

Cliff Swallow

Petrochelidon pyrrhonota

Description 5-6" (13-15 cm). Sparrow-sized. A stocky, square-tailed swallow with pale buff rump. Upperparts dull steel-blue; underparts buff-white; throat dark chestnut; forehead white.

Habitat Open country near buildings or cliffs; lake-shores and marshes on migration.

Nesting 4-6 white eggs in a gourd-shaped structure of mud lined with feathers and placed on a sheltered cliff face or under eaves. Nests in colonies.

Range Breeds from Alaska, Ontario, and Nova Scotia southward through most of United States except Southeast. Winters in tropics.



Voice Constant squeaky chattering and twittering.

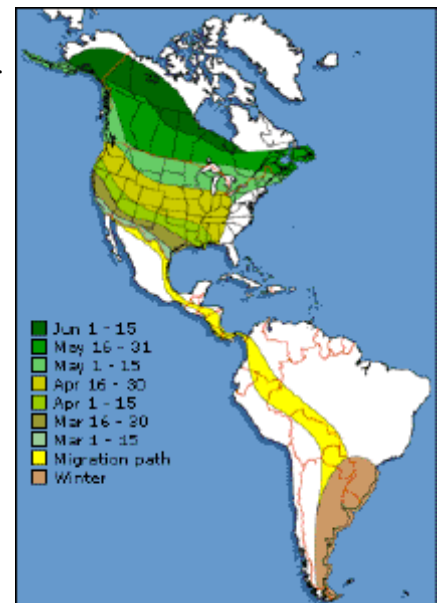
Discussion As its name implies, this swallow originally nested on cliffs. The introduction of House Sparrows was a disaster for these birds, since the sparrows usurp their nests and often cause the swallows to abandon a colony. Long, cold, rainy spells while the young are in the nest also cause widespread mortality since the adults are unable to obtain enough insects.



Migration Info The relatively leisurely migration of these swallows begins in early February, when they begin passing along the eastern slopes of the Andes. They follow the Gulf coast into northern Mexico and then split into two groups. Western populations move rapidly up the Pacific coast, while eastern birds push into the Mississippi River valley and northward.

There is some evidence that individuals that nest together in North American colonies remain together while leading a primarily nomadic existence in South America.

This is the famed swallow of Mission San Juan Capistrano, reputed to arrive each year on exactly March 19 (St. Joseph's Day).



In flight look for square tails, orange throat and rump patch and up close a pale patch on forehead. Listen for squeaky twitters given upon approach to the nest.



Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica

Description 5 3/4-7 3/4" (15-20 cm). Sparrow-sized. Our most familiar swallow, and the only one with a deeply forked tail. Upperparts dark steel-blue, underparts buff, throat and forehead rusty.

Habitat Agricultural land, suburban areas, marshes, lakeshores.

Nesting 4-6 brown-spotted white eggs in a solid cup of mud reinforced with grass, lined with feathers and soft plant material, and placed on a rafter in a building or on a sheltered ledge.



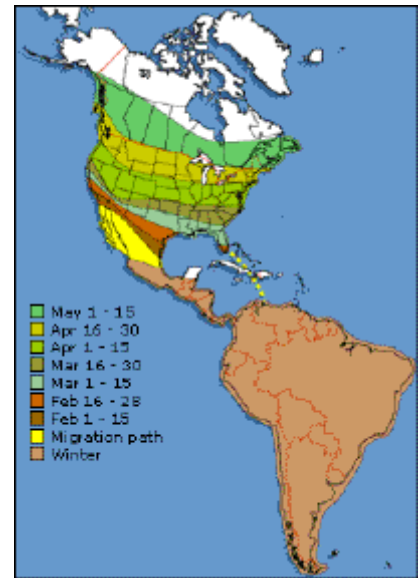
Range Breeds from Alaska east across Canada to Newfoundland and south through all of United States except southern Texas, Gulf Coast, and peninsular Florida. Winters in tropics. Also in Eurasia.

Voice Constant liquid twittering and chattering.

Discussion The great majority of these birds now nest on or in buildings, but originally they used rocky ledges over streams and perhaps attached their nests to tree trunks in the shelter of branches (as do related species in Africa). Barn Swallows perform long migrations; some that breed in North America winter as far south as Argentina. Like other swallows, they migrate by day, often feeding as they travel. They are swift and graceful fliers, and it is estimated that they cover as much as 600 miles (1,000 kilometers) a day in quest of food for their young.



Migration Info The extensive winter range of this species -- from central Mexico to the southern tip of South America -- is somewhat misleading; the bulk of the North American population is believed to winter in the lowlands of eastern South America. Determining the actual whereabouts of any population of Barn Swallows in winter is complicated by several factors: These birds are extremely nomadic, they join huge roosting aggregations, and at any time in nearly any season of the year, one population or another is migrating. During spring migration thousands of these birds may aggregate near bodies of water, particularly during periods of inclement weather.



In Flight watch for a long deeply forked tail, orange throat and forehead. Listen for a bubblier series of twitters and chips.

