



SWIFT.

1. *Cypselus murarius*, (Temm.).

WHITE-BELLIED SWIFT.

2. *Cypselus Alpinus* (Temm.).

Drawn from Life and on Stone by J. & E. Gould.

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Genus CYPSELUS, *Illig.*

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* very short, triangular, large, all its base concealed, depressed; *gape* extending beyond the eyes; *upper mandible* hooked at the point; *nostrils* longitudinal, near the ridge of the beak, open, the edges raised and furnished with small feathers. *Tarsi* very short. *Toes* four, all directed forwards and entirely divided; *nails* short, strong and hooked. *Tail* composed of ten feathers. *Wings* very long; the first *quill-feather* a little shorter than the second.

SWIFT.

Cypselus murarius, *Temm.*

Le Martinet.

WE know of no birds, and certainly none in Europe, possessed of equal power of flight with the species of the present genus: in fact, their natural habitat appears to be the air, their short feet and strong claws serving more especially to cling to the rough surface of rocks, towers, and high buildings, or firmly securing them while in a state of repose. Their extraordinary length of wing, combined with the shortness of their tarsi, prevents them walking on, or rising from, any level situation, unless by repeated exertions, or taking advantage of some slight elevation; they are therefore seldom, if ever, to be seen on the ground. These birds are distinguished not only by the velocity of their flight, but by the smooth and graceful sweeps they take during their aerial career in pursuit of the various insects constituting their food. In fine and serene weather, when these insect tribes ascend to an almost incredible elevation, the Swifts occupy the highest regions of the atmosphere, persevering in the chase almost beyond the reach of sight. Their degree of elevation, however, doubtless depends on that of the insects, and the latter on the influence of the weather; so that the low or high flight of these birds may be taken as a barometrical index of the state of the air, and the consequent probability of rain or the contrary.

The Swift, which is spread over Europe generally, is essentially migratory. It arrives in England at the beginning of May, and leaves us again as early as August or September. It breeds in old buildings, steeples, ruins, towers, and rocks. The eggs are white.

The colour of the plumage, with the exception of the throat, which is white, is of a uniform sooty-black with bronze-coloured reflections. The sexes offer no external marks of distinction.

WHITE-BELLIED SWIFT.

Cypselus alpinus, *Temm.*

Le Martinet à ventre blanc.

THE claims of this fine Swift to a place in the Fauna of Great Britain rest on the circumstance of one noticed by Mr. Selby in the "Transactions of the Northumberland, Newcastle, and Durham Natural History Society;" and one we have personally inspected, which was killed by the gardener of R. Holford, Esq., on his estate at Kingsgate near Margate, in whose possession it now remains.

The natural habitat of the *Cypselus alpinus* is more exclusively limited to the middle of the southern districts of Europe, particularly its alpine regions, and the shores of the Mediterranean, being very abundant at Gibraltar, Sardinia, Malta, and throughout the whole of the Archipelago; and to these may also be added the northern parts of Africa. In its manners it closely resembles our well-known Swift, but possesses, if possible, still greater powers of flight.

It would appear that the clefts of rocks and high buildings are the sites which this bird chooses for the purpose of nidification; the female laying three or four eggs of a uniform ivory white.

The sexes of this species present but little differences, the colour of the female being rather less decided; in the male a uniform greyish brown is spread over the whole of the upper surface, which descends across the breast in the form of a band, along the flanks and over the inferior tail-coverts; the throat and the middle of the belly are of a pure white, the tarsi covered with brown feathers, and the irides brown. Length from nine to ten inches.



Gould, John. 1837. "White-bellied Swift. *Cypselus alpinus*, Temm. Le martinet à ventre blanc. [Pl. 53]." *The Birds of Europe* 2, <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.317223>.

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