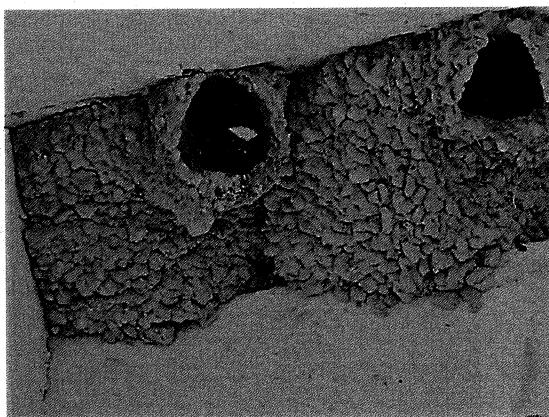


# Cliff Swallow Beneficial Practice Guide for Ontario Rural Residents



Cliff Swallow nests – note gourd shape



Cliff Swallow adults and nestling

## Timing of migration and breeding activities in southern Ontario:

Spring arrival	Mid to late April
Fall departure	Mid to late August
Nesting Dates	Late April and May
Nest cycle (average number of days):	
Nest Building	7-14 days
Incubation	14 days
Fledging (when young leave the nest)	20-24 days
Post-fledging parental care	3-5 days
Post-breeding roosts	August
Migration to wintering grounds	September

## Why help Cliff Swallows:

Cliff Swallows are small birds that can be observed flying in groups around bridges and overpasses in pursuit of flying insects. Though still relatively common, Cliff Swallow populations have experienced steep declines across Canada, possibly due to reductions in available insect prey and loss of habitat. Cliff Swallows play an important role in pest management – they eat hundreds of insects each day!

## Habitat Requirements:

Nesting: Cliff Swallows nest in colonies. Once they select a breeding area, Cliff Swallows gather mud pellets to build their nests, adhering pellets to a cliff or other vertical surface, such as the external facade of a building. Commonly used structures include houses, barns, rectangular culverts, and trusses beneath bridges.

Feeding: Cliff Swallows eat only flying insects, and rely on healthy insect populations to raise their families. Hay crops and riparian habitat (buffered stream, pond, or swamp) provide good habitat for insect production and a great source of food for swallows.



# Cliff Swallow Beneficial Practice Guide for Ontario Rural Residents

## Threats:

**House Sparrows:** House Sparrows compete with Cliff Swallows for established nesting colonies, and can prevent Cliff Swallows from using nests.

**Cats:** Domestic cats prey on Cliff Swallows at nest sites and while they collect mud to build their nests.

## BENEFICIAL PRACTICES: How to maintain a swallow friendly property?



House Sparrow (male)

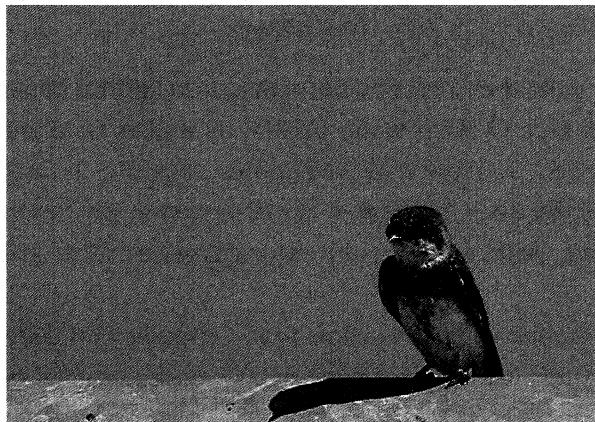
- **Provide surfaces for nest sites:** Brick, concrete, and untreated wood provide the best surfaces for mud pellets to adhere. Nests are less likely to be built on smooth surfaces (e.g., painted or metal).
- **Provide access to mud:** A pond or stream with a muddy bank provides for a source of mud for nest building. You can maintain a mud puddle using a garden hose if the nest-building season coincides with a dry spell.
- **Protect watercourses and wetlands:** If you use pesticides, consider reducing pesticide use in proximity to water, including phasing out use of neonicotinoids; and maintain wide natural buffers around ponds, streams, and along drainage ditches.
- **Manage House Sparrows:** Removal of House Sparrow nest materials, and discouraging their occupation of colonies is recommended.
- **Minimize disturbance at the colony:** Discourage cats from approaching Cliff Swallow nests and mud collection areas during the breeding season. Safer for your cat and the birds if your cat does not roam at large. See [www.catsandbirds.ca](http://www.catsandbirds.ca) for tips and ideas.
- **Food source:** Maintain pastures, hay crop, and riparian habitat (buffered stream, pond, or swamps) within a few hundred metres of the colony to provide Cliff Swallows with food.

## More Information:

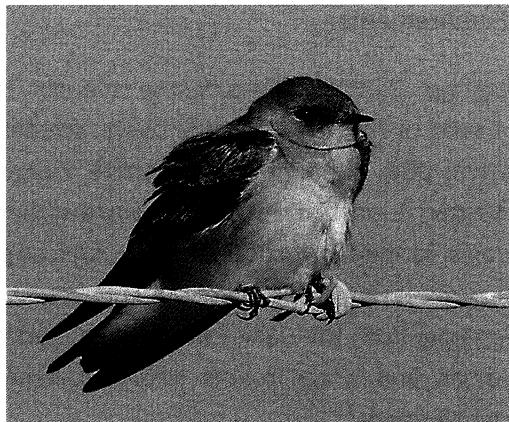
- Visit [www.naturecanada.ca](http://www.naturecanada.ca) or Contact [info@naturecanada.ca](mailto:info@naturecanada.ca) or call 1 613 562 3447
- <https://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/ai> or Contact [lpurves@birdscanada.org](mailto:lpurves@birdscanada.org) or call 1 888-448-2473
- <http://www.cliffswallow.org/faq.html>
- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/c/cliff-swallow/>
- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/house-sparrow>



## Beneficial Practice Guide for Bank Swallow and Northern Rough-winged Swallow



Bank Swallow perched – note the distinct dark breast band



Northern Rough-winged Swallow perched – note the lack of dark breast band and a browner underside



Breeding grounds (burrows) for Bank and Northern Rough-winged Swallows

<b>Timing of migration and breeding in southern Ontario:</b>		
<u>Event</u>	<b>Bank Swallow</b>	<b>Northern Swallow</b>
Spring arrival	Late April to May	Late April
Fall departure	August to September	July to September
Nesting dates	Early May to mid-July	Mid-May to mid-June
<u>Nest cycle (average number of days):</u>		
Nest building	2-3 weeks	17-22 days
Incubation	13-16 days	16-17 days
Fledging (when young leave nest)	17-21	17-21
Parental care – post fledging	1 week	1 week
Post breeding roosts	July to August	August
Migration to wintering grounds	September to October	September to November



# Beneficial Practice Guide for Bank Swallow and Northern Rough-winged Swallow

## Habitat Requirements:

- **Nesting:** Bank Swallows nest in colonies. They build their nests by burrowing into vertical banks of sand or fine silt alongside rivers, streams, lakes, and other water bodies, as well as sand and gravel pits. Although the Northern Rough-winged Swallow may sometimes excavate its own burrow, it most often nests in burrows built by the Bank Swallow. It can also nest in cavities or cracks formed in vertical surfaces, such as gutters, walls, culverts, and natural crevices. Close and easy access to water is also very important.
- **Feeding:** Both the Bank Swallow and Northern Rough-winged Swallow feed exclusively on flying insects, and forage in open habitat such as pastures with livestock, hayfields, ponds, lakeshores, and wetlands.

## Beneficial Practices:

- **Maintain nesting sites:** Bank Swallows prefer to burrow in soils that are soft and easy to excavate, often close to a body of open water. Help maintain suitable vertical nesting faces on your property (e.g., avoid dumping material on lakeshores for erosion control)
- **Provide sources of food:** Adult swallows must find enough food to raise their families. Access to insect-rich habitats such as pastures with livestock, hayfields, ponds, and wetlands are ideal habitats to encourage successful reproduction. Avoid using pesticides near watercourses and make sure to buffer watercourses from field runoff that may contain pesticides.
- **Avoid nest disturbance:** Leave nesting habitat undisturbed during the breeding season. Prevent children or pets from climbing on vertical faces used by Bank Swallow colonies.
- **Predation:** Digging mammals such as foxes, skunks, and raccoons pose a threat to nests, as they can dig into the nests from above. If you have a colony nesting on your property, along a lakeshore for example, consider putting fencing in a way to both make mammal access difficult while alerting humans to avoid the area. If you have pets, keep them away from nest sites.

For more information about Bank Swallows and Northern Rough-winged Swallows, visit:

1. Visit [www.naturecanada.ca](http://www.naturecanada.ca) or Contact [info@naturecanada.ca](mailto:info@naturecanada.ca) or call 1 613 562 3447
2. <https://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/ai/bans/index.jsp?targetpg=index>
3. [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Bank\\_Swallow/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Bank_Swallow/overview) (All About Birds - Bank Swallow)
4. [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern\\_Rough-winged\\_Swallow/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Rough-winged_Swallow/overview) (All About Birds - Northern Rough-winged Swallow)
5. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/avoiding-harm-migratory-birds/beneficial-management-practices.html> (Beneficial Management Practices - Bank Swallows)
6. <http://catsandbirds.ca/>

