



Swallow CORE Volunteer Packet 2013

Welcome to Project Swallow CORE! Thank you for helping us collect important information on New Hampshire's colony nesting swallows. These amazing "aerial insectivores" are declining. In 2010, New Hampshire Audubon started the Swallow CORE project to collect current information on the statewide distribution of breeding colonies, and track their size and nesting success. This information will help us to determine their conservation needs. You can find more details on the project and each species of swallow at: <http://www.nhbirdrecords.org/bird-conservation/swallow-core.htm>

Who can help? Anyone! The directions have been designed to be easy for any bird enthusiast to use. Participants can include everyone from families to scout troops to experienced birders.

What swallows are being studied? The Swallow CORE project is monitoring these four species:

Barn Swallow	Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow	Purple Martin

What do I need?

- Binoculars
- Field Guide
- Swallow CORE forms (included in this packet)
- Pencil
- Map (or GPS) to identify the location of the site you are observing

What is the time commitment? This is entirely up to you: it may be as little as 10 minutes, or as long as you would like. You can make one visit or many visits. The amount of time you observe depends on how long it takes you to record the required information.

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NOTE: Word versions of each form are available on the web site if you would like to fill them out on your computer. To receive Word forms via e-mail, send a request to: SwallowCore@nhaudubon.org

Thank you for your time and effort in helping us learn about New Hampshire's swallows! We could not do this project without you. Please don't hesitate to contact us with your questions:

Project Swallow CORE: Project Leader, Becky Suomala,
bsuomala@nhaudubon.org
603-224-9909 x309



First Colony Visit (one occasion)

Make your first visit to a colony. This can be an incidental observation (you saw the colony while camping), a deliberate search, a visit to a known site such as your barn, or a visit to a historically active site on the registry.

A. How to find a site. Choose from the three options below:

- Monitor a local colony you already know about.
- Search for an active colony in your area.
You can locate colonies by knowing where to look or what behaviors to look for. By canoe or kayak, look for Bank Swallow colonies in the riverbanks of large rivers (e.g., Connecticut, Merrimack, etc.). Current information on their locations will help fill gaps in our knowledge. For Cliff and Barn Swallows, look in the area for barns, bridges, or other structures that might host the colony. If you see birds foraging over open areas in June or early July, it's almost certain there's a colony nearby. Watch the birds more closely to see where they may be going.
- Choose a colony from the Swallow CORE colony registry and visit the site.
New Hampshire Audubon has a list of known colonies on the Swallow CORE web site: <http://www.nhbirdrecords.org/bird-conservation/swallow-core.htm> (click on registry at the bottom of the page). The registry includes information on the location and the year the colony was last known to be active. Some colonies on the list may no longer be active. This is especially likely for sites in southern NH and those that haven't been checked in several years. (Note the year in the registry.) Checking on these colonies is an important part of Swallow CORE, and volunteers are encouraged to check these sites to see if they are still being used by swallows. If not, that information is valuable, so be sure to report your findings with a zero for the number of birds.

B. What to record.

- Fill out the "**Site Registration and First Observation Form**", whether or not birds are found.
- Report any active breeding colonies of the four swallow species: Barn Swallow, Bank Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Purple Martin.
- When you are checking colony sites, be sure to collect all the information in the Site Registration Form needed to register the colony.
- Once you have filled out a "**Site Registration and First Observation Form**" for a particular colony, you do not need to fill out another one of these forms. Use the "**Site Monitoring Form**" for subsequent visits to the same site.



C. Site Registration and First Observation Form Instructions

1. Site name – keep it short and descriptive

Giving the colony a short but descriptive name is a good start. For example, “my house” or, “the Smith barn,” are too general. An address can work, but is best saved for the more detailed site description. A good hybrid approach might be to use something like “Indian Stream Rd.” for sites without clear identifying features, and “NH Statehouse” for those that are a little more obvious (not that there’s a swallow colony on the Statehouse). Don’t forget to include the name of the town.

2. Site location details

Be as specific as needed, and include the full address. Describe which side of the building (such as a barn) the nests are on, and so forth. This form will be the record on which all subsequent study of a given colony will be based, so please bear in mind that someone else may need to check this colony in the future, and that they may not be familiar with the area. The more detail you can provide about the site, the better.

3. Geographic location of the colony

It is equally important to get an accurate set of latitude and longitude coordinates for the colony. You can do this by several means:

1. Use a hand-held GPS receiver to take a reading in the field, if you have one.
2. Use Google Earth to plot your location and copy down the latitude and longitude coordinates provided by Google Earth.
3. Attach a map with the site marked and we will find the coordinates.
4. Provide an accurate description of the location (including a street address if possible) so that we can find it on a map.

4. Identify the species nesting in the colony

Check the species of swallow nesting in the colony. In rare cases, a colony may contain multiple species (such as a Northern Rough-winged Swallow among Bank Swallows, or a couple of Barn Swallows with Cliff Swallows), and in such cases be sure to check both species on the form. This will help us track the changing composition of each colony.

5. Colony substrate

This is the type of structure where the nests are located.

6. Reporter Information

Please include all “**Reporter Information**” so that we can reach you, if we have questions.

7. Record your first observations

The form includes a place to record your first observation. Please record as much detail as you can, such as the number of birds seen, number of nests and nestlings, and fledglings. The form provides specific details on what to record.

The **Site Registration and First Observation Form** needs to be filled out just once for a site. All subsequent visits, no matter what year, may be recorded on the Site Monitoring Form.

Site Registration & First Observation Form

Site Name: _____ **Year:** _____

(Use a descriptive site name that helps locate the site for future observers.)

Town: _____ **Latitude:** _____ **Longitude:** _____

(For lat./long. use either 43.375° or 43° 22' 30", or attach a map with the site marked.)

Site Location details (e.g., address, directions, description, etc.- *the more specific the better*):

Species: place an 'X' next to all the species at this site

Purple Martin Bank Swallow N. Rough-winged Swallow
 Cliff Swallow Barn Swallow No Swallows

Colony substrate: choose one by marking with an 'X' and provide additional details if needed

Sand or gravel pit River Bank Purple Martin house
 Natural cliff Bridge
 Other exposed bluff (please give details) _____
 House, barn, or other structure (please specify type) _____

Reporter Information (the person filling out the form):

Name: _____

Address: _____

e-mail: _____ phone: _____

Please Check:

I plan to make future observations at this site This is a one-time observation
 I would like to enter future observations in eBird Yes No

The First Observation (Use the Site Monitoring Form for subsequent observations.)

Date	Species	Number of birds seen	Number of Nests ¹	Number of occupied nests ¹	Stage of Nesting (See below) ²	Other Notes

Additional Comments

¹In cases where you cannot make an actual count of nests, write N/A in this and the "occupied nests" column, and write the estimated number of adults in the "Other Notes" column. ² **Stage of nesting:** Off-season, Building, Incubation, Nestling, Fledged, Departed (see volunteer packet for definitions.)

Return this form to: Swallow CORE, c/o Rebecca Suomala, NH Audubon, 84 Silk Farm Rd., Concord, NH 03301, **or** submit this form via e-mail to: SwallowCore@nhaudubon.org. E-mail us for a Word version of this form.



Regular Colony Monitoring

Though optional, **it is very valuable to monitor a site regularly during the nesting season.** In general, the more visits, the better. *Reports from a single visit are valuable, but we encourage observers to make periodic visits to record the number of nests and collect additional data on breeding behavior and success.*

A. Site Monitoring Instructions

- Use the **Site Monitoring Form** only if a **Site Registration and First Observation Form** has already been filled out. The **Site Monitoring Form** is for all visits after the first visit.
- Record detailed observations of swallow activity at a colony of one or more of these species: Barn Swallow, Bank Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Purple Martin.
- Try to check the colony at least once a week from approximately May 1, through the time the young fledge and the colony departs. However, information from single or occasional visits is still valuable.
- Minimize disturbance by watching from a distance. If the swallows squawk at you and dive close to your head, *you are too close to the colony.*

Can I submit my observations via eBird?

Once you have filled out your **Site Monitoring Form**, you may enter your observations in eBird (www.ebird.org/nh), but please:

- enter the sightings under your own eBird account
- share each checklist with SwallowCore@nhaudubon.org (user name: swallowcore).
- **send us your Site Monitoring Form** just the same – do NOT rely on just eBird to submit your observations. We have found that critical information is often missing.

You do not have to enter your observations via eBird if you prefer not to.

Please e-mail SwallowCore@nhaudubon.org if you would like information on how to use eBird.



B. What to Record on the Site Monitoring Form

1. Total number of birds and nests (both old and new nests).
2. Number of actively occupied nests – look for those with some sign of current activity such as new mud, rebuilt sides, or holes without debris or spider webs. Early in the spring (“Off-Season” below) you will not yet have active nests.
3. Counting swallows vs. counting nests: Sometimes it can be difficult to count the number of nests if the colony is inaccessible (e.g., under a major highway bridge, on private land, etc.). If efforts to access the colony are unsuccessful, it is still important to get an idea of how many birds are nesting there. In such cases, counting or estimating the number of birds flying around the colony is a good surrogate. On the **Site Monitoring Form**, record such information in the “**Number of Birds Seen**” column, give more detail in the “**Other Notes**” column, if possible, and write “**N/A**” in the columns for number of nests.
4. Number of young (to the extent possible) – for large colonies this is not possible, but for a few nests you may be able to count the number of young in open-nesting species.

5. Stage of nesting:

Off-Season – spring birds have arrived and are flying around the colony and perhaps engaged in courtship but not actively nest building yet.

Nest Building – adults are bringing in nesting material and building or re-furbishing nests.

Incubation – watch for an adult sitting quietly on the nest. For cavity nesters, watch for one adult to come in and change places with the other adult.

Nestlings – watch for signs of young birds such as adults bringing food to the nest, frequent visits to the nest by both adults, adult carrying a fecal sac (white pouches of a young bird’s poop) from the nest, cheeping noise from the nest when adults approach, young birds at the nest hole, etc.

Fledged – “the colony is empty”! Young birds may still be nearby being fed by the adults but there is no activity at the nest itself.

Departed – the nesting season is over and all birds have left the colony.

6. Record the presence of any species nesting in the colony that are not swallows. For example House Sparrows may use Cliff Swallow nests and European Starlings may nest in Purple Martin houses.
7. If you entered your observations in eBird, remember to:
 - share all checklists with SwallowCore@nhaudubon.org (user name: swallowcore).
 - **return your Site Monitoring Form** to Swallow CORE – please do NOT rely on just eBird to submit your observations. We have found that critical information is often missing.

