

Genus MEROPS.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* elongated, pointed, quadrangular, slightly arched, the ridge elevated. *Nostrils* basal, lateral, ovoid, open, slightly covered by hair directed forward. *Tarsi* short. *Toes* three before and one behind; the second toe united to the middle one as far as the second articulation, and the middle toe to the inner one as far as the first articulation; the hind toe large at its base, with a very small claw; the second *quill-feather* the longest, the first very short.

BEE-EATER.

Merops apiaster, *Linn.*

Le Guepier vulgaire.

THE station which the species of this genus occupy appears to be intermediate between the Kingsfishers on the one hand, and the Swallows on the other: to the former they are allied by their elongated form of beak, shortness of tarsi, brilliancy of plumage, similarity of places of nidification, and the white colour of the eggs; and to the latter by their gregarious habits, their lengthened wing, their great and continuous powers of flight, and their manner of capturing while on wing the insects which constitute their food.

The present beautiful species is we believe the only one of its genus which Europe can claim as its own.

It is a bird of migratory habits, visiting, in the greatest abundance, the warmer portions of the Continent, especially Italy, Spain, Sicily, the Archipelago, and Turkey; and, not unfrequently, France, Germany and Switzerland, straying at uncertain intervals across the Channel to the shores of England, sometimes singly, and sometimes in small flocks of eight, ten, or even twenty, but never remaining with us or attempting to breed, our climate being in all respects uncongenial to its habits. Montague informs us that it is nowhere so plentiful as in the southern parts of Russia, particularly about the rivers Don and Volga.

In the situation it chooses for a place of nidification, it greatly resembles our Sand-Martins, preferring precipitous sand-banks and the edges of rivers, in which it scoops out deep holes, generally in an oblique direction.

The eggs are from five to seven in number, of a pure white; but whether deposited on the bare ground or in a nest we are not able to say with any degree of certainty, as it is a point on which different authors hold contradictory opinions.

In its manners it very much resembles the Swallow tribe, continuing like them for a length of time on the wing, and traversing backwards and forwards in pursuit of its food, which consists of flies, gnats, and small coleoptera, as well as bees and wasps, to which it is peculiarly partial, and from which it derives its name. Although its flight is, as above stated, like that of the Swallow, still we are informed its allied species in India are frequently in the habit of taking their food like the Flycatchers, whose manners they closely imitate, sitting motionless on a branch, darting at the insects as they pass, and returning again to their station. We have some grounds for suspecting that this peculiarity obtains more or less with all the species of this genus.

The sexes of the Bee-eater in general offer no material differences of plumage, except perhaps that the colours of the female are rather more obscure,—a circumstance which, as in the Kingsfisher, extends also to the young, the adult colouring of the plumage being assumed at an early age.

The beak is black, and one inch and three quarters in length; the irides red; the forehead yellowish white merging into blueish green; the occiput, back of the neck, and upper part of the back rich chestnut, fading off on the rump into a brownish amber; from the base of the beak proceeds a black mark which passes beneath the eye, and spreads over the coverts of the ear; the wings, except a large middle stripe of brown, are greenish, with something of an olive tinge; the quill-feathers inclining to blue and ending in black; the tail greenish; the chin and throat bright yellow, bounded by a black line which ascending reaches the ear-coverts; the breast and whole of the under surface blue, intermingled with reflections of green; the first quill-feather rudimentary, the second the longest.

The tail is square with the exception of the two middle feathers, which are an inch longer than the others; feet and tarsi reddish brown. Total length from ten to eleven inches.

We have represented an adult male in its finest state of plumage.