

COLLOCALIA ARIEL, *Gould.*

Fairy Martin.

Collocalia Ariel, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., October 11, 1842.

UNTIL my arrival in the colony of New South Wales I had no idea of the existence of this new and beautiful Martin, nor in fact until I was awakened by its twittering notes at the bed-room window of the inn at Maitland, did I discover that I was surrounded by hundreds of this species, which were breeding under the verandahs and corners of the windows, precisely after the manner of the Common Martin of Europe. Several of their bottle-shaped nests were built round the house, and from these I obtained as many eggs as I desired.

It is numerously dispersed over all the southern portions of Australia, and like every other member of the genus it is strictly migratory, making the southern latitudes its summer residence. It usually arrives in the month of August and departs again in February or March; during this interval it rears two or three broods. The Fairy Martin, unlike the favourite Swallow of the Australians, although enjoying a most extensive range, appears to have an antipathy to the country near the sea, for neither in New South Wales nor at Swan River have I ever heard of its approaching the coast-line nearer than twenty miles; hence while I never observed it at Sydney, the town of Maitland on the Hunter is annually visited by it in great numbers. In Western Australia it is common between Northam and York, while the towns of Perth and Fremantle on the coast, are, like Sydney, unfavoured with its presence. I observed it throughout the district of the Upper Hunter, as well as in every part of the interior, breeding in various localities, wherever suitable situations presented themselves, sometimes in the holes of low decayed trees; while not unfrequently clusters of nests were attached to the perpendicular banks of rivers, the sides of rocks, &c., always, however, in the vicinity of water. The nest, which is bottle-shaped with a long neck, is composed of mud or clay, and like that of our Common Martin, is only constructed in the morning and evening, unless the day be wet or lowery. In the construction of the nests they appear to work in small companies, six or seven assisting in the formation of each nest, one remaining within and receiving the mud brought by the others in their mouths: in shape they are nearly round, but vary in size from four to six or seven inches in diameter; the spouts being eight, nine or ten inches in length. When built on the sides of rocks or in the hollows of trees they are placed without any regular order, in clusters of thirty or forty together, some with their spouts inclining downwards, others at right angles, &c.; they are lined with feathers and fine grasses. The eggs, which are four or five in number, are sometimes white, at others spotted and blotched with red; eleven-sixteenths of an inch long by half an inch broad.

Its flight closely resembles that of the Common Martin; the stomach is tolerably muscular and the food consists of small flies.

The sexes cannot be distinguished by their outward appearance.

Crown of the head rust-red; back, scapularies and wing-coverts deep steel-blue; wings and tail dark brown; rump buffy white; upper tail-coverts brown; under surface white, tinged with rust-red, particularly on the sides of the neck and flanks; the feathers of the throat with a fine line of dark brown down the centre; irides blackish brown; bill blackish grey; legs and feet olive-grey.

The figures are of the natural size.