MARTIN.

Hirundo urbica, Linn.
L'Hirondelle de fenêtre.

Like the Swallow this little fairy-like bird is strictly migratory, resorting during our winters to climes far to the south of the British Islands, and indeed to any other portion of Europe; whence it does not return till the spring, generally making its appearance about the middle of April: but in this respect the Martin, as well as most other insectivorous birds, is influenced in a great measure by the state of the season, a certain degree of temperature being necessary for bringing forth the insects upon which its existence depends.

The flight of the Martin is not so rapid, nor attended with such sudden evolutions as that of the graceful Swallow, but it is nevertheless performed with great ease and buoyancy; and although it does not possess so long a wing in proportion to its size as any other of its European brethren, and is consequently less adapted for continued flight, still it is seldom if ever seen resting either on trees or on the ground, but is continually traversing the air with apparently untiring wings, except during the period of nidification, when it descends to the earth for the purpose of collecting mud employed for the construction of its nest, which is erected under the eaves of houses and windows, the sides of rocks, under the arches of bridges, &c.: the nest when complete is a most compact and solid structure, firmly cemented together, the labour of one day being allowed to remain until the substance has got hard and dry, before the little mason proceeds to heap on more wet materials; the only means of ingress or egress is a small hole on the most sheltered side of the nest: the interior is well lined with straw, hay, and feathers. The eggs are five in number, of a pinkish white. At first the young birds are fed in the nest, afterwards the parents cling to the outside by means of their claws, and feed them at the entrance; when able to fly, they are fed on the wing for a considerable time, like the Swallow, and they occasionally resort to the house-top, or to the branches of some neighbouring tree, where they are also supplied with food by their parents, until they have acquired sufficient strength and confidence to launch forth and provide for themselves.

Like the Swallow, the Martin produces two broods in the year, the first of which are able to fly in July, and the second in August or the beginning of September. Early in October the Martins assemble in large flocks, frequently so numerous as almost to cover the roofs of houses, particularly in the villages situated on the borders of the Thames. About the middle of the month they commence their migration, continuing to depart in flocks till the early part of November, after the sixth or eighth of which month few are to be seen.

The notes of its song, which is frequently uttered during the period of incubation, are guttural, but soft and pleasing.

The female differs but little from the male: the young during the first autumn are readily distinguished by the less degree of brilliancy in their colouring.

The head, back of the neck, and back glossy bluish black; wings and tail brownish black; rump and all the under surface pure white; bill black; tarsi and toes clothed with white downy feathers.

We have figured an adult male and female of the natural size.