

# HIRUNDO NEOXENA, Gould.

## Welcome Swallow.

*Hirundo Javanica*, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 191.

*New Holland Swallow*, Griffith's Edit. Cuv. Anim. King., Aves, vol. vii. p. 96; and *H. pacifica*, Ibid., pl. not numbered.

*Kun-na-meet*, Aborigines of the lowland districts of Western Australia.

*Ber-rin-nin*, Aborigines of New South Wales.

LIKE many other Australian birds, this species has been considered to be identical with another or others described by the older writers. Messrs. Vigors and Horsfield, in their "List of Australian Birds," published in the fifteenth volume of the Linnean Transactions, state that they "have been led into a more detailed description of this species, in order to point out the differences of its characters from those of our European species *Hir. rustica*, with which it has been generally confounded;" but while they have very clearly pointed out the distinctive characters of the two species, they have, in my opinion, departed from their usual accuracy in considering it to be identical with the bird figured by Sparmann in the "Museum Carlsonianum" under the name of *Hirundo Javanica*, which is there represented with a square tail, and which, if drawn correctly, is not only specifically but generically distinct. I have also compared specimens of the Australian Swallow with the *Hirondelle Orientale* of M. Temminck's "Planches Coloriées," with which species it was likewise considered to be identical by Messrs. Vigors and Horsfield, but from which also I conceive it to be distinct. On the contrary, the Swallow figured in Griffith's edition of Cuvier's "Animal Kingdom" is certainly the Australian bird; but as the specific term there given had been previously employed by Sparmann, as mentioned above, the necessity of a new name for the present species has been forced upon me; and that of *neoxena* has suggested itself as appropriate, from the circumstance of its appearance throughout the whole of the southern portions of Australia being hailed as a welcome indication of the approach of spring, and its arrival there associated with precisely the same ideas as those popularly entertained respecting our own pretty Swallow in Europe. The two species are in fact beautiful representatives of each other, and assimilate not only in their migratory movements, but also most closely in their whole habits, actions and economy. It arrives in Van Diemen's Land about the middle or end of September, and after rearing at least two broods departs again northwards in March; but it is evident that the migratory movement of the Swallow, and doubtless that of all other birds, is regulated entirely by the temperature and the more or less abundant supply of food necessary for its existence; for I found that in New South Wales, and every country in Australia within the same latitude, it arrived much earlier and departed considerably later than in Van Diemen's Land; and Mr. Caley, who resided in New South Wales for several years, and whose valuable notes on the birds of that part of the country have been so often quoted, states that "the earliest period of the year that I noticed the appearance of *Swallows* was on the 12th of July 1803, when I saw two; but I remarked several towards the end of the same month in the following year (1804). The latest period I observed them was on the 30th of May 1806, when a number of them were twittering and flying high in the air. When I missed them at Paramatta, I have sometimes met with them among the north rocks, a romantic spot about two miles to the northward of the former place." A few stragglers remain in New South Wales during the whole of the winter, but their numbers cannot be for a moment compared with those to be observed in the summer, and which during the colder months have wended their way to a warmer and more congenial climate, where insect life is sufficiently abundant for the support of so great a multitude. I have never been able to trace this bird very far to the north; it certainly does not visit Java, nor I believe New Guinea, neither have I yet seen it from Port Essington or any part of the north coast, although it is probable that its range does extend thus far.

The natural breeding-places of this bird are the deep clefts of rocks and dark caverns, but since the colonization of Australia it has in a remarkable degree imitated its European prototype, by selecting for the site of its nest, the smoky chimneys, the chambers of mills and out-houses, or the corner of a shady verandah; the nest is also similarly constructed, being open at the top, formed of mud or clay, intermingled with grass or straw to bind it firmly together, and lined first with a layer of fine grasses and then with feathers. The shape of the nest depends upon the situation in which it is built, but it generally assumes a rounded form in front. The eggs are usually four in number, of a lengthened form; the ground colour pinky white, with numerous fine spots of purplish brown, the interspaces with specks of light greyish brown, assuming in some instances the form of a zone at the larger end; they are from eight to nine lines long by six lines broad. At Swan River the breeding-season is in September and October.

The food consists of small flies and other insects.

Forehead, chin, throat and chest rust-red; head, back of the neck, back, scapularies, wing-coverts, rump and upper tail-coverts deep steel-blue; wings and tail blackish brown, all but the two centre feathers of the latter with an oblique mark of white on the inner web; under surface very pale brown; under tail-coverts pale brown passing into an irregular crescent-shaped mark near the extremity and tipped with white; irides dark brown; bill and legs black.

The figures are those of a male and female of the natural size.