

NESTS OF THE CLIFF-SWALLOW.

CURIOUS BIRDS'-NESTS.



THE cliff swallow is a native of the western parts of the United States of America, and it is only recently, comparatively speaking, that it has ventured within the domains of civilized man.

It is now familiar in different localities of Ohio and Kentucky, and in the western part of New York. Like all the other American swallows, it passes the winter in tropical America, and arrives at its northern breeding-places in April. This species is gregarious in its habits, and numbers construct their symmetrical nests in clusters. At the dawn of day they commence their labours, collecting the mud of which the exterior is formed, and persevere in their work until near mid-day, when they relinquish it for some hours, employing the time in the capture of insects and in aerial gambols. In unsettled countries these birds avail themselves of the sides of rocks under the shelter of overhanging ledges; but in civilized districts they evince a predilection for the abodes of man, building

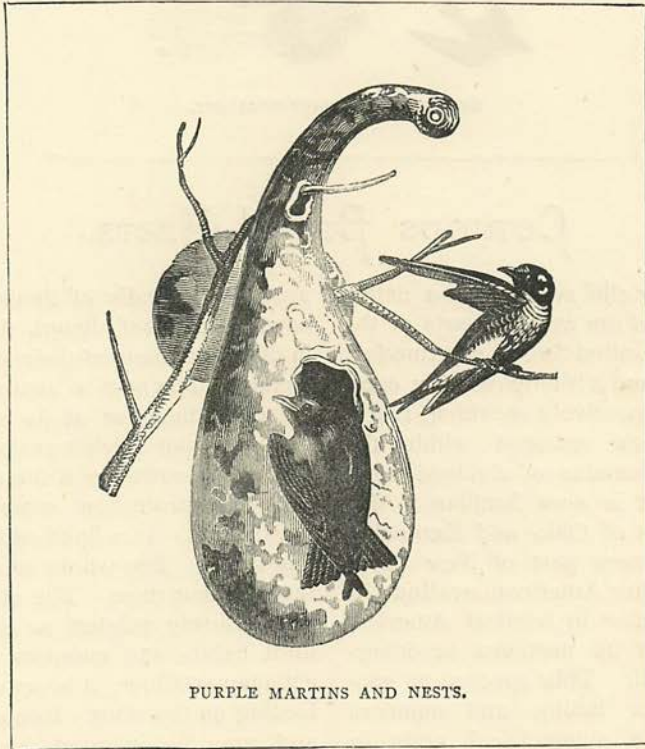
against the walls of houses, under the eaves of the roof, though they have not in the least changed their style of architecture. The nest is hemispherical, five inches in diameter at its attachment to the wall, from which it projects six inches, having the entrance at the end of a short neck-like projection somewhat turned downwards. It is lined with dried grass and straw. The whole is completed in three or four days. The cliff-swallow is more closely related to our martin in form, habits, and manners, than to our chimney-swallow; it is active and rapid, feeding on the wing. Its note is peculiar, and may be imitated by rubbing a moistened cork around the neck of a bottle.

This swallow is characterized by its even tail. Instead of having the lower part of the back white, like our window-swallow or martin, it is of a pale ferruginous tint, as is also the forehead; a narrow black line extends over the bill to each eye; the upper parts generally are glossy violet-black; the breast is pale rufous ash-colour; the under parts dirty white. Length, five inches and

a-half. Eggs, four in number; colour, white, spotted with dusky brown.

"The summer residence of the purple martin," says Wilson, "is universally among the habitations of man, who, having no interest in his destruction, and deriving considerable advantage as well as amusement from his company, is generally his friend and protector. Wherever he comes he finds some hos-

Some people have large conveniences formed for the martins, with many apartments, which are usually fully tenanted and occupied every spring; and in such places particular individuals have been known to return to the same box for several successive years. Even the solitary Indian seems to have a particular respect for this bird. The Choctaws and Chickasaws cut off all the top



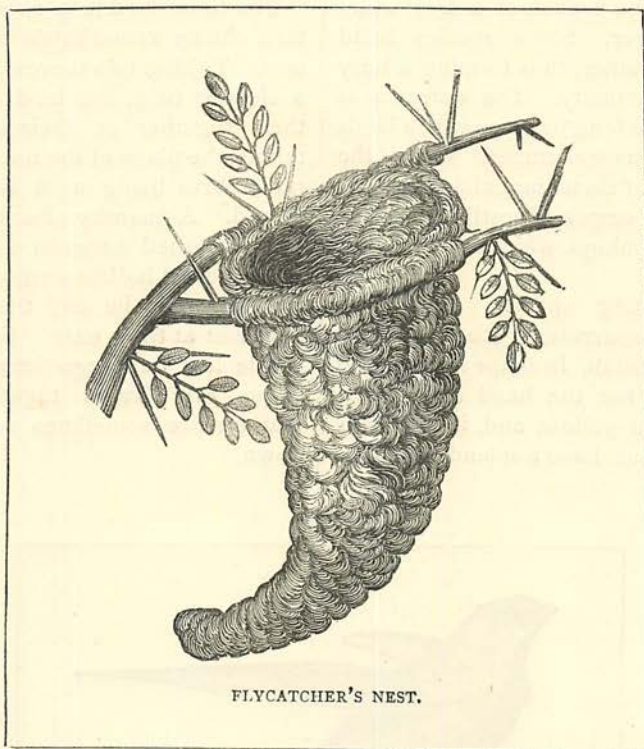
pitiable retreat fitted up for his accommodation and that of his young, either in the projecting wooden cornice, on the top of the roof, or sign-post, in the box appropriated to the blue-bird (*Saxicola sialis*); or, if all these be wanting, in the dove-cot, among the pigeons. In this last case he sometimes takes possession of one tier of the premises, in which not a pigeon dare for a moment set its foot

branches from a sapling near their cabins, leaving the prongs a foot or two in length, on each of which they hang a gourd or calabash, properly hollowed out for their convenience. On the banks of the Mississippi the negroes stick up long canes with the same species of apartment fixed to their tops, in which the martins regularly breed. Wherever I have travelled in this country, I have

with pleasure seen the hospitality of the inhabitants to this favourite bird."

The spotted flycatcher is a small bird of a brownish tint above, with a few dark spots on the top of the head; beneath, dull white; with brown streaks on the throat and breast. This bird arrives in England very regularly in the month of May, and commences building its nest immediately on its arrival. For this

by Atkinson as having occurred in Leeds; the nest was built on the angle of a lamp-post, and the parents succeeded in rearing their young. In the other instance, which is referred to by Mr. Jesse, the nest was made in the ornamental crown on the top of one of the lamps in Portland Place; it contained five eggs, which had been sat upon; and Mr. Yarrell states that he saw the nest, in its



purpose it often selects most singular situations; a pair have been known to build on the head of a garden-rake, which had been accidentally left standing near a cottage; another pair built in a bird-cage; but the most curious instances of caprice in this matter, are those of two pairs of these birds which selected street lamp-posts for the purpose of nidification. One of these is recorded

curious receptacle, at the Office of Woods and Forests. In general, the nest is placed in a hole in a wall, in a fagot-stack, or an out-building; but the branches of trees trained against a wall are sometimes selected for its reception. The nest is cup-shaped, generally composed of moss, and lined with fine grass, sometimes having also feathers and horsehair; it is beautifully made, and

the female is supposed to be the architect. The eggs are four or five in number, of a bluish-white colour, spotted with red.

A bird's-nest, although a work of instinct, is suggestive of care, ingenuity, and industry, in the selection of materials and in its site. Nests vary in beauty and nicety of structure, as well as in the substances of which they are made.

One of the most curious nests is that of the weaver-bird, which is usually suspended from the branch of a tree overhanging a river. Some species build their nests together, thus forming a busy and noisy community. The entrance is at the end of a long passage which leads upwards to a snug chamber. One of the chief designs of these ingenious nests is to secure their eggs and nestlings against snakes and monkeys, which are the birds' great enemies.

An interesting species, called the bottle-nested sparrow, is found in most parts of Hindostan. In shape it resembles our sparrow, but the head and breast are of a bright yellow, and, in the rays of a tropical sun, have a splendid appear-

ance when flying by thousands in a grove of acacias. These nests are made of long grass woven together in the shape of a bottle, and suspended by one end to the extremities of a flexible branch. These nests contain several apartments; in the one the hen sits on the eggs, while another, consisting of a little thatched roof, and covering a perch without a bottom, is occupied by the male bird, who, with his chirping note, cheers his partner during her maternal duties.

The tailor-bird is a sober little creature, chiefly remarkable for its curious nest. Taking two leaves at the end of a slender twig, the bird skilfully sews them together at their edges, its bill taking the place of the needle, and vegetable fibres being used in the place of thread. A quantity of soft cottony down is then pushed between the leaves, and a convenient hollow scraped out in which the eggs may lie and the young birds may rest at their ease. Sometimes, if a single leaf be large enough, its two edges are drawn together. A few feathers are sometimes mixed with the down.

