts and under parts, deep chestnut, the under parts with thin, inconspicuous, blackish stripes. Remaining upper parts, including wings and tail, glossy blue-black. The tail very long and deeply forked.

Total length, about 7 in. ; wing, 5 in.

Although this beautiful swallow is usually common in the vicinity of limestone hills in the lowlands of the Peninsula, it is very local in its distribution, and there are large tracts of country from which it has never been recorded. I have seen specimens from Johore, but it is very rare in the extreme south of the Peninsula. The nest is known but the eggs have never been described.

*Delichon dasyopus***The Japanese Martin**

Vol. I., p. 175.

Rump, white; remaining upper parts, black, glossed with blue on the back. An ill-defined, whitish collar across the nape is formed by the pale bases of the feathers showing through. Under parts, white, washed with brownish grey on the throat, breast and flanks. Under tail coverts with blackish centres.

Total length, about 5 in.; wing, 4 in.

This martin, which I regard as merely the Far Eastern subspecies of the familiar house-martin of the British Isles, breeds in Japan and visits Malaysia in the winter. It is rare in the Malay Peninsula, but probably commoner than the two specimens obtained at the One-Fathom Bank Lighthouse, in the Straits of Malacca, and Gunong Angsi, in Negri Sembilan, both in November, appear to indicate.