

BARN SWALLOW

Hirundo rustica



Physical characteristics



The barn swallow measures 15 to 18 cm long and has a wingspan of 29 to 32 cm. It has a characteristic metallic-blue upperside and forked tail, a light brown or rust-coloured underside, and a chestnut throat and forehead. It can also be distinguished by its pointed wings.



Diet



The barn swallow's diet consists of flies, locusts, dragonflies, beetles, bees, wasps, moths, and other insects.

Habitat



Most individuals of this species build their nests on wooden structures such as barns, sheds, bridges, overpasses, culverts, and houses. Multiple pairs will sometimes nest in the same place. Colonies generally contain around 10 pairs.



Periods of vulnerability



- The nesting period is from late April to September. Barn swallows start building their nests 5 to 14 days after arriving at a nest site and can have up to two broods in a single nesting season.
- The first broods are produced around mid-May. Egg incubation lasts 12 to 17 days, and nestlings fledge 18 to 23 days after hatching.
- The bird then migrates to Central or South America.

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Threats



- Habitat degradation due to intensification of agriculture.
- Habitat loss, particularly through the destruction of old farm buildings.
- Reduced populations of the flying insects barn swallows eat at all stages of development due to pesticide use.



Sustainable practices



- For farm buildings:
 - From the start of egg-laying season until the young leave the nest (18 to 23 days after hatching), leave an opening in the building of at least 20 cm in case any barn swallows are nesting inside.
 - If possible, avoid storing machinery and materials within 2 m of nests to prevent cats or other potential predators from getting to them.
 - Retain or add wood cladding to the upper walls inside buildings to facilitate nest building.
- Create or enhance small wetlands or ponds to encourage the presence of insects and provide mud for nest building.
- Preserve old buildings and other structures where possible to increase the availability of nesting sites and reduce competition with other species.
- Maintain pastures and graze livestock more often to attract the insects on which barn swallows feed.

- As of 2023, **threatened** species listed on Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*
- No recovery program under the Act, but COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on the Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) in Canada: publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2022/eccc/cw69-14/CW69-14-629-2021-eng.pdf

Sources

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