HIRUNDO FILIFERA, *Steph.*

Wire-tailed Swallow.

Hirundo filifera, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. p. 78.—Sykes in Proc. of Comm. of Sci. and Corr. of Zool. Soc., part ii. 1832, p. 83; Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. iii. p. 421.—Gray, Gen. of Birds, vol. i. p. 58, *Hirundo*, sp. 23.—Id. List of Spec. of Birds in Coll. Brit. Mus., part ii. sec. 1, *Fissirostres*, p. 25.—Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 197.—Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., tom i. p. 338.—Horsf. and Moore, Cat. of Birds in Mus. East Ind. Comp., vol. i. p. 93.—Jerd. Birds of India, vol. i. p. 159.

——— *filicaudata*, Frankl. in Proc. of Comm. of Sci. and Corr. of Zool. Soc., 1830–31, p. 115.—Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. i. p. 263.

——— *ruficeps*, Licht. Verg. der Doubl. des Zool. Mus. zu Berl., p. 58.

——— (*Cecropis*) *filifera*, Less. Comp. Buff., tom. viii. p. 499.

Chilidon ruficeps, Boie, Isis, 1844, p. 171.

Wire-tailed Swallow, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. vii. p. 309, pl. cxiii.

Leishra of the Hindoos.

Elegant in contour as are the members of the *Hirundinidæ* generally, I question if any Swallow yet discovered can excel the *Hirundo filifera* in this respect, neither is there one among them whose aërial movements are more graceful. None who have studied the various members of this family, and particularly those of the section to which our own Chimney Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) pertains, can have failed to observe how greatly prolonged are the outer tail-feathers of the males, and that these deeply fork-tailed birds are characterized also by the elegant proportion of their wings and by a general structure suited for sustained flight and a variety of aërial evolutions. In some of the species the outer tail-feathers are more or less broad, while in others they diminish to the thread-like form seen in the present bird.

"This very beautiful Swallow," says Mr. Jerdon, "is found in small numbers throughout India, not in general ascending mountains to any height, but, according to Adams, occurring rarely in the north-west Himalayas and Cashmere. It is more rare in the extreme south of India than towards the north, and is unknown on the Malabar coast, Lower Bengal, and the countries to the eastward. It breeds in old buildings, on walls, in stone bowries or wells, very commonly under bridges, and in rocks overhanging water, making a small mud nest open at the top, and laying two or three eggs, which are white, sparingly spotted with rusty red. I always found the nests single, and we seldom see more than five or six couple in one place. The Hindustani name is given to it from a supposed resemblance of its thin tail-feather to the rod used for catching birds with bird-lime, which is called *Leishra*. It is said also to occur in the north-east of Africa.

"In the northern parts of the country it is very generally spread, and frequents not only the neighbourhood of water, but also fields, gardens, and open plains. Its long thread-like tail-feathers are only observable at a few yards' distance, and in consequence of this, nine-tenths of the Europeans in India are unaware of its existence. It occasionally perches on trees."

Colonel Sykes remarks that it is "very abundant in the Dukhun and very beautiful, with its thread-like tail-feathers floating behind when in flight."

With regard to the reported occurrence of this bird in Africa, I may remark that I am inclined to doubt the identity of the Indian and African birds; for fine examples of both now before me appear to differ too much to admit of their being considered as examples of one and the same species. The Gambian specimens are much smaller, have a lesser amount of rufous colouring on the head, and shorter tails.

As is the case with the Swallows in general, the sexes are alike in colour, but the female is of smaller size and has the outer tail-feathers much shorter than those of the male.

Crown of the head rich rusty red; lores black; upper surface, wings, and tail glossy steel-blue; throat and under surface generally pure white; all but the four central tail-feathers with a nearly square spot of white on the inner web near the tip; irides, bill, and feet black.

The figures are of the natural size.