

Barn Swallow (BARS)

Hirundo rustica

Description

Barn Swallows are medium-sized (~18 cm long), graceful insectivores with a steel blue back extending from cap to rump. They have black wings, an orangish-white underside, and dark reddish-brown (rufous) throat and forehead. They have a distinct forked tail that extends well beyond the wingtips and allows for quick, sharp turns while flying. The lower part of the tail feathers has white patches that are visible in flight. Males and females are similar in appearance, though females are less glossy, slightly more greenish on their backs, and have a less deeply forked tail. Juveniles have similar plumage compared to adults, though they are duller, have a dark breast band, and have shorter outer tail feathers.

Known and potential breeding habitat

Barn Swallows breed in open areas near water and human-made structures, such as fields/meadows, roadway edges, or wetlands where they forage for small flying insects. In Newfoundland, breeding evidence has been observed between 9 May and 2 September. Breeding has been observed in western Newfoundland (Robinsons, Port aux Basques), the Great Northern Peninsula (Parsons Pond), and across the Avalon Peninsula (Whitbourne, Petty Harbour, Trepassey).

Detection Tips

Habitat

Barn Swallows forage in open habitats: meadows, parks, roadway edges, marshes, wetlands, ponds, riparian areas, and coastal waters. They are often observed in close proximity to their nesting site. They are rarely found in forest interiors.

Vocalization

The typical song of Barn Swallows has been described as liquid twittering and chattering that continues constantly, often ending in a rattle. Alarm calls sound like a scratchy “svit-svit”.

Behaviour

Barn Swallows are frequently a colonial species and are often found breeding, foraging, or perching in flocks; however, they can be spotted singly or in pairs. They pursue insects in flight over water or in open habitats, often making quick, tight turns and diving to catch their prey; their erratic flight behaviour is similar to that of a bat foraging. They fly



Photo By: Daniel Arndt



Open/Meadow



COSEWIC Ranking:
Threatened



NL Designation:
Not at Risk



Martins & Swallows

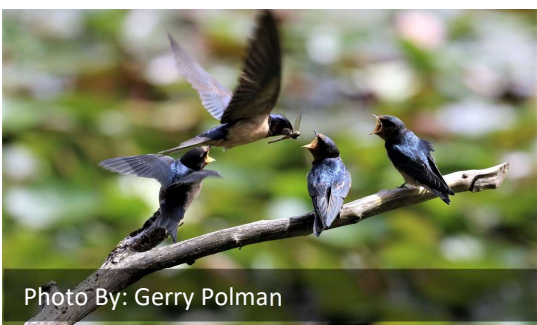


Photo By: Gerry Polman



Photo By: Kathlin Simpkins

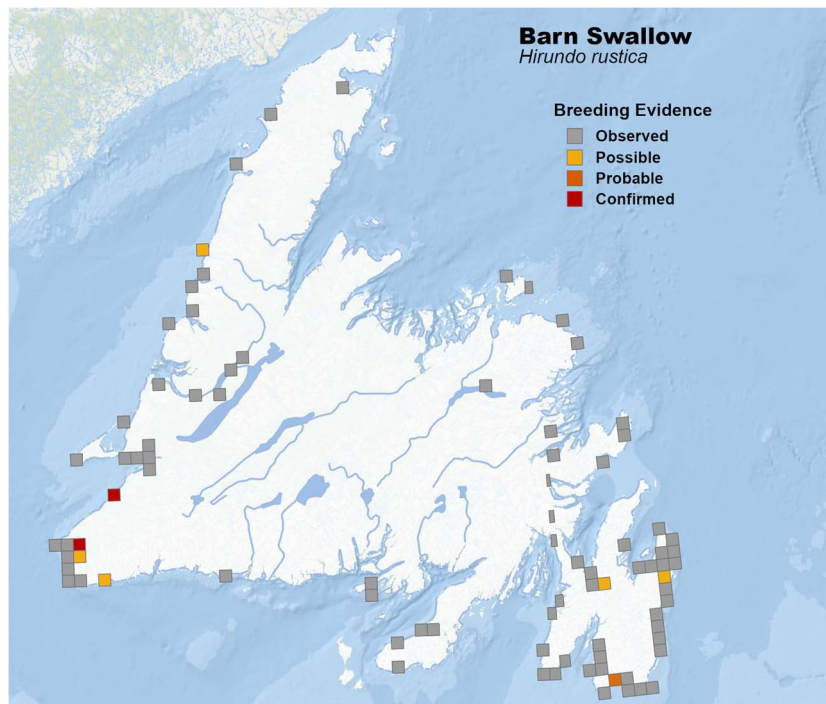
quite low to the ground, using quick wingbeats and rarely gliding.

Nesting

Barn Swallows often breed close to sources of water because they build muddy cup nests with grasses and feathers as lining; females do most of the work shaping the nest. Most often, Barn Swallows use cabins, sheds, eaves on houses, bridges, culverts, and other man-made structures for nesting. Uncommonly, Barn Swallows may nest on natural features, such as caves, crevices, riverbanks, canyon walls, and coastal cliffs. Barn Swallows lay 1-2 clutches in a year, each with an average of 4-5 eggs (range: 1-7) that are creamy white with brown spots. Barn Swallows share parental duties, though females do most of the work, including incubating, carrying broken eggshells and fecal sacs away from the nest, and feeding hatchlings. Parents may visit the nest to feed their young nearly 30 times per hour!

Breeding Evidence

Though Barn Swallows are frequently observed throughout Newfoundland, the only confirmed breeding evidence detected over the past 10 years was one observation of a fledged young (FY) in western Newfoundland. Other expected breeding evidence includes species in suitable nesting habitat (H), singing males (S), pair observed in suitable nesting habitat (P), visiting a probable nest site (V), nest building (NB), adults carrying food (CF) or fecal sacs (FS), adults leaving/entering a nest site (AE), and nest with eggs (NE) or young (NY).



Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) were detected in 86 squares in Newfoundland during the past ten years (2011–2021). Breeding was confirmed in 2 of these squares.