

= Brazza 's martin =

Brazza 's martin (*Phedina brazzae*) is a passerine bird in the swallow family , *Hirundinidae* . It is 12 cm (4 @. @ 25 in) long with grey @-@ brown upperparts , heavily black @-@ streaked white underparts , and a brownish tint to the breast plumage . The sexes are similar , but juvenile birds have more diffuse breast streaking and reddish @-@ brown edges to the feathers of the back and wings . The song consists of a series of short notes of increasing frequency , followed by a complex buzz that is sometimes completed by a number of clicks .

The range of this species falls within the African countries of Angola , the Republic of the Congo , and the Democratic Republic of the Congo . Nesting in burrows in river banks , it lays a clutch of three white eggs . This bird feeds on flying insects , including termites , and may hunt over rivers or open savanna . It forms mixed flocks with other swallows , but is readily identified by its combination of brown upperparts , streaked underparts and a square tail .

Although this little @-@ known bird had been classified as Data Deficient by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) , it actually appears to be common and widespread , and it has been listed as a species of Least Concern since 2008 . There may be some hunting of this martin for food , but the species does not appear to be facing any serious short @-@ term threats .

= = Taxonomy = =

The Brazza 's martin was first described in 1886 under its current binomial name by French zoologist Émile Oustalet from a specimen obtained at Nganchu in the Ngabé District of what is now the Republic of Congo . The genus name , *Phedina* , is derived from the Greek *phaios* (?????) " brown " and the Italian *rondine* " swallow " . The species name commemorates Italian @-@ born French explorer Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza , later to become governor @-@ general of the French Congo , who collected the type specimen . This species was often called the " Congo martin " , but this invites confusion with the Congo sand martin or Congo martin , *Riparia congica* .

The *Phedina* species are members of the swallow family of birds , and are classed as members of the *Hirundininae* subfamily , which comprises all swallows and martins except the very distinctive river martins . DNA sequence studies suggest that there are three major groupings within the *Hirundininae* , broadly correlating with the type of nest built . These groups are the " core martins " , including burrowing species like the sand martin ; the " nest @-@ adopters " , which are birds like the tree swallow that utilise natural cavities ; and the " mud nest builders " , such as the barn swallow , which build a nest from mud . The *Phedina* species nest in burrows and therefore belong to the " core martins " group .

The genus *Phedina* is thought to be an early offshoot from the main swallow lineage , although the striped plumage of its two species suggests a distant relationship with several streaked African *Hirundo* species . The only other member of the genus is the Mascarene martin *P. borbonica* , although in the past it has sometimes been suggested that Brazza 's martin should be moved to its own genus *Phedinopsis* due to the significant differences in vocalisations and nest type from its relative . The nearest relative of the *Phedina* martins is the banded martin , *Riparia cincta* , which appears not to be closely related to the other members of its current genus and resembles Brazza 's martin in nesting habits and vocalisations . The current Association of European Rarities Committees (AERC) -recommended practice is to move the banded martin to its own genus as *Neophedina cincta* , rather than to merge it into *Phedina* , since the banded martin 's larger size , different bill and nostril shape and non @-@ colonial nesting are differences from the other *Phedina* species .

= = Description = =

The Brazza 's martin is 12 cm (4 @. @ 25 in) long with wings averaging 100 @. @ 5 mm (4 @. @ 4 in) . This small hirundine has grey @-@ brown upperparts with a somewhat darker brown head and white underparts heavily streaked with blackish @-@ brown from the throat to vent . There is a

brownish tint to the breast plumage . The square tail averages 46 @. @ 8 mm (1 @. @ 8 in) long and has white edges to the brown undertail coverts . The flight feathers are blackish @-@ brown and the bill and legs are black . The eyes are dark brown and the black bill averages 8 @. @ 5 mm (0 @. @ 33 in) long . The sexes are similar , but juvenile birds have more diffuse breast streaking and reddish @-@ brown or buff edges to the feathers of the back and wings . This bird has no subspecies .

The song consists of a series of short notes increasing in frequency which are followed by a complex buzz and sometimes completed by a number of clicks . The song becomes increasingly loud , although the final clicks are quite soft . The song is similar to that of the banded martin , and does not resemble the Mascarene martin , suggesting unresolved taxonomic problems . The flight is variously described as heavy , or like that of a sand martin .

Brazza 's martin can be distinguished from most other swallows within its range by the heavy streaking on the underparts . Although the lesser striped swallow also has white underparts with dark streaking , it is larger , has a deeply forked tail and a very different plumage , with dark blue upperparts , a red rump and a chestnut head . Compared to the Mascarene martin , this species is smaller , has a plainer back and finer dashing on the throat and chest , but there is no range overlap .

= = Distribution and habitat = =

The distribution of the Brazza 's martin was initially poorly known , and until 1922 the type specimen in the Paris Museum was the only recorded example of this species . A Father Callewaert then collected 20 martins near Luluabourg (now Kananga) , and this bird is now known to breed in the south of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) , the Republic of the Congo , and in northern Angola . There is one probable sighting from southeast Gabon .

In the breeding season this martin is found near rivers with the steep banks that are needed for the nest burrows . Suitable habitat occurs along lowland tropical rivers like the Congo or rivers with sandbanks in the highlands of Angola . The highland locations have wide grassy riverways running through miombo woodlands , whereas the Congo Basin is tropical forest with over 200 cm (80 in) of rain a year . The lowland habitats are a patchwork of dry , seasonally flooded and permanently wet woodland , and seasonally flooded savanna , and the swamp forests contain trees such as *Symphonia globulifera* , raffia palms and *Mitragyna* species , and the riverbanks are often lined with arrowroot . This martin seems to be able to adapt to open savanna habitats containing *Hymenocardia acida* , in which it will roost overnight when not breeding , and is therefore not heavily dependent on the neighbouring forests as long as the riverine breeding sites survive .

= = Behaviour = =

In a presumed example of courtship behaviour , a male Brazza 's martin perched about 30 cm (1 ft) away from a female and sang for about ten minutes . As it sang , the male leant towards the female , which caused the still @-@ folded wings and tail to rise relative to the body . The Brazza 's martin nests in the vertical banks of forested rivers from July to October , at the end of the dry season but before the river levels are high enough to cause flooding . A small colony of four pairs was recorded breeding near a rocky outcrop on the side of a valley .

The Brazza 's martin nests singly or in loose colonies with sometimes widely separated burrows . The nest is a small heap of soft material such as feathers or dry grass at the end of a typically 50 @-@ cm (20 @-@ in) tunnel . The normal clutch is three white eggs . The eggs measure 18 @. @ 5 x 112 @. @ 5 mm (0 @. @ 73 x 0 @. @ 49 in) and weigh 1 @. @ 5 g (0 @. @ 05 oz) . The incubation and fledging times are unknown , although as with all hirundines the chicks are altricial , hatching naked and blind .

As with other swallows , Brazza 's martin feeds on flying insects , including termites , and may hunt over rivers or open savanna . It can occur in single @-@ species flocks or with other swallows including barn swallows , lesser striped swallows , or rock martins .

= = Status = =

There has been little ornithological research in this part of Africa , and until 2008 the Brazza 's martin was classified as Data Deficient . It was thought to have a much more restricted distribution range , but a 2007 paper presented evidence that extended its known range by 500 km (300 mi) to the north and 175 km (90 mi) southwards , a quadrupling of the area . It has a large range of 402 @, @ 000 km² (155 @, @ 000 sq mi) although the total population is unknown . Its extensive range and apparently stable population means this bird is classed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List .

It is likely that this species is dug out for food by humans , but its small , dispersed colonies in firm soil suggests that it is a less rewarding target than the densely packed sandbank nests of species such as the African river martin and rosy bee @-@ eater . Breeding colonies in river sandbars are liable to flooding , but neither natural causes nor hunting appear to be having a serious impact , and this species seems under no immediate threat . Its ability to use degraded habitats also aids its survival . The Brazza 's martin is not a protected species in Angola , the DRC , or the Republic of Congo .