

Bank Swallow (BANS)

Riparia riparia

Description

Bank Swallows are the smallest swallow in North America (~12 cm long). Like other swallows, they have short legs, a short bill, and relatively long, pointed wings. Bank Swallows are grayish brown on their head, back, rump, and tail, with darker brown on the outer parts of the wings. They have a white throat that wraps around dark cheeks, and a pure white underside, except for the contrasting brown breast band, which can extend to the belly in a sharp spike. When they are perched, a notch in the tail is visible. There is no visible difference between males and females. Juveniles are distinguished from adults by the buff (brownish yellow) edging on their upperparts and a buffy pink wash on their throat. Hatchlings have long down with gray-white tufts on the top of their head, but are unlikely to be seen as they live only in the nest burrow.

Known and potential breeding habitat

Bank Swallows breed in burrows excavated in vertical banks near open habitats where they forage for small flying insects. In Newfoundland, evidence of breeding has been observed between 13 May and 7 August. Breeding has been confirmed in coastal regions of western Newfoundland (Codroy Valley, Barachois Brook, Stephenville, eastern Port au Port Peninsula, Cow Head, and just north of Gros Morne National Park) and riverine habitats (north of Deer Lake and in the Codroy Valley).

Detection Tips

Habitat

Bank Swallows nest colonially in excavated burrows in vertical banks composed of soft, fine substrate, such as lake and ocean bluffs, streams/riverbanks, sand and gravel pits, roadcuts, piles of sand/soil, or similar sites. Breeding sites are often located near water in open terrestrial habitats with abundant insect prey such as grasslands, meadows, pastures, agriculture cropland, and wetlands. Bank Swallows are rarely found in forests.

Vocalization

Males sing while flying, at the nest, and during courtship. Both sexes sing during pair formation and to guard their nest/mate. Songs are described as a constant, buzzy, harsh, rapid chattering. These songs vary in intensity, from soft twittering between a pair, to louder and harsher songs when disputing with other individuals. Calls are often given during

Photo By: Denise McIsaac



Open/Meadow



COSEWIC Ranking:
Threatened



NL Designation:
Threatened



Martins & Swallows

Photo By: Darroch Whitaker





Photo By: Denise McIsaac

flight and are a short, dry, scratchy “chirr” or two-syllable “tschr tschr”.

Behaviour

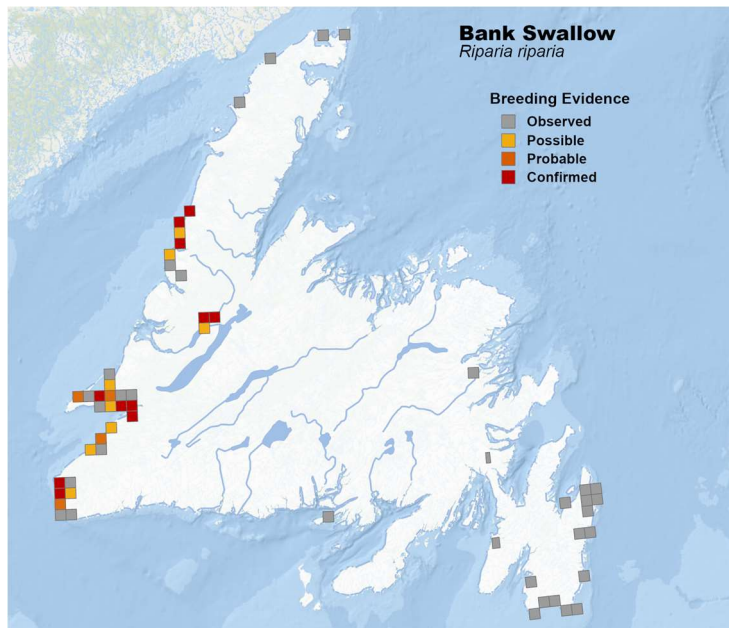
Bank Swallows are a colonial species and are often found both nesting and foraging together in numbers ranging from several pairs to a few thousand (avg. < 50 pairs). At breeding sites, males excavate burrows with their bills, wings, and feet until burrows are about 30 cm deep. Males attempt to attract females by singing and flying circles around the site, landing on the entrance, and flashing their throat patches until a mate is attracted. When foraging, they zip through the air with fluttering, rapid wingbeats, often making quick twists to capture insect prey. They glide relatively infrequently. When feeding nestlings, they dart directly into the burrow without landing on the edge.

Nesting

After pairs form, both the male and female continue to excavate the burrow (avg. length 60-90cm). After the burrow is dug, they build the nest together by collecting materials from the ground (e.g., grasses, twigs, rootlets, stalks, leaves, feathers, etc.). Females lay 3–6 smooth, white eggs and do most of the incubating, though males will incubate when females leave the nest. Both parents feed the nestlings, though males make more feeding visits. Parents also remove fecal sacs and deposit them outside of the burrow.

Breeding Evidence

Most often, breeding evidence for Bank Swallows will be nest-building (NB), adults entering/leaving a nest site (AE), adults carrying food (CF), nest with young seen or heard (NY), observations of species in a suitable nesting habitat (H), or pair in a suitable nesting habitat in nesting season (P). Invalid codes include >7 singing individuals (M), as this code is not applicable for colonial species.



Bank Swallows (*Riparia riparia*) were detected in 58 squares in Newfoundland during the past ten years (2011–2021). Breeding was confirmed in 11 of these squares.