

Conservation of Barn Swallows



Barn Swallow adult.



Barn Swallow youngster.

Barn Swallows are very beneficial birds, consuming enormous amounts of flies, aphids, beetles, bees, moths, mayflies, dragonflies, grasshoppers, caterpillars and other insects. Unfortunately, their numbers are declining in New Hampshire and we are studying the reasons why. They are found worldwide and in the western hemisphere, they winter in South America and return to the US in summer to nest. Their annual migration roundtrip takes them 14,000 miles! Barn Swallows like open country and nest in colonies in man-made structures, such as barns and bridges.

Important: Barn swallows, their eggs, and young are **federally** protected and may not be killed. Active nests may not be removed during the summer breeding season.

Timetable

- late April-early May: swallows arrive back in the spring
- early-mid-May: begin nesting (egg laying)
- late May-June: incubation (14-16 days) and feeding of young (17-24 days until first flight)
- mid-July: most swallows leave nesting areas but late nesters may stay through July
- late July-August: swallows migrate out of New Hampshire

Please help by allowing Barn Swallows to nest in barns and other structures on your land. They are a natural means of insect control. One bird can eat up to 6,000 flying insects per day! You may remove the old nests after the birds have left. Remember to leave building doors or windows open during nesting season.

What to do about droppings? Swallow parents remove the droppings until the young are about 12 days old. Problems with droppings last only about a week until the young leave the nest. You can put down newspaper or a plastic sheet beneath their nests. Use an old sheet that's easily moveable to cover something like the family car. You can install a board below the nest to collect droppings. Put up nest boxes or a nesting shelf to help entice them away from areas where you would rather not have them nesting. You will also probably need to cover their favorite nesting spots so they cannot access them.



Barn Swallow nest box, photo by Jeremy Phillips.

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