



LIVING WITH CLIFF & BARN SWALLOWS

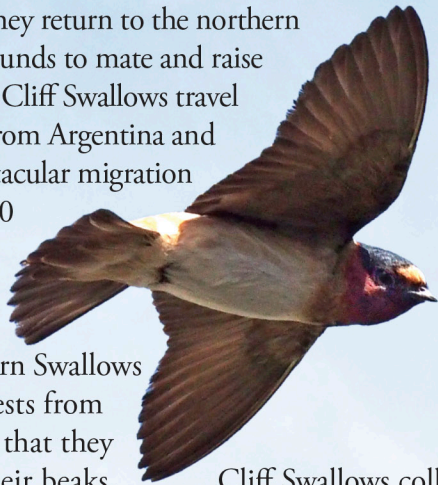
Natural History

Cliff and Barn Swallows are beautiful, graceful, insectivorous migratory birds. They delight us with their aerial acrobatics as they capture a variety of insect prey midair with their wide-gaped bills and expert flight. They are devoted parents and will fly several miles from their nest site to forage, capturing thousands of insects a day to feed their young.

Each year swallows migrate to Central and South America, where they spend the winter. They stay up to six months in southern locations, capitalizing on the temperate climate and abundance of insects. In the spring, they return to the northern breeding grounds to mate and raise their young. Cliff Swallows travel all the way from Argentina and make a spectacular migration of over 14,000 miles round trip.

Cliff and Barn Swallows construct nests from mud pellets that they collect in their beaks.

Cliff Swallows collect over 1000 pellets of mud to build their nest. Barn Swallow nests are cup-shaped, and Cliff Swallow nests are gourd-shaped. Both species line their nest with grass, hair and feathers. Barn Swallows tend to nest solitarily and Cliff Swallows nest in colonies which can contain a dozen to over 500 nesting pairs.



Historically, Barn and Cliff Swallows nested on cliffs and vertical banks where they were protected from rain. Today, both species build nests on eaves, bridges or docks, or in structures such as barns and garages that have a ledge, a vertical wall, and a roof.

From the start of nest building to the departure of young, the swallow breeding season lasts late March through August. Swallows usually raise two clutches of young per year. Both the male and the female build the nest beginning in late March or early April and incubate three to five eggs, which hatch after 12 to 17 days. The young fledge the nest when they are 20-25 days old. After learning to fly, the young remain in or near the nest to be fed by parents and to roost at night. They remain in the area for several weeks after becoming independent.

The presence of swallows is enjoyable as well as beneficial. Many people welcome swallows nesting on or around their homes, and enjoy watching parents feeding their young. Swallows provide a beneficial service as they consume thousands of flying pest insects. Colonies of cliff swallows on school grounds provide opportunities for study.



Swallows are legally protected by state and federal laws. These laws prohibit the destruction of nests and eggs, as well as harm to chicks or adults.

Preventing Conflicts

Conflicts with Cliff and Barn Swallows occur when these birds nest close to humans and produce droppings and other debris. When baby swallows first hatch, the parents carry droppings away from the nest to prevent detection by predators. By the twelfth day, the young are strong enough to back up to the edge of the nest and defecate out the entrance.



Place newspaper or similar material where droppings accumulate to solve the problem. As necessary, dispose of the paper and droppings in a compost pile, dug into the ground, or the garbage. Similarly, use a blanket or tarp to cover a car or structure, and replace as needed.

Another solution is to install a shelf under the nest(s) to catch the droppings and debris. Before attaching the shelf, observe the swallows' comings and goings to prevent installing something that could interfere with access to their nest. Use an

installation technique that facilitates easy removal of the shelf for cleaning off droppings as needed.

Install a physical barrier to safely prevent swallows from nesting on a structure. Barriers include any non-hazardous non-lethal physical structure placed between the swallow and the building. This method must be implemented before the birds arrive for the breeding season. Physical barrier material includes coroplast, plexiglass, plastic sheeting or silicone-based paint applied directly to the surface of the structure where birds are attempting to nest. These slick surfaces prevent the mud from adhering to the structure. Alternatively, install plywood to block off the right angle under building eaves where swallows tend to build their nests.

A curtain of wire mesh or fiberglass window screen can be suspended from the eave. Hang the material three to four inches from the wall and extend it straight down 18 inches or more below the eave.

Never use any form of netting to exclude or deter any bird from a structure, tree, etc. Netting is extremely hazardous to small birds, such as swallows, as they easily become entangled in the netting.

Never apply so-called repelants, such as sticky substances, to discourage birds from nesting or perching on a structure. These materials cause feather contamination, which renders the bird flightless and leads to the death of a legally protected species

It is illegal to disturb or remove an active nest of a native bird during the breeding season. Inactive nests can be safely and legally removed October through January, after the breeding season.

Native Songbird Care & Conservation is a state and federally permitted wildlife rehabilitation facility. We are dedicated to the conservation of native songbirds through rehabilitation, release back to the wild, and public education.

Please contact Native Songbird Care & Conservation for more information about swallows, advice about conflict prevention, or assistance with an injured or orphaned native bird.



707-484-6502

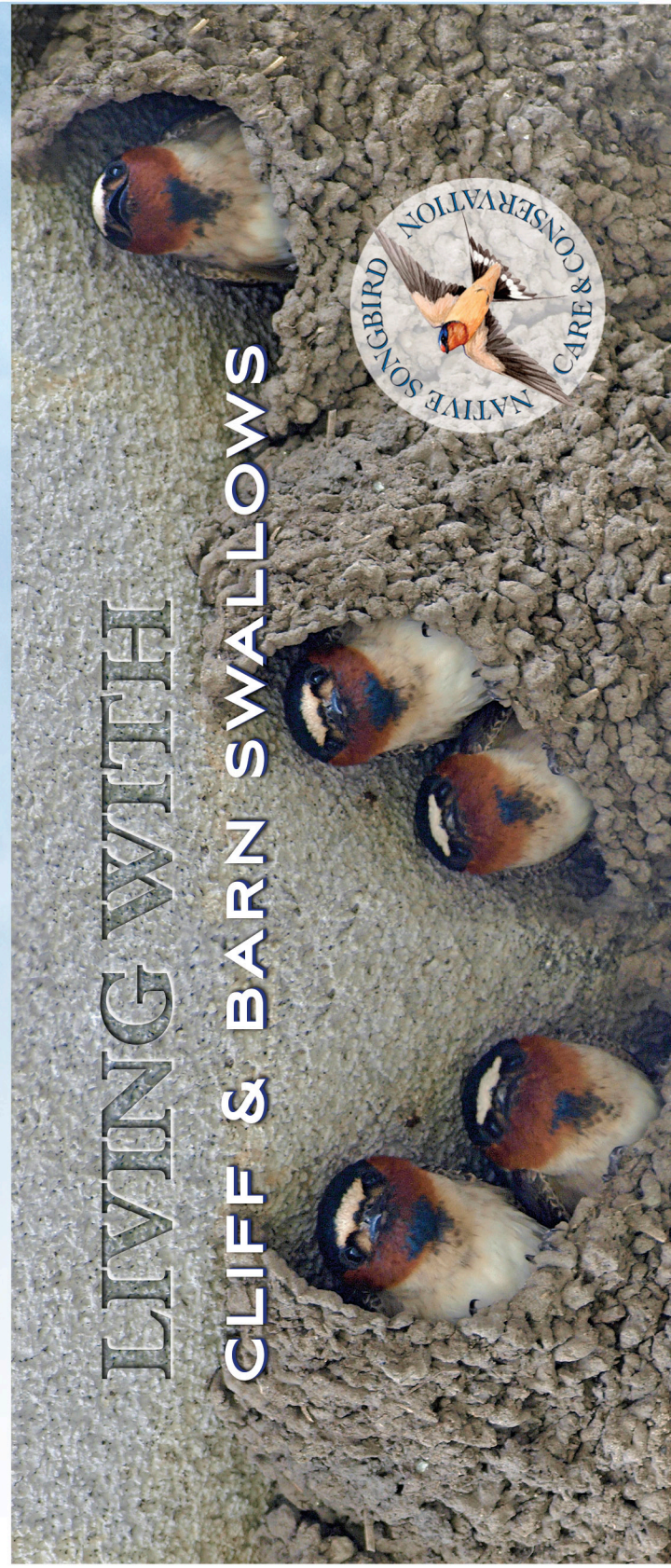
www.nativesongbirdcare.org

8050 Elphick Road
Sebastopol, CA

Additional Information about Cliff Swallows;
Brown, C. R., and M. B. Brown. 1995. Cliff Swallow (Petrochelidon pyrrhonota). In *The Birds of North America Online*, No. 149 (A. Poole, Ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY.

Cliff Swallow photos by Colin Talcroft
www.colintalcroft.com

Information adapted from the
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Service.



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