

in the present instance their points were blunt. The pectoral fin is not well represented in the figures; and the dorsal is placed too far behind, its exact position being, as far as the eye can judge, just above the centre of gravity. As the proper situation of this organ is an important character of the species, it is carefully given in the figure which accompanies this paper. (Plate VII.)

I am sorry that, with so favourable an opportunity, I am not able to add anything on the subject of the internal structure of the animal; but after having bargained with the possessors for the bones, especially of the head, when they should have finished their exhibition to the public, they were afterwards sold without my knowledge for a higher price.

Perhaps the manner in which this whale was taken may in some degree illustrate its history, for it has been observed that most of the cetaceous animals taken in England have run themselves on shore; a circumstance which has been ascribed, with much appearance of probability, to the influence of sickness. On the 29th of March in the present year, the specimen here described was seen to approach and strike its head against a rock on the east shore of Looe Island; and the blow was followed by a discharge of blood, it is believed from the mouth, since no wound was afterwards discovered. It afterwards moved off into free water, but returned to the shore, among the rocks of which it became entangled; thus affording the two or three men who were present an opportunity of fastening a rope round the root of its tail. As the tide receded it was left dry, and died in about the space of six hours.

Polperro, 1842.

XL.—*The Birds of Ireland.* By WM. THOMPSON, Esq.,
Vice-Pres. Nat. Hist. Society of Belfast.

[Continued from p. 230.]

No. 13.—*Hirundinidæ.*

COMMON SWALLOW, *Hirundo rustica*, Linn. This species is by far the most common of the *Hirundinidæ* in Ireland. It arrives the second in order, the sand martin preceding it. The first week of April is the earliest time I have known it to appear about Belfast, the second week of that month being the ordinary period, and seldom is it looked for in vain upon the tenth day*.

* From newspaper paragraphs it would appear that it occasionally comes earlier. In the Belfast Commercial Chronicle of April 1835, it was stated that swallows had been seen about Larne on the 2nd of the month. The contributors of such notices rarely discriminate the different species of *Hirundo*, and the term swallow is used generically, or applied to the three

Although in the year 1836 the swallow did present itself in one locality near Belfast on the 15th or 16th of April, the species was generally late in arrival, and remarkably scarce. When walking for upwards of two hours on the morning of the 1st of May through a well-wooded and cultivated district where these birds usually abound at this season, not one was to be seen. On the 2nd of that month, when going fourteen miles along the southern side of the bay, and again on returning, swallows appeared only at one place, where a few were in company. On the 3rd, 4th and 5th I walked for miles along the banks of the river Lagan, a favourite resort of these birds, and not one was seen. In 1837 also they were very late in coming, and, as in the preceding summer, very scarce*. In the following year and subsequently they made their appearance as usual. The earliest observed by myself in 1838 were two, which on the 15th of April kept flying over the grassy margin of Belfast Bay. It was a most untoward day for them, being excessively cold with occasional heavy showers of snow, and blowing a hurricane. The storm effect was such as I never before witnessed, for as the in-coming tide flowed over the banks, the wind swept the spray (caught from the top of the small waves) before it over the shallower portion of the bay, presenting the appearance of a dense hail-shower, careering for miles over the surface of the sea. In the summer of 1840 again, swallows were remarkably scarce in the north of Ireland. This was attributed by an ornithological friend to the inclement summer of the previous year having been unfavourable to their breeding—he considered that there were fewer young birds in 1839 than he had ever before known. On making a tour through the west of Ireland in the summer of 1840, I observed that the *Hirundinidæ* generally were very scarce there†.

species. The sand martin, which is the earliest comer, was probably the bird alluded to. On the 10th day of that month I saw single swallows in two localities near Belfast.

* When travelling from Holyhead to Shrewsbury on the 12th of May 1837, and on the following day thence to London, I remarked that swallows were everywhere very scarce. Being seated outside the coach, an excellent opportunity for observation was afforded.

† May 17, 1842. Although the month of April this year was so remarkably fine and warm, swallows were a fortnight later than usual in making their appearance in the north of Ireland. It is very remarkable too, that from the first day of their arrival about Belfast until the 14th inst., or during three weeks, there was no apparent increase to their numbers. On the two following days, however, a sudden increase in all directions took place, and without any marked change in weather or wind.

The practice of hunting the wren, as it is called, in the south of Ireland, and the children carrying the victims about the streets on St. Stephen's-day, and chanting a song for the purpose of collecting money, as noticed at p. 143, had in some respects an analogue in Greece in the case of the swallow. "The children in Rhodes greeted the latter as herald of spring in a little song¹. Troops of them carrying about a swallow sang this from door to door, and collected provisions in return."

¹ Above thirty simple and most pleasing lines, given in Hase's 'Public and Private Life of the Ancient Greeks,' English Translation, p. 24.

Dr. Jenner (Phil. Trans., vol. cix. p. 24) states that swallows on and for some time after their arrival feed principally on gnats, but that their more favourite food, as well as that of the swift and martin, is a small beetle of the *Scarabæus* kind, which on dissection he "found in far greater abundance in their stomachs than any other insects." Two species of gnat, *Culex pipiens* and *C. bifurcatus*, are particularised by Mr. Main (Mag. Nat. Hist., vol. iv. p. 413) as their favourite food. Sir Humphry Davy 'Salmonia' has "seen a single swallow take four [Mayflies] in less than a quarter of a minute that were descending to the water." Without having actually examined the contents of its stomach, I have so often observed the swallow in localities presenting very different species of insects, and sweeping in the summer evenings through the midst of little congregated parties of various kinds, as to be satisfied that its food differs very considerably, a singular corroboration of which is, that an angling friend once resident near the river Lagan has repeatedly captured swallows with artificial trout-flies presenting very different appearances*.

In the autumn a few years since, my friend Wm. Sinclaire, Esq., a most accurate ornithologist, remarked a number of swallows flying for a considerable time about two pollard willows (*Salix fragilis*) which served as gate-posts to a field at his residence near Belfast, and on going to the place ascertained that the object of pursuit was hive-bees, which being especially abundant beneath the branches, he had an opportunity of seeing the birds capture as they flew within two or three yards of his head†.

The insect prey of the swallow and martin kept so near the ground on the evening of the 14th of August 1827—which was fine, after a day of excessive rain—that in its pursuit several birds of both species were killed with walking-sticks and umbrellas in some of the streets of Belfast‡.

* Isaac Walton informs us, that with the rod and line swifts were in his time taken in Italy.

† In the 'British Naturalist' (vol. ii. p. 381) the sand martin (*H. riparia*) is mentioned as preying on the common wasp. In an article in the 'Field Naturalist's Magazine' (March 1834, p. 125) on the 'Enemies of the Hive Bee,' an anonymous contributor states, that having observed some swallows seize upon his bees in passing the hives in his garden, he shot them, and on opening them carefully, found that although "they were literally crammed with drones, there was not a vestige of a working bee." Instances of the *Hirundo rustica* preying on bees have been very rarely recorded. In a paper read before the Lyceum of New York in 1824, De Witt Clinton, in his amiable admiration of the whole tribe of swallows, indignantly declared that "they are in all respects innocent, and the accusation of Virgil that they destroy bees is known to be unfounded both in this country and in Europe." But from Wilson's 'American Ornithology' (Jardine's ed. vol. ii. p. 153) we learn, that even in the United States, bees constitute part of the ordinary food of the purple martin (*Hirundo purpurea*).

‡ In the year 1838, I was informed by a bird-preserver here, that he had at different times received not less than twenty swallows which had been killed in the streets with walking-sticks or rudely formed whips used by mischievous boys.

The swallow is one of the very earliest of British birds in commencing its morning song. About midsummer it is begun occasionally before half-past two o'clock. It is also continued late in the season. On the 13th of Sept. 1833, I heard one when perched beside its nest sing in as fine mellow tone as early in the summer; and on Sept. 2nd another year, out of a number congregated on a house-roof, several were engaged in going over their amorous notes. On the 10th of Sept. 1841, two passing near me sang sweetly as they flew in company with a number of others.

Common as it is to see the *Hirundines* follow in the train of birds of prey, I never but in the following instance saw any of them turned upon. On the 22nd of September 1832, when walking in the garden at Wolfhill*, near Belfast, with a friend, a kestrel (*Falco Tinnunculus*) in close pursuit of a swallow appeared in sight over the hedgerow, and continuing the chase with extreme ferocity, lost not the least way by the swallow's turnings, but kept within about a foot of it all the time, at one moment passing within five or six yards of our heads. It is idle to conjecture how long the chase may have lasted before we witnessed it; but immediately on the kestrel's giving it up, the swallow nothing daunted became again, accompanied by many of its species, its pursuer and tormentor, and so continued until they all disappeared from our view. The kestrel was probably driven to this chase by the particular annoyance of the swallows, as they and the martins were more numerous that day at Wolfhill than they had been at any time during the season. On returning from a pursuit of this kind, I have often remarked, as Mr. Main has done (*Mag. of Nat. Hist.*, vol. iv. p. 413), that these birds "unite in a song [apparently] of gratulatory exultation."

We read of the martin (*H. urbica*) being the most partial to, and dependent upon man of all its tribe, but from a partial view only can such a conclusion be drawn. The martin, it is true, often claims for its nest the protection of the same roof that covers man himself, but it also selects for its domicile the wildest and most stupendous precipices. On the other hand, I know not any instance of the swallow selecting for its nest any place removed from man's direct influence. The situations usually chosen in the north of Ireland are sheds, gateways and outhouses of every kind, the site once determined on being generally occupied for a series of years. All other nestling-places which have come under my own observation, and so far as I recollect to have read, were within the sphere of man's works†. In the north of Ireland I have never known the nest of the swallow to be built in chimneys, although, on account of its predilection for building within them, the species has received the name of chimney swallow

* See foot-note to Swift in one of the following pages.

† Subsequently Mr. Hepburn has stated, that he has "seen nests of this species on the rocks about Tantallon Castle, opposite the Bass."—Macgillivray's *British Birds*, vol. iii. p. 569.

Sir Wm. Jardine mentions the *H. urbica* as building in this locality, in his edition of *Wilson's Amer. Orn.*, vol. iii. p. 320.

in different languages*. White remarks in his 'Natural History of Selborne' (letter 18), that "in general with us this *Hirundo* breeds in chimneys; and loves to haunt those stacks where there is a constant fire, no doubt for the sake of warmth. Not that it can subsist in the immediate shaft where there is a fire; but prefers one adjoining to that of the kitchen, and disregards the perpetual smoke of the funnel, as I have often observed with some degree of wonder." It appears singular that in certain countries the *Hirundo rustica* should thus be partial to chimneys, which however I cannot think with White, are preferred for heat. In Sweden it is called *Ladu Swala*, or barn swallow, from selecting the barn for its nest; and in southern countries as in Italy it prefers similar sites, as we have indeed learned from Virgil, and to the correctness of which I can myself bear testimony†.

One or two peculiar instances of the nidification of the swallow in the neighbourhood of Belfast may be mentioned. In the summers of 1831 and 1832, a pair of these birds built their nest in a house at Wolf-hill, although the door by which alone they could enter was locked every evening, and not opened before six in the morning; being an early-rising species, they must consequently have thus lost for no inconsiderable part of the season fully three hours every day. A similar fact is mentioned in Capt. Cook's 'Sketches in Spain' (vol. ii. p. 275), where it is stated that "in the southern provinces they [swallows] sometimes live in the posadas, their nests being built on the rafters, where they are shut up every night."

Under a very low shed in the hawk-yard at the Falls near Belfast, where my friend John Sinclaire, Esq., keeps his trained peregrine falcons (*F. peregrinus*), a pair of swallows, regardless of the almost constant presence of four of these birds, constructed a nest in the summer of 1832. The man in charge of the hawks tore down the partly formed nest several times, but the swallows were not to be so deterred, and persisted in completing it within about three yards of a block, on which one of the hawks constantly perched: in due time the young appeared and got off in safety. Although such places as the swallow usually prefers for its nest are not only contiguous to, but especially numerous in, the immediate vicinity of the hawk-yard, and all the other sheds and office-houses are considerably higher

* Chimneys are stated in general terms by authors¹ to be usually resorted to in England for this purpose. The sites preferred in Scotland, according to Sir Wm. Jardine and Mr. Macgillivray, are similar to those above stated to be selected in Ireland. What Mr. Hepburn says of East Lothian exactly applies to the north of Ireland. He remarks that the nest "is built under arches, gateways, caves and waterspouts, against the beams, rafters and lintels of outhouses, and under wooden bridges."—Macgillivray's Brit. Birds, vol. iii. p. 569.

† In the Morea likewise, within the town of Patras, I remarked in June 1841, that they selected similar places to what they do in the north of Ireland, their nests being built under the rude porticos in the streets.

¹ White, Pennant, Bewick, Montagu (who adds, that "it is not unusual to find the nest in outhouses, upon beams or rafters"), Selby, Yarrell, &c.

than the erection there, this singular locality was again selected in 1833, when the nest of the former year was once more used, and the brood escaped from it without any casualty. Two new nests were also built this year and successfully occupied, one of which I remarked on the 10th of August contained eggs for a second brood, and on the 19th of the same month I had the satisfaction of seeing it tenanted by young birds. This nest had for its support the wing of one of the departed falcons, on the centre of which it rested*. The entire height of the shed, which was erected solely for the protection of the hawks, is not above seven feet. The nests are about six feet from the ground, and built against a beam of timber (to this the wing just mentioned is nailed) placed on the top of the low wall supporting the roof. The height of the roof from the ground is four feet two inches, which leaves only two and a half feet clear for the swallow's flight between it and the heads of the hawks as they perch upon their blocks. One of the nests is only six feet from the block occupied by a hawk, and from which this bird has liberty to move to half that distance. The swallows however flew closely past these rapacious birds without being in any way heeded by them†.

* In White's 'Selborne' a similar instance is mentioned.

† In the Northern Whig (a Belfast newspaper) of July 2, 1829, the following paragraph appeared:—"We understand that a pair of swallows have built their nest in Mr. Getty's school-room, at Randalstown; and notwithstanding there are above forty scholars daily attending, the birds fearlessly went on with their labour, and have now out their young ones. One of the windows had been for several nights left down, at which time the swallows found admittance, and after much apparent deliberation commenced their structure, which they carried on chiefly during the hours of the school; and though they had abundance of time to build, either before the school commenced, or after it was dispersed, yet they always preferred a few hours about noon for their labour, and seemed to do little at any other time. The scholars, much to their credit, gave them as little annoyance as possible, and the window is still kept down."

Mr. Blackwall in his 'Researches in Zoology' mentions the remarkable fact from personal investigation, that swallows, house martins and sand martins not unfrequently leave their last brood of young to perish, and occasionally leave their eggs before they are incubated. He speculates on the causes of this "voluntary act of desertion," and combats the opinion of Dr. Jenner, that it is prompted by "the desire to migrate, produced by a change in the reproductive system." Having given less attention to the subject than either author, I should perhaps be silent, but a few remarks on so apparently singular a proceeding may not be considered presumptuous. In the instances alluded to, the young broods and eggs were deserted late in the season, and I should suppose at the migratory period. The paramount object would then seem to be migration, and when favourable weather and wind prevail, the love of offspring yields to the stronger impulse, and the parents take their departure. Had this favourable time been long enough protracted, they would have continued to tend their offspring and bring them to maturity. It is quite different at the season when the first brood is being produced. The primary principle which then influences them is, the production of their species; and no matter how favourable every circumstance may be for migration, they do not leave the country. I have attended to

In perching, the swallow, unlike the swift, occasionally rests upon the ground by choice, roads being not uncommonly thus resorted to. I have observed a number of these birds frequenting a large mound of clay in the vicinity of houses daily throughout the month of August, or long subsequent to the time that such material is required for their nests*. On betaking themselves to trees they generally exhibit a singular choice in avoiding the flourishing branches and alighting on those which are dead. It has been remarked to me by Mr. Wm. Sinclair, that as soon as the young can provide for themselves, they do not return to the nest in which they were reared; from which circumstance, and from seeing large flocks of swallows fly in the autumnal evenings around the highest trees at his residence, and invariably disappear in their direction, he concludes that they roost on trees. White of Selborne, speaking generally of these birds, mentions their thus roosting late in autumn.

The same author remarks that "the swallow is a bold flyer, ranging to distant downs and commons even in windy weather, which the other species seem much to dislike; nay, even frequenting exposed seaport towns, and making little excursions over the salt water." The "excursions" of the swallow over Belfast Bay are of daily occurrence throughout summer. It may be chiefly observed attendant on the in-coming tide, where we may presume its food is most abundant, owing probably to the insects being driven off the beach by the encroaching waters†. When on different occasions, in the month of June, on the low mass of rock called the Mew Island (the smallest of the three Copeland islands off the coast of Down), this species, and it alone of the *Hirundinidæ*, always appeared; thus proving a propensity to range, as there is not a spot on the islet that would afford accommodation for its nest.

Mr. White (of Selborne) remarks of the swift, that "in the longest days it does not withdraw to rest till a quarter before nine in the evening, being the latest of all day birds." In the general terms in the departure of the *Hirundines* for many years, and to the influencing causes, and was at first surprised at the suddenness of their disappearance when favourable weather arrived. At the end of August I have known the great body to depart, and at other times remarked them evidently waiting for weeks, and on to the month of October before they would take their flight.

* Mr. Macgillivray says of the swallow, that "it sometimes alights [on the ground] as if to pick up insects, which it has observed there."—Brit. Birds, vol. iii. p. 564. On such occasions, as I have particularly remarked the circumstance, food was certainly not the object—the birds were simply resting.

† August 2, 1838. I have remarked during the summer of this year, that swallows course as regularly over the masses of *Zostera marina* with which the beach is covered on the western shore of Belfast Bay, as they do over any meadows. This evening they were perched in great numbers on stakes which rise above the sea, and they were likewise busily feeding over the surface of the tide, on the insects roused probably by its flowing over the *Zostera*. The stakes alluded to are just such as—were they more remote from a public road—cormorants would alight on to expand and dry their outstretched wings.

which this was meant to be understood, it agrees with my observation ; but I have occasionally at different periods during their stay, seen swallows on wing at so late an hour that they could hardly be distinguished. This occurred more especially throughout the month of June 1832, which was remarkably cold and wet. On several evenings towards the end of the month I saw swallows fly about at a quarter past nine P.M. The wants of the nestlings doubtless prompted this late flight, and if my informant be correct, it was in some instances of no avail, as during this time he saw young swallows fall dead from the nest, owing, it was conjectured, to starvation, and this too in a locality where food should have been comparatively abundant. On the 12th of June 1838, I observed a swallow flying about Wolfhill at half-past nine o'clock in the evening. The day throughout had been moderately warm, without rain.

When wind and weather are favourable for migration, swallows, including many of the first brood, leave us from the end of August, but about the middle of September is the chief time of their departure. On to the middle of October some are seen every year. Mr. Templeton notes his having observed a few on the 30th and 31st of October 1813; on the 14th of November 1815, I am informed that one was repeatedly seen flying about Stranmillis near Belfast, where likewise, on the 28th of October 1819, three were seen after a severe fall of snow and a good deal of frost; in 1835, one was remarked on the 26th of October near the town just named; and on the 3rd of November 1837, Mr. H. H. Dombtrain of Dublin shot one at sea near Lambay island, when it was flying towards land*.

Variety in plumage.—Very rarely do we see any departure from the ordinary colour in the swallow. The Rev. G. M. Black states, that in the month of July 1815, a pure-white one was seen flying about Stranmillis near Belfast, for about ten days.

In the years 1811, 1812 and 1813, when my friend Dr. J. L. Drummond of Belfast was surgeon of H.M.S. San Juan, then anchored close to the New Mole at Gibraltar, he every year, both in spring and autumn, saw "swallows" (the species of which is not now remembered) every day during a few weeks at the former season flying northward, and at the latter southward. They kept flying throughout the day, and invariably in autumn as well as spring were in little parties, not more than three or four being generally together†. In the course of a tour made in the year 1841, the swallow was seen as follows:—On descending the Rhone from Lyons to Avignon,

* Observations made during a number of years (and occasionally daily) on the proceedings of the swallow preparatory to migration from the north of Ireland, together with the state of wind, weather, food, &c., here follow in my manuscript, but they are withheld, as without them, there is doubtless sufficient matter upon one species!

† Capt. Cook, in his 'Sketches in Spain,' remarks of the *Hirundo rustica*, that "a few of these birds winter in the south of Andalusia. I saw them on the summit of the Lomo de Vaca, far from the haunt of man, living with the *H. rupestris*"—a species which, according to the same author, "winters in great numbers along the southern shore [of Spain]."

some appeared on the 9th of April at several places, but they were nowhere numerous. On the 13th of that month a very few were observed between Leghorn and Pisa. At Malta on the 17th they were as abundant as we ever behold them in the British Islands. On the passage of H.M.S. Beacon from Malta to the Morea, two swallows flew on board on the 22nd of April, when the vessel was about forty miles east of Malta; on the 25th, when about fifty miles from Calabria, several appeared; towards the evening of the next day about a dozen alighted on the vessel, and after remaining all night took their departure early on the morning of the 27th, when perhaps ninety miles west of the Morea: throughout the afternoon and towards the evening of the same day (at sunset we were about sixty miles from the Morea) many more arrived, and all that came having remained, they appeared about the close of day flying about the ship in considerable numbers.

On arrival at Navarino on the 28th, the swallow was observed to be common, as it likewise was, in the following month, in the island of Syra, about Smyrna and Constantinople*; in June about the island of Paros, at Athens and Patras†; in July at Venice, Verona, Milan, &c. At Trieste, where I spent ten days at the end of June, no swallows were observed, although house martins and swifts were abundant; my not seeing them however may have been accidental. About none of the southern or eastern localities mentioned are swallows, house martins, sand martins or swifts more numerous than in the north of Ireland, or the British Islands generally‡.

In the later editions of Bewick's 'British Birds,' a highly interesting account of the familiarity of the swallow in confinement appears in a letter from the Rev. Walter Trevelyan.

[To be continued.]

XLI.—On a new species of *Rafflesia* from Manilla.

By J. E. TESCHEMACHER, Esq. §.

[With a Plate.]

HAVING just received from Manilla, preserved in spirit, several buds of that rare and singular parasite, *Rafflesia*, which

* I never met with swallows more plentiful anywhere than they were on the 16th of May, flying over some low and extremely rich pastures in which some of the Sultan's stud were grazing, between Constantinople and the *vilage* of Belgrade.

† On the 14th of June, the young were all but fledged here. At this date, they are in favourable seasons equally far advanced in the north of Ireland.

‡ The only localities that in the midst of summer I ever remarked all the *Hirundinidæ* to be absent from, were the South Islands of Arran, off Galway Bay. Not an individual of any of the species was seen here by Mr. R. Ball or myself, when visiting the islands on the 7th, 8th and 9th of July 1834, the weather being all the time very fine. Returning from them we had no sooner reached the coast of Clare—the nearest land—than many of the *H. rustica* were observed.

§ From the Boston Journal of Nat. History, vol. iv. p. 63.



Thompson, William. 1842. "XL.—The Birds of Ireland." *The Annals and magazine of natural history; zoology, botany, and geology* 9, 373–381.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03745484209445351>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/61919>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03745484209445351>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/58484>

Holding Institution

University of Toronto - Gerstein Science Information Centre

Sponsored by

University of Toronto

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.