

CECROPIS HYPERYTHRA.

Ceylonese Mosque-Swallow.

Hirundo hyperythra, Layard, Blyth, Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. xviii. p. 814.—Id. Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 198.—Layard in Ann. and Mag. Nat. Hist., sec. ser. vol. xii. 1853, p. 170.—Blyth, Ibis, 1867, p. 306.

HOWEVER closely allied the *Cecropis rufula*, *C. Daurica*, and *C. erythropygia* may be, the present bird possesses some very tangible specific characters by which it may at once be distinguished from either of them. The most prominent of these are the absence of the rufous superciliary stripe and nuchal band, the deep ferruginous chestnut hue of the entire under surface and rump, and the striæ which pervade the breasts of all the Mosque-Swallows being in this instance exceedingly narrow and hair-like. That a bird with such distinguishing characters should be tolerably common in Ceylon, and yet never be found in the contiguous parts of India, would excite extreme surprise, did we not find similar instances to occur in other countries: thus the fact that the Crested Lark, so common at Calais, is scarcely ever seen at Dover, and *vice versâ* with regard to the Common Wagtail, may be cited as cases in point. So far as we yet know, the *C. hyperythra* is stationary, while, on the other hand, it is well ascertained that at least two or three other Asiatic species are strictly migratory. It would be as much out of place to go into the subject of migration in the present paper, as it would be impossible to divine why the *C. Daurica* is a summer visitant only in Northern China, and the *C. rufula* in the Holy Land, why the intermediate species *C. erythropygia* never leaves India, or the present species the beautiful island in which it is found; we may speculate upon these points, but we shall be unable to prove anything respecting them.

I regret to say that the following brief notes from the pens of Mr. E. L. Layard and Mr. Blyth comprise all the information respecting this species.

"I first discovered this species," says the former gentleman, "In November 1849, at Ambepusse, on the road to Kandy. I have since seen it at Putlam, up the central road as far as the hills extend, at Ambegamoa, and up the Caltura river from Perth sugar-estate to Ratnapoora and Adam's Peak. It breeds in caverns and under bridges, and builds a nest of mud attached to the roof. The general shape and size is that of a small basin, with a round entrance-hole at the top. The lining is composed of fine hay and feathers; and the eggs are laid in March. The late Dr. Gardner informed me that a pair built their nest on a ring supporting a hanging lamp nightly used in his sitting-room. They securely hatched their eggs, unscared by the cleaning or lighting of the lamp; and the young birds returned to the nest every night for about a month after being fully fledged."

Mr. Blyth remarks that this species resembles *C. erythropygia*, but has the entire under parts and the ear-coverts of the same deep ferruginous hue as the rump, which is deeper in tint than that of *C. erythropygia*; the mesial streaks of the feathers of the lower parts are also less developed. It is permanently resident in the mountainous parts of the island of Ceylon.

It seems probable that this is the only species of the genus *Cecropis* found in Ceylon; but a second may occasionally occur there; for Mr. Layard mentions, under the head of *Hirundo Daurica*, that he found one of these birds in the village of St. Pedro, in December, which had probably been driven over from the opposite coast by stress of weather, and was hawking about the street. He fired at and wounded it, but it flew away. The next day it appeared again in the same place, when he succeeded in killing it, and found that the shot of the previous day had broken one of its legs. I have no doubt that this was not a *C. Daurica*, as Mr. Layard supposes, but a *C. erythropygia*.

Head, neck, back, wing-coverts, and upper and tips of the under tail-coverts deep steel-blue; wings and tail brownish black, glossed with steel-blue; throat, under surface of the body, axillaries, and under wing-coverts deep chestnut, with a very fine hair-like line of dark brown down the centre of each feather; rump deep chestnut, without striæ; under tail-coverts bluish black; bill black; feet brownish black.

The Plate represents the two sexes, of the natural size.