

Bank Swallow

Riparia riparia

The Bank Swallow (known as the Sand Martin in Great Britain) is a widely distributed Holarctic species, breeding in temperate parts of the Northern Hemisphere and wintering in the tropics. In North America, the species breeds from Alaska, northwestern Canada, central Quebec, and southern Labrador, south to southern California, southern Texas, Tennessee, and Virginia (AOU 1983). The Bank Swallow winters in northern South America.

Bank Swallows are generally found in open areas, most often near water. These birds nest exclusively in vertical banks of sand, clay, and sandy loam. Earthen banks seldom remain sufficiently steep for nesting unless their bases are being constantly cut away by water or human activity. Sites used include riparian cut-banks, sand and gravel pits, and such transient sites as mounds of stockpiled sand for winter use at town highway garages. The Bank Swallow is highly colonial; larger colonies may contain more than 100 pairs, and most colonies contain between 30 and 50 pairs. Estimates of colony size based on burrow counts are usually inaccurate because not all burrows are in use in a colony at a given time. The species occupies and abandons colonies regularly because of the transient nature of nesting sites.

The Bank Swallow is a conspicuous aerial forager with a distinctive husky voice. Once Bank Swallows are known to be in an area, a careful check of banks and borrow pits may lead to breeding confirmations. The species tends to forage several kilometers away from colonies and may have been recorded as possible breeders in some atlas blocks where their presence was for feeding rather than breeding. In more than 80% of all breeding confirmations active nests were located.

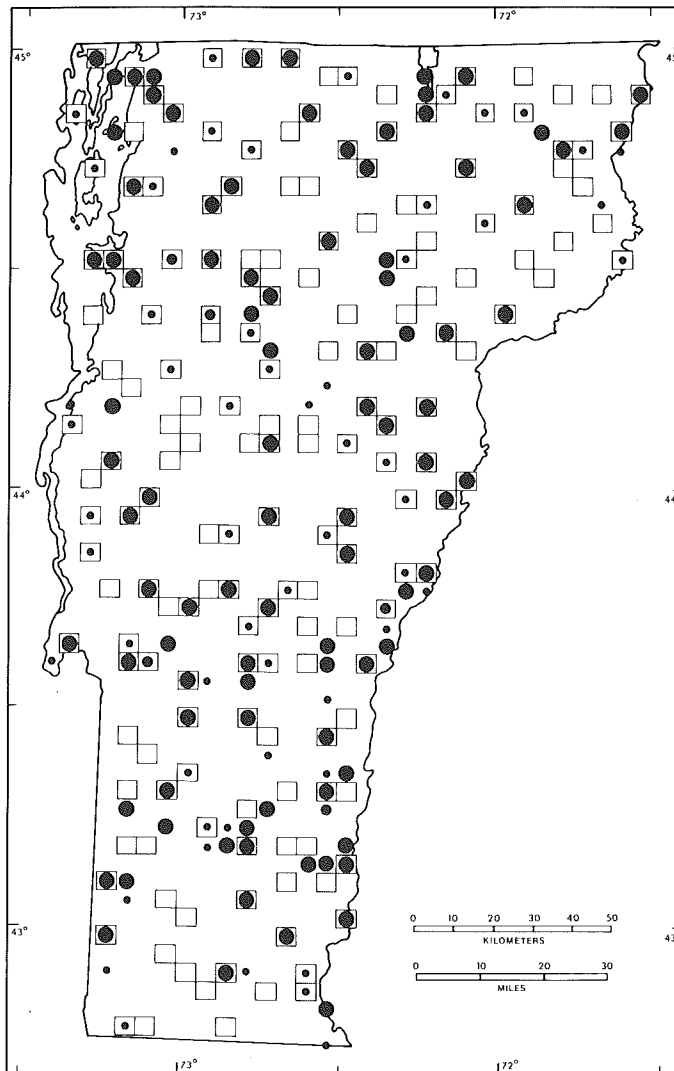
At many colony sites in Vermont Bank Swallows do not appear until May. In most years a few arrive in late April; the range of arrival dates over the last decade runs from April 12 to May 2 (RVB, Spring 1973-83).



Breeding behavior starts within a week of arrival. Bank Swallows dig their own burrows, and often reuse burrows from previous years. Burrows are 38.1-119.4 cm (15-47 in) deep (Harrison 1975); tunnel depth varies with soil compaction and texture (Petersen 1955). The nest is a pile of grasses and rootlets to which a lining of feathers is added during incubation.

Bank Swallow eggs are pure white, and number from 2 to 6 per clutch, with an average of about 5 (Petersen 1955). Seven dates for eggs in Vermont range from May 18 to July 10. The incubation period lasts about 15 days (Petersen 1955). Six nestling dates for Vermont range from June 16 to July 6, and egg dates indicate that earlier and later dates are probable. The nestling period is long, averaging 22 to 23 days (Petersen 1955; Turner and Bryant 1979). Two reported dates for dependent young for Vermont are June 28 and July 20. The young remain dependent on their parents for food for about 5 days after fledging (Turner and Bryant 1979). The autumn migration begins in mid to late July and peaks in August. Bank Swallows are scarce in Vermont by September and gone by midmonth (RVB, Fall 1973-83).

The Bank Swallow's distribution is restricted by the availability of suitable nest sites. The species was recorded in 60% of the priority blocks, and the distribution is



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 108 (60%)

Possible breeding: 38 (35% of total)

Probable breeding: 4 (4% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 66 (61% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	26	84	24.0
Green Mountains	29	54	27.0
North Central	11	58	10.1
Northeast Highlands	7	44	6.5
East Central	14	74	13.0
Taconic Mountains	9	56	8.3
Eastern Foothills	12	50	11.1

noticeably clumped and patchy even when the clumping of priority blocks is taken into account. In the East Central region and Champlain Lowlands the species occurred in 74% and 84% of the priority blocks, respectively. The latter area contains more available habitat and more suitable soil for colonies than do other regions. The distribution correlates somewhat with the valleys of such rivers as the Connecticut, Waits, and West. There is also a marked north-south pattern of occurrence in the Valley of Vermont and along the eastern edge of the main ridge of the Green Mountains.

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