

CYPSELUS MELBA.

Alpine Swift.

Hirundo melba, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 345.

Cypselus melba, Ill. Prod. Syst. Mamm. et Av., p. 230.

Apus melba, Cuv. Règ. Anim. (1817), tom. i. p. 373.

Micropus melba, Boie, Isis, 1844, p. 165.

Hirundo alpina, Scop. Ann. Hist. Nat., tom. i. p. 166.

Cypselus alpinus, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 1815, p. 270.

Micropus alpinus, Mey. et Wolf, Taschenb. Deutschl. Vög., tom. i. p. 282.

Cypselus gutturalis, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xix. p. 422.

— *melbus*, Vieill. Gal. des Ois., tom. i. p. 192, pl. 121.

Hirundo gularis, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. x. p. 99.

THIS fine Swift is a summer visitant to the central and southern portions of Europe. As its trivial name implies, it is also a denizen of the Alps, and, I believe, of the Apennine ranges also—rocky regions appearing to be peculiarly attractive to it, although it is said also to frequent plains. In Berne and Fribourg, besides many other places, it is known to breed in the steeples of the cathedrals and churches of those fine old towns. Like the common Swift it is a migrant, and in the early part of autumn leaves all the parts of Europe it frequents, and passes into Africa; how far its range extends southward in the latter country is not known, the bird from the Cape Colony formerly supposed to be the same having been ascertained to be a distinct species. Besides being dispersed over Central and Southern Europe, the Alpine Swift is abundant in the Holy Land, Asia Minor, Persia, and, doubtless, all the intervening countries to Afghanistan and Western India, where, as will be seen by Mr. Jerdon's notes given below, it is very numerous.

Almost every person who has had an opportunity of observing this bird speaks in terms of admiration of its vast powers of flight: it is not surprising, therefore, that an individual should now and then wing its way across the Channel to the British Islands, and course over our meads and fields until it is shot. Its occurrence here is almost exclusively confined to England; for I find no record of its having been seen in Scotland, and only two instances of its being killed in Ireland. The first specimen known as British was shot early in June 1820, by the bailiff of the late R. Holford, Esq., at Kingsgate, in the Isle of Thanet, and is now, I believe, in the possession of R. B. Hale, Esq., of Alderley Park, Gloucestershire. Since that date a few more examples have been killed in this country—one in Norfolk, another in Essex, a third in Kent, a fourth in Cambridgeshire, a fifth in Berkshire, and a sixth in Lancashire; and there may have been others unknown to me. Having had no opportunities of studying the habits of the bird myself, I must refer to the writings of those who have been more fortunately placed.

"During the past summer," says Mr. Hewitson, in a note to myself, "I noticed the Great Swift wherever I went in Switzerland, on the mountain-passes on both sides and at the top of the Gemmi, in the Canton Valais, and on the Righi. In former visits I saw it about the cathedral at Berne only. There I have many a time watched its glorious flight, and witnessed how superior it is in speed to the common species: whilst the *C. apus* sweeps round you and below the promenade on which you stand, this bird pursues his wonderful flight high in the air."

Bailly states that it is quite as common in the rocky portions of Savoy during the months of summer as it is in Switzerland and the Tyrol, that it arrives there from the 15th to the 20th of April, and that it feeds exclusively upon insects, which it captures as it skims along with astonishing rapidity over bushes, trees, ditches, and the surface of the water, into which it occasionally dips to secure its prey. It commences the duty of incubation about the end of May, or beginning of June. Both sexes engage in the construction of the nest, which is usually placed in a nearly always inaccessible cleft of a rock, but occasionally among ruins or in a building situated on some mountainous ridge, and also under the stones on the roofs of the châteaux. It is externally composed of small sticks and roots, intermingled with which are pieces of straw, which they seize with such address while skimming over the ground that the action is scarcely perceptible; the interior is lined with the catkins of poplars, the down of flowers, &c., which they seize in a similar manner or when blown about in the air, the whole being cemented together with the bird's glutinous saliva. The eggs are two or three in number, and of a pure white.

"*Cypselus melba*," says the Rev. H. Tristram, "though very abundant, is rather a local bird in the Holy Land, and only a summer migrant. The first time we noticed it was at daybreak, on February 12th, when, camped outside the walls of Jerusalem, we saw large flocks passing with amazing rapidity, at a great