# CHELIDON URBICA.

## House-Martin.

*Hirundo urbica*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 98.
——— *domestica*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Coll. Brit. Mus., p. 19.
——— *sociabilis*, Bailly, Orn. de la Savoie, tom. i. p. 268.
*Chelidon urbica*, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 550.
——— *fenestrarum* et *C. rupestris*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., tom. i. p. 140.
*Hirundo* (*Chelidon*) *urbica*, Keys. und Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 61.

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I know of no group of our native birds the study of which would afford greater pleasure to the young student of nature than the family of Hirundines—the Swift, the Swallow, the Sand- and House-Martins—each being characterized by a peculiarity in their structure, habits, and economy, and their modes of incubation being strikingly different, as will be seen on reference to my account of the respective species. All these birds are associated with summer; for it is at that season alone that they appear among us, gladdening our hearts with their presence, and exciting our admiration by their graceful evolutions during flight. Occasionally the mead is visited by all the species at the same time; and it is then that the difference in their modes of flight may be observed to the greatest advantage. The bold, sweeping action of the Swift enables him to outstrip the others with ease; the Swallow, with its lengthened tail, makes many rapid and graceful turns when engaged in the capture of insects, while the flight of the Sand- and House-Martins, though not without many elegant movements, appears to be more laboured; when thus engaged, the fairy-like House-Martin, although shorter and more robust than its congeners, attracts greater attention than either of the others, in consequence of the white spot on the rump showing very conspicuously as the bird glides away in the distance or glances about in the sun, and presenting a great contrast to the adjoining dark-tinted plumage and the water over which the bird may be flying. While it must be conceded that all the species evince but little fear of man, the Martin is by far the most familiar of them; for it apparently loves to be among us, and seems to court our intimacy and friendship more than the others. If its neatly built mud nest be destroyed, it neither takes offence nor harbours malice, but immediately commences another near the same site, or on the other side of the house, but generally at the corner of a window. We may reasonably assume that there was a time when there were no houses under which to make its nest, nor man to afford it protection, in which case the sides of rocks and shelving cliffs were the places sought for the purposes of incubation; and even at the present day such situations are resorted to; for Dr. Percy has very kindly called my attention to the circumstance of its still building in the rocks of Port Neath, Vaughan, in the vale of Neath, his authority for the fact being Mr. Edward Young, a very good observer, who has paid considerable attention to natural history. On the other hand, if a new dwelling be erected, far distant from other houses, the House-Martin soon appears, and commences building under the newly-formed eaves or at the angles of the windows; at least I observed it so to do at a recently erected residence at Auchnashalloch, in Ross-shire; and I trust that Mr. Tennant has afforded these welcome strangers a happy home during their sojourn in the beautiful valley of the Carron. That the Martin is neither capricious nor ungrateful for such protection, I can readily believe; for, if not overtaken by misfortune during its winter residence in foreign climes, the same individuals will return to the spot where, the last year, or for years before, it had been allowed to remain undisturbed; and, in confirmation of this, I append a note forwarded to me by Mr. Philip Crowley, of Alton, in Hampshire, a gentlemen fully imbued with a love for nature, and intimately acquainted with our native birds. It is dated July 8th, 1852, at which time he was resident at Grove House, Tottenham, Middlesex. "The two Martins I caught, labelled, and set at liberty last year, have returned. I tied a small piece of parchment to one leg of each, and wrote on it, 'P. Crowley, Alton, Hants, England,' and on the other side of one of them I now find, 'Don Vangello, Barcelona.'"

"That the House-Martin not only visits the same place," says Captain King, in his 'Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Arctic Regions in 1833–35,' "but the same nest year after year, is a fact which I ascertained by experiment. While residing in Kent, about ten years ago, having selected a detached nest, I fastened a small piece of silk round one of the legs of its inmate, then sitting upon eggs. The following season the bird returned, and, with the garter still affixed, was secured in the same nest—a convincing proof of the instinctive knowledge attributed to it." In confirmation of the above statement, Mr. Durham Weir informed Macgillivray that he caught several pairs of Martins at the windows of his house in September, 1838, and fixed small silver rings round their legs, and that one of them was shot, in his immediate neighbourhood, the following May.