



Purple Martin
by Pam Hunt

Swallow CORE Newsletter Spring 2012

At long last, some news from Swallow CORE! I know you haven't heard anything from Swallow CORE since last spring and I appreciate your patience. Hillary Chapman provided welcome support for the project early last year, but left to further her education, and she has been sorely missed. It wasn't until we found a new Project Assistant, Yvonne Beran (see below), that Swallow CORE began to get back on its feet. Yvonne has been making great progress, but we're still getting caught up, so we both appreciate your continued patience. We hope to be back on track by the time the swallows start nesting this year!

Thanks to everyone who watched a colony last year. If you haven't sent in your forms from 2011, please do that right away. Yvonne has almost finished updating the registry, and eBird, and we hope we haven't missed anything.

We'll be in touch by e-mail about the upcoming season to find out who will be watching again this year, so please watch for new forms, and an updated registry.

We are grateful for funding to support this project from the Charles Blake Fund of the Nuttall Ornithological Club. The NH Fish and Game Department also helped to establish this program.

Thanks for all your help as we get this fledgling program off the ground.

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Welcome Yvonne

We are delighted to welcome Yvonne Beran as the new volunteer Project Assistant for Swallow CORE. Yvonne has been busy compiling, organizing, and entering the 2011 data, which is a challenging task seven months after the field season. Some of you have already heard from her with questions, and we both really appreciate your responses. Yvonne will be corresponding more with volunteers as we get ready for the Spring 2012 field season. If you want to reach her, please e-mail her at: swallowcore@nhaudubon.org.

Swallow CORE website: <http://nhbirdrecords.org/bird-conservation/swallow-core.htm>

Looking Ahead to 2012



Barn Swallow
by Pam Hunt

The swallows will be returning before we know it. The first arrivals of the four Swallow CORE species are usually reported from the southern part of the state in mid- to late April, but they won't be settling down to breed until May (and sometimes June). As I write this, we are having record warmth, and the Tree Swallows (not monitored by Swallow CORE) are back extremely early! We will be e-mailing observers the forms to use for the 2012 field observations.

Should I use eBird or Fill out Forms?

We are still having trouble using eBird as a data entry system. The information we want for Swallow CORE doesn't match up with the information fields in eBird. For example, eBird asks you to record the number of birds, but there's no designated spot for number of nests, and people don't always remember to put that information in the eBird "Comments" field. We're trying to figure out the best way to work this out, so that we get all the information we need for swallow monitoring. Experience from 2011 is showing us that it's critical for volunteers to fill out our monitoring forms. **Please be sure to record your information from your site visits on the forms we send out and mail, or e-mail them back to us.** It makes a huge difference.

Do I need to Fill Out a Site Registration Form?

If there is already a Site Registration Form for a particular colony, you do not need to fill one out again. Yvonne has been working hard to update the nest registry, and that information will now be included, so it will be easy for you to check whether you need to fill out a form. New colonies will always need a form, but we also do not have Site Registration Forms for most of the historic colonies. We'll e-mail the updated registry to everyone and also put it on the web site. If you're in doubt, please fill out a registration form – it may add to our information about a site.

Historic Sites Need Checking

There are a lot of historic colonies that we have no information on – some of which were large colonies. Many of these are Bank Swallow colonies on the Merrimack and Connecticut Rivers, but are best viewed from a boat on the river. If you're interested in doing some paddling, and watch out for swallows as well, this would be a great way to do both. Some of the sites in question are as follows:

Merrimack River bank at Boscawen
Merrimack River at sod farm, Canterbury
Merrimack River, SPNHF Conservation Area, Concord
Connecticut River, Cornish
Connecticut River below Vernon Dam, Hinsdale
Connecticut River, Orford
Connecticut River at N. Walpole

Other large historic colonies that are priorities for checking are:

Bank Swallow sites:

Souhegan River at Amherst
Pemigewasset River near Rt. 175A, Holderness
Route 3A, Hooksett
Berlin Airport, Milan
North of Barnet Bridge, Monroe
Baker River, Rumney
Pemigewasset River, Old Rt. 3A, Sanbornton



Bank Swallow
by Jason Lambert

Cliff Swallow sites:

Pulsifer's Barn, Bog Road, Campton
Chatham Center, Chatham
Shaker Bridge, Enfield
Dartmouth Riding Center, Etna
Red barn on Rt. 4, Mascoma village
Metallak Road/Partridge Cabins, Pittsburg
Tabor Road, Pittsburg
Govoni's barn, Route 3A, Plymouth
Hunkin's Barn, Bridgewater Hill Rd., Plymouth
Diamond Ledge Road, Sandwich



Cliff Swallow
by Pam Hunt

Monitoring Bank Swallow Nests

Volunteer, GG Lily sent some excellent photos that illustrate Bank Swallow nests. Each Bank Swallow pair excavates a hole in a steep bank and there are usually several pairs (to hundreds) in the same bank. Photo #1 shows a bank with Bank Swallow holes.



Photo #1:
Bank Swallow nest holes at a Surry gravel pit
in 2011.
Photo by GG Lily.



Photo #2:

The nest material showing in this hole indicates that it is not a Bank Swallow. It may be a House Sparrow. Photo taken by GG Lily at the Surry gravel pit in 2011.

However, Photo #2 with all the nesting material sticking out is **not** a Bank Swallow. Bank Swallows tunnel in at least 15" so you do not see any nesting material sticking out - all you see is the hole. Photo #2 is more likely a House Sparrow. I don't know if we have records of House Sparrows in Bank Swallow colonies but they do nest in cavities and will kick out other birds (sometimes killing them). House Sparrows will also take over Cliff Swallow nests, and you can recognize when they do from all the nest material that is visible. Belted Kingfishers also nest in banks, but there will only be a single pair in a bank with one nest hole that is noticeably larger than the swallows' holes.

The next question is, how to count the nests. Bank Swallows excavate more burrows than they actually use, so you can't tell the size of the colony by the number of holes in the bank – you have to watch for activity at the holes. The first thing to count is the number of Bank Swallow nest holes in total and record that on your form. Then try to count the number of swallows flying around and record that. This at least gives some basic information. The final step takes a little time. Watch for birds going to and from each nest hole. If there are birds going in and out, then this is an active nest. When birds are nest building or feeding young this is easy to see. When birds are incubating there is much less activity at the nest hole and it can take quite a bit of time to tell which ones are active. The evening may be a better time to watch but we haven't checked that out, so please share any advice you have from personal experience. It can be very helpful to make a quick, hand drawn map of the colony showing the nest holes, and then mark each hole as you see activity at it.

Bank Swallows begin courtship and burrow excavation within two weeks of arrival and competition for burrows at large colonies is intense. They typically lay five eggs, and both parents take turns incubating. Incubation is most likely to be in late May or early June in New Hampshire. The eggs hatch after 15 days, and the young birds typically leave the nest in 20-23 days after hatching. Bank Swallows have only one brood (as best as is known), but if a nest is destroyed early on, they will try again. That means there can be late nesters that are at a very different stage of nesting than a colony that is "on time" – especially in gravel pits where banks often get destroyed. Most Bank Swallows are through nesting and leave their colonies in mid-July, so the window of observation is very short.

The final step in monitoring is to figure out how many nests are successful. This requires a visit to the colony when the young are being fed. It may be easiest just before they leave the nest when the young can be seen sitting at the mouth of the holes. Counting Bank Swallows takes patience, and a second observer can be helpful.

Don't worry if you can't make multiple visits to a colony, or have trouble counting. Do your best to count what you can see, and make estimates of numbers of active holes. If you can only get to a colony once, that's fine. All observations are helpful. Sometimes just knowing swallows are there is more information than we had before.