

How to Be a Good Barn Swallow Host



BIRD STUDIES
ÉTUDES D'OISEAUX **CANADA**



Photo: David Bradley

About Barn Swallows

- Barn Swallows can be identified by their blue back, wings, and deeply forked tail, chestnut throat and forehead, and pale underparts.
- These birds play an important role in pest management, eating hundreds of insects each day!
- Ontario's Barn Swallow population has declined by 68% since 1970.

Where do they nest?

- Barn Swallows nest in locations close to foraging habitat and sources of mud (which they use to build their nests).
- They choose structures with an overhang to provide protection, a ledge (can be as small as a wire or nail) to support the nest, and a vertical wall to which it can be attached.
- Nesting sites are commonly near powerlines (for perching), and livestock.

Will they make a mess?

- Droppings and debris are natural at nesting sites. Fortunately, swallows are not a significant source of any infectious disease.
- Parents remove droppings from the nest until the young begin to defecate over the side of the nest, when they are almost ready to fledge.
- Some human hosts choose to place newspapers below nests to catch droppings. This can be done beginning about 15 days after the eggs hatch.



Photo: David Bradley



Photos: Kristyn Richardson

How can I create ideal nesting habitat?

- Replicating where Barn Swallows nest can be quite easy:
 - Create a food source – install insect feeders or put out crushed egg shells (source of calcium).
 - Create a mud source.
 - Leave barn and shed doors and windows open at all times.
- Putting up nest cups or shelves in barns or below overhangs may attract nesting swallows to your property.
- Ledges or nest cups should be at least 8-10 cm wide, and placed 15 cm below the ceiling.

How can I replace habitat?

- As old buildings deteriorate and are demolished, artificial nesting structures can be constructed.
- If you build your structure at least one breeding season before the old structure is taken down, the young of the year can have a look before fall migration.
- The structure should include a vent near the ceiling to moderate temperature, and have sides low enough to protect nests from winds and precipitation.
- Protect nests from predators by placing metal flashing on each leg of the structure, and placing nest cups at least 8 feet above the ground.

Monitor your nests and share your observations online!
www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pnw



Photo: Christian Artuso



Ontario

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