

CYPSELUS APUS.

Swift.

Hirundo apus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 344.

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

——— *murarius*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., p. 271; and 2nd edit. tom. i. p. 434.

——— *vulgaris*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. x. p. 72.

Micropus murarius, Meyer, Taschenb. deutsch., tom. i. p. 281.

Brachipus murarius, Meyer, Vög. Liv- und Esthl., p. 143.

ADMITTING as I do that, in structure, habits, and economy, the Swifts differ considerably from the Swallows and Martins, I do not think it necessary or desirable, in a work of such limited extent as one on the "Birds of Great Britain," to place them far from each other, the more so as they are generally associated by every observer of our native birds. Structurally they are all admirably adapted for flight, but the Swifts much more so than the Swallows and Martins. The latter descend to and even spend a part of their time on the ground and on the branches of trees. The Swifts, on the other hand, as if disdainful of this nether world, are strictly denizens of the air; it is in that element alone that they obtain their insect-food, and in the pursuit of which they will ascend to an almost incredible height, while they are equally expert in their pursuit when the state of the temperature induces insects to remain near the ground. The wing-powers of the Swift are indeed enormous, and the number of insects they must take to keep up their muscular condition defies calculation. Its evolutions in the air are most perfect, and it often, while flying, forms lengthened sweeps and curves of the most graceful description; so easy and buoyant, in fact, are all its movements that language fails to portray that of which the eye alone can convey a full conception.

In the British Islands the Swift is a constant summer resident, and at that season may be seen in all parts of the country; but in the northern districts, particularly in some parts of Scotland and in the Orkneys, it is less abundant than in England and Ireland. From the vast wing-powers which this bird possesses, it would naturally be supposed that its range is more extensive than it really is, but it is not so widely extended as that of many other birds whose power of flight is much more limited. I have a specimen in my collection from Trebizond, but I have never seen examples from India. Mr. Adams states that it is common in Cashmere, which is probably its extreme eastern limit. The centre of its area would appear to be the middle of Europe: from this point it is distributed in summer over the other parts of the continent, as far north as Sweden, Norway, and Russia, while Northern Africa and Arabia as far as the tropics are probably its winter residence and the farthest extent of its range in that direction.

I suspect that all migrants, whether in the northern or southern hemisphere, are guided by the sun,—that is, that at stated periods they impulsively follow its course, the genial rays of that luminary having, as is known to every one, an especial influence both on vegetable and insect life. In the northern hemisphere we know almost to a day the arrival of the Stork and the passing of the Crane to its summer home. The Swallow and the Martin visit us at the latter end of March or the beginning of April; the Swift, on the other hand, is more tardy in its arrival, for it is not until the first week in May, when the spring has far advanced and insect life is almost at its height, that it makes its appearance in any number. Not only is it one of our latest spring birds, but it is also one of the earliest to depart, for it generally leaves us early in August; or, if a solitary pair remain, the delay is due to some extraneous cause: their affection for a late-hatched brood will occasionally induce them to extend the period of their stay until September. I shall here give some remarks on the arrival and departure of the Swift, and on its nidification, which have been kindly forwarded to me by P. J. Martin, Esq., of Pulborough in Sussex, who, having a great partiality for this bird, always affords it his protection, and allows it to breed undisturbed under his hospitable roof. In a letter, dated August 16, 1858, this gentleman says,—“I send you herewith some Swifts' nests taken from under the eaves of my house, where from ten to twenty pairs have bred for the last ten or twelve years. They appear to appropriate for their own use the straw and feathers carried up by the Sparrows, for they are never seen to collect any of these materials themselves. I generally send my servant on to the roof to collect the Sparrows' eggs when the Swifts arrive, which is generally in the second week of May, a few days earlier or later according to the season; but this is not done every year, and I do not observe but that they go on amicably enough together when let alone. My boy sometimes finds three eggs in a nest, but more usually two. We generally lose the Swifts before the 12th of August. In the box you will find some of the droppings, which always appear to me to be chiefly composed of the elytra of beetles. Do they emigrate as soon as this kind of food ceases to exist?”

It is evident that during the short stay of the Swift in this country, almost its whole time must be spent in