THE REPUBLICAN OR CLIFF SWALLOW.

+HIRUNDO FULVA, Vieill.

PLATE XLVII.—MALE, FEMALE, AND NESTS.

In the spring of 1815, I for the first time saw a few individuals of this species at Henderson, on the banks of the Ohio, a hundred and twenty miles below the Falls of that river. It was an excessively cold morning, and nearly all were killed by the severity of the weather. I drew up a description at the time, naming the species *Hirundo republicana*, the *Republican Swallow*, in allusion to the mode in which the individuals belonging to it associate, for the purpose of forming their nests and rearing their young. Unfortunately, through the carelessness of my assistant, the specimens were lost, and I despaired for years of meeting with others.

In the year 1819, my hopes were revived by Mr. ROBERT BEST, curator of the Western Museum at Cincinnati, who informed me that a strange species of bird had made its appearance in the neighbourhood, building nests in clusters, affixed to the walls. In consequence of this information, I immediately crossed the Ohio to Newport, in Kentucky, where he had seen many nests the preceding season; and no sooner were we landed than the chirruping of my long-lost little strangers saluted my ear. Numbers of them were busily engaged in repairing the damage done to their nests by the storms of the preceding winter.

Major OLDHAM of the United States Army, then commandant of the garrison, politely offered us the means of examining the settlement of these birds, attached to the walls of the building under his charge. He informed us, that, in 1815, he first saw a few of them working against the wall of the house, immediately under the eaves and cornice; that their work was carried on rapidly and peaceably, and that as soon as the young were able to travel, they all departed. Since that period, they had returned every spring, and then amounted to several hundreds. They usually appeared about the 10th of April, and immediately began their work, which was at that moment, it being then the 20th of that month, going on in a regular manner, against the walls of the arsenal. They had about fifty nests quite finished, and others in progress.

About day-break they flew down to the shore of the river, one hundred yards distant, for the muddy sand, of which the nests were constructed, and worked with great assiduity until near the middle of the day, as if aware that

the heat of the sun was necessary to dry and harden their moist tenements. They then ceased from labour for a few hours, amused themselves by performing aerial evolutions, courted and caressed their mates with much affection, and snapped at flies and other insects on the wing. They often examined their nests to see if they were sufficiently dry, and as soon as these appeared to have acquired the requisite firmness, they renewed their labours. Until the females began to sit, they all roosted in the hollow limbs of the sycamores (*Platanus occidentalis*) growing on the banks of the Licking River, but when incubation commenced, the males alone resorted to the trees. A second party arrived, and were so hard pressed for time, that they betook themselves to the holes in the wall, where bricks had been left out for the scaffolding. These they fitted with projecting necks, similar to those of the complete nests of the others. Their eggs were deposited on a few bits of straw, and great caution was necessary in attempting to procure them, as the slightest touch crumbled their frail tenement into dust. By means of a tablespoon, I was enabled to procure many of them. Each nest contained four eggs, which were white, with dusky spots. Only one brood is raised in a season. The energy with which they defended their nests was truly astonishing. Although I had taken the precaution to visit them at sun-set, when I supposed they would all have been at rest, yet a single female happening to give the alarm, immediately called out the whole tribe. They snapped at my hat, body and legs, passed between me and the nests, within an inch of my face, twittering their rage and sorrow. They continued their attacks as I descended, and accompanied me for some distance. Their note may be perfectly imitated by rubbing a cork damped with spirit against the neck of a bottle.

A third party arrived a few days after, and immediately commenced building. In one week they had completed their operations, and at the end of that time thirty nests hung clustered like so many gourds, each having a neck two inches long. On the 27th July, the young were able to follow their parents. They all exhibited the white frontlet, and were scarcely distinguishable in any part of their plumage from the old birds. On the 1st of August, they all assembled near their nests, mounted some three hundred feet in the air, and about 10 o'clock in the morning took their departure, flying in a loose body, in a direction due north. They returned the same evening about dusk, and continued these excursions, no doubt to exercise their powers, until the third, when, uttering a farewell cry, they shaped the same course at the same hour, and finally disappeared. Shortly after their departure, I was informed that several hundreds of their nests were attached to the court-house at the mouth of the Kentucky river. They had commenced building them in 1815. A person likewise informed me, that, along

the cliffs of the Kentucky, he had seen many *bunches*, as he termed them, of these nests attached to the naked shelving rocks overhanging that river.

Being extremely desirous of settling the long-agitated question respecting the migration or supposed torpidity of Swallows, I embraced every opportunity of examining their habits, carefully noted their arrival and disappearance, and recorded every fact connected with their history. After some years of constant observation and reflection, I remarked that among all the species of migratory birds, those that remove farthest from us, depart sooner than those which retire only to the confines of the United States; and, by a parity of reasoning, those that remain later return earlier in the spring. These remarks were confirmed as I advanced towards the south-west, on the approach of winter, for I there found numbers of Warblers, Thrushes, &c. in full feather and song. It was also remarked that the *Hirundo viridis* of WILSON (called by the French of Lower Louisiana *Le Petit Martinet à ventre blanc*) remained about the city of New Orleans later than any other Swallow. As immense numbers of them were seen during the month of November, I kept a diary of the temperature from the 3d of that month, until the arrival of *Hirundo purpurea*. The following notes are taken from my journal, and as I had excellent opportunities, during a residence of many years in that country, of visiting the lakes to which these Swallows were said to resort, during the transient frosts, I present them with confidence.

Nov. 11.—Weather very sharp, with a heavy white frost. Swallows in abundance during the whole day. On inquiring of the inhabitants if this was a usual occurrence, I was answered in the affirmative by all the French and Spaniards. From this date to the 22nd, the thermometer averaged 65°, the weather generally a drizzly fog. Swallows playing over the city in thousands.

Nov. 25.—Thermometer this morning at 30°. Ice in New Orleans a quarter of an inch thick. The Swallows resorted to the lee of the Cypress Swamp in the rear of the city. Thousands were flying in different flocks. Fourteen were killed at a single shot, all in perfect plumage, and very fat. The markets were abundantly supplied with these tender, juicy, and delicious birds. Saw Swallows every day, but remarked them more plentiful the stronger the breeze blew from the sea.

Jan. 14.—Thermometer 42°. Weather continues drizzly. My little favourites constantly in view.

Jan. 28.—Thermometer at 40°. Having seen the *Hirundo viridis* continually, and the *H. purpurea* or Purple Martin beginning to appear, I discontinued my observations.

During the whole winter many of them retired to the holes about the houses, but the greater number resorted to the lakes, and spent the night

among the branches of *Myrica cerifera*, the *Cirier*, as it is termed by the French settlers.

About sunset they began to flock together, calling to each other for that purpose, and in a short time presented the appearance of clouds moving towards the lakes, or the mouth of the Mississippi, as the weather and wind suited. Their aerial evolutions before they alight, are truly beautiful. They appear at first as if reconnoitering the place; when, suddenly throwing themselves into a vortex of apparent confusion, they descend spirally with astonishing quickness, and very much resemble a *trombe* or water-spout. When within a few feet of the *ciriers*, they disperse in all directions, and settle in a few moments. Their twittering, and the motions of their wings, are, however, heard during the whole night. As soon as the day begins to dawn, they rise, flying low over the lakes, almost touching the water for some time, and then rising, gradually move off in search of food, separating in different directions. The hunters who resort to these places destroy great numbers of them, by knocking them down with light paddles, used in propelling their canoes.

FULVOUS OR CLIFF SWALLOW, *Hirundo fulva*, Bonap. Amer. Orn., vol. i. p. 63.

HIRUNDO FULVA, Bonap. Syn. p. 64.

FULVOUS OR CLIFF SWALLOW, *Hirundo fulva*, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 603.

REPUBLICAN OR CLIFF SWALLOW, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. i. p. 353; vol. v. p. 415.

Bill shorter than in the last species; wings of the same length as the tail, which is slightly emarginate. Upper part of head, back, and smaller wing-coverts black, with bluish-green reflections; forehead white, generally tinged with red; loreal space and a band on the lower part of the forehead black; chin, throat, and sides of the neck deep brownish-red; a patch of black on the fore-neck; rump light yellowish-red; lower parts greyish-white, anteriorly tinged with red. Female, similar to the male. Young, dark greyish-brown above, reddish-white beneath.

Male, $5\frac{1}{2}$, 12. Female, $5\frac{4}{12}$, $12\frac{3}{4}$.

Cliff Swallow.
(Nests.)

Audubon, John James. 1840. "The Republican or Cliff Swallow, *Hirundo fulva*, Vieill. [Pl. 47]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 1, 177–180. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319160>.

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