

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo Rustica*)

Family: Hirundinidae



Physical Characteristics: Dark slate, iridescent blue head and wings. Rusty orange throat and forehead with paler orange chest and underside. Males have slightly deeper color on underparts. Deeply forked tail is slightly longer in males. Long wings. Small black bill. Tiny legs and feet. An acrobatic flier. Size: Approximately 6-7 inches long. Wingspan: 11-13 inches. Weight: 0.6-0.71 ounces.

Interesting Facts: Barn Swallows are the most abundant and widely spread swallow species in the world. Female Barn Swallows prefer to mate with males that have the longest and most symmetrical tails and a darker reddish chest color. Unmated males may kill nestlings in an attempt to succeed in breaking up a pair, thus allowing him the opportunity to mate with the female.

Status: Migratory. Populations much greater now than before European settlement of North America. Mainly due to human construction providing more nesting sites.

Habitat: Prefers habitats with open areas for foraging and materials for nesting. Requires mud for nest building. May be found in farmlands, cities, marshes and lakeshores, or along highways.

Nesting: Nest is cup shaped, approximately 6 inches wide by 8 inches long, and made of mud mixed with long grasses and hairs, and lined with grass and feathers. Building sites include rafters or eaves of buildings, under bridges, in mine shafts, old wells, and sinkholes. Eggs: 4-6 small, elongated, white and reddish spotted all over. Incubation: 13 days. Both sexes incubate the eggs and raise 2 broods per season in the south.



Food Habits: Only insects such as grasshoppers, beetles, moths and other flying insects.

Song: Series of long musical twitters and gurgles with “wit, wit” call when feeding or approaching nest. Also has specific mating call.

Range: Summer: from southern Alaska southward to central Mexico. Also throughout Eurasia, northern Africa and in Argentina. Winter: Southern Mexico, Central American South America, Asia, Indonesia and Micronesia.

Legal Status: Federally protected. An occupied nest, with or without eggs may not be destroyed.

Milam County: February through September. Makes its first appearance in the southern US from mid February to the first of March, arriving in pairs or a few, but not as flocks.

Sources: Nature Works (www.nhptv.org); Audubon (www.audubon.org); Cornell Lab of Ornithology (www.birds.cornell); Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife on line; www.eNature.com; Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America.