

Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica

STATUS

Threatened



Endangered



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Species Description

The Barn Swallow is a small (15-18 cm long) songbird with long pointed wings and a deeply forked tail. Its upperparts are cobalt blue, its forehead and throat are a dark reddish-brown, and its underparts are a lighter orangey-brown. There is a partial blue upper breast band across the chest. A row of white spots may be visible on the tail during flight. Males and females are similar in appearance, with males having longer streamers on the tail.

Occurs throughout Nova Scotia. Winters in Central and South America. Has declined by 76% over the last 40 years in Canada.



Population Range

Habitat

Historically this species used caves, crevices, and cliff ledges as nesting sites. They now use mostly artificial structures, including barns, garages, houses, bridges and road culverts and place their nests on surfaces such as beams, ledges, and light fixtures. They select nesting sites in close proximity to open areas such as fields, agricultural lands, lakes, rivers, and wetlands. Open, wet, muddy areas are used to obtain mud for nest construction.



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Barn Swallows are generally observed from April to September, flying low along the ground or water, in search of flying insects.

Interesting Points

- This species breeds throughout Canada and is found in every province and territory but Nunavut. It also occurs on all continents with the exception of Antarctica.
- There are indications that Barn Swallows nested on wooden First Nations dwellings in the early 1800s.
- Year-old birds are likely to come back to the same area they fledged to nest (within 30 km).



Young birds

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Similar Species

Refer to the Bank Swallow (page 29) and Chimney Swift (page 39) pages to learn more about these species. Barn Swallow can be distinguished from other swallows due to their deeply forked tail and orangey-brown underparts.

Tree

Swallow:
Iridescent blue upperparts and bright white underparts. Nests in hollow trees or nest boxes.



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Cliff

Swallow:
Also nests on structures but has a light patch on forehead, light rump, white belly and less forked tail.



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light forehead patch

Threats to Survival

- Habitat loss and degradation (accessible wood structures, open foraging areas).
- Large-scale changes in insect prey (climate change, pesticides).
- Climate change (altered weather patterns, warm then cold snaps in spring).
- Parasitism (ectoparasites that reduce nesting success).
- Human persecution (disturbance or removal of nests).



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Barn Swallow nest

How You Can Help

Report sightings of this species to eBird. Do not disturb birds or nests. If this species shares your property and there is a drought during nest building, spray water in the patches of clay soils they frequent to restore their nest material source. Choose pesticide-free foods and maintain chemical-free properties.



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Gathering mud pellets for nest building

Contacts, Information & Sighting Reports

Contact: Environment Canada (506) 364-5044, www.ec.gc.ca

Info: www.sararegistry.gc.ca, Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas: www.mba-aom.ca

Sighting Reports: eBird.org, 1-866-727-3447 or www.speciestrisk.ca/sightings