

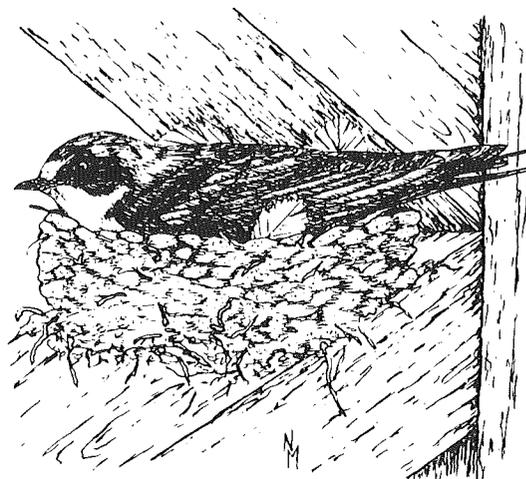
Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica

The Barn Swallow, like the Bank Swallow, is a widely distributed Holarctic species whose Western Hemisphere population winters in South America. The eastern North American population breeds from Labrador and Ontario south to the Gulf Coast. Thompson (1853) wrote that Barn Swallows were widely distributed in Vermont, and that they were "better known than either of the other species." Perkins and Howe (1901) stated that they were common summer residents. Many people who are not otherwise interested in birds eagerly await the first Barn Swallow of the spring.

Barn Swallows are birds of the open country—farms, fields, marshes, and lakes—with nearby habitation. Their original nesting sites, before Europeans settled this continent, were located in caves, in crevices, or beneath overhangs on rocky cliffs (Bent 1942). Such sites are still used, but the species has adapted to using man-made structures for nesting. DeGraaf et al. (1980) concluded that such man-made structures as barns now represent a critical habitat requirement. Barn Swallows nest singly or in colonies. In New York, Snapp (1976) determined that colony size increased in proportion to the size of the barn or other structure and/or the number of entry sites.

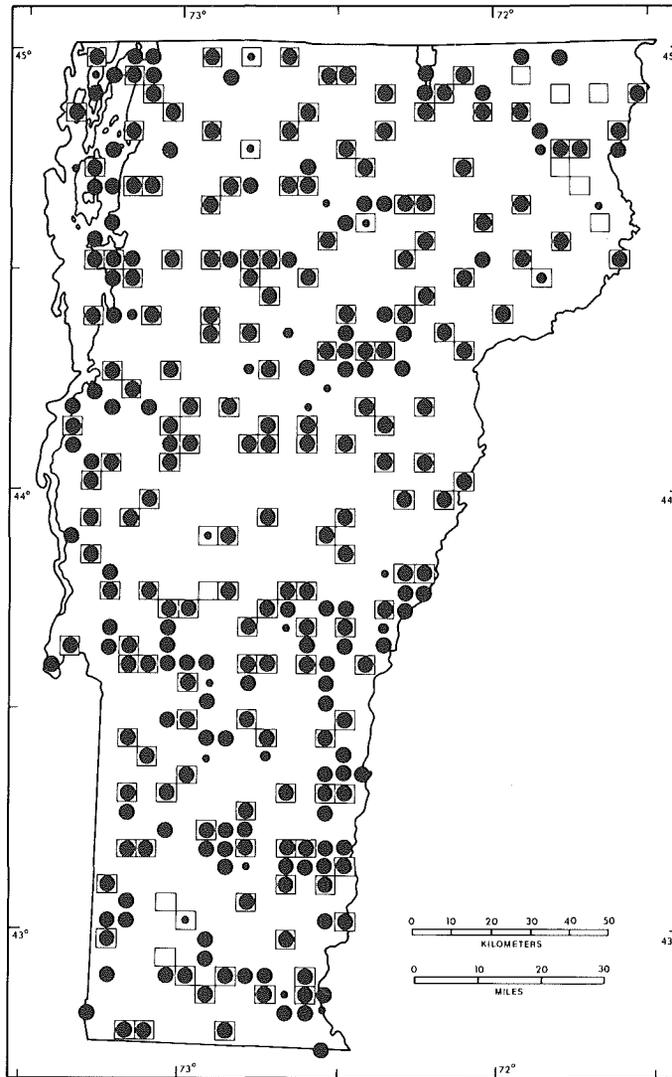
Barn Swallows usually arrive in Vermont from mid to late April (April 10 is an early date), though in some cold, wet springs they may not appear until the first of May. Like many birds, they arrive first in the major valleys (Connecticut River valley and southern Lake Champlain valley) where plants and insects emerge somewhat earlier than in other sections of Vermont. In late July, after the breeding season, Barn Swallows begin to collect in large numbers on wires and trees and in marshes as they prepare to depart for their wintering grounds. They are on the move during August and early September; occasionally individuals may be seen later. Hawk watchers see them moving in groups down the ridges.



Because the Barn Swallow nests most frequently inside buildings, it is one of the easiest breeding birds to confirm; most Atlas Project workers found nests with young. This species was confirmed nesting in all seven physiographic regions; the few areas where it was not found in the Northeast Highlands and the southern Green Mountains were probably in heavy woods at high elevations.

The nest, built of mud bonded with grass and lined with soft grasses and feathers, is plastered against a vertical or horizontal surface; it may be placed under bridges or in barns, sheds, or other old buildings that have openings large enough to permit the swallows to enter and leave. The clutch of 4 to 5 white eggs, variably marked with reddish brown spots, is incubated 16 to 23 days by both parents (Harrison 1975). Young leave the nest at 18 to 23 days, and remain with their parents for 11 days after leaving the nest (Terres 1980). The parents usually raise a second brood. Vermont nesting information includes 8 reports of birds seen building their nests from May 8 to June 19; 59 reports of nests with eggs from May 20 to August 3; 86 reports of nests with young from June 1 to August 27; and 33 reports of fledglings from June 25 to August 25.

The Barn Swallow's calls are described as "a series of energetic, bubbly, twittering notes at different pitches; liquid, distinctive, and not melodious"; and as "a soft 'wit' or



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 170 (95%)

Possible breeding: 5 (3.0% of total)

Probable breeding: 1 (0.6% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 164 (96.4% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	31	100	18.2
Green Mountains	51	94	30.0
North Central	19	100	11.2
Northeast Highlands	10	63	6.0
East Central	19	100	11.2
Taonic Mountains	16	100	9.4
Eastern Foothills	24	100	14.0

'kwit kwit'' (Pough 1946). These birds are often seen skimming low over lakes and other waterways and over cultivated fields in pursuit of flying insects. Like other birds that feed on flying insects, Barn Swallows are probably vulnerable to unseasonably cold weather in the spring, and some may starve during prolonged cold spells (although this has not been documented).

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