

**California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System**  
**California Department of Fish and Wildlife**  
**California Interagency Wildlife Task Group**

---

BARN SWALLOW

*Hirundo rustica*

Family: HIRUNDINIDAE  
B344

Order: PASSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: M. Green  
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt  
Edited by: R. Duke, D. Winkler

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common, summer resident throughout the state, except highest mountains and southeastern deserts. Breeding now frequently dependent upon human-made structures. First spring migrants arrive in mid-February, and departure records extend into November. Casual in winter from Central Valley south (McCaskie et al. 1988). Found in virtually every open habitat from coastal grassland and shrubland to mixed conifer habitats. More common at lower elevations. Usually breeds near water.

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Hawks flying insects during extended cruising flights. Hunts low over bodies of water and wet meadows, or over grasslands and other drier, open habitats. Occasionally eats berries and seeds (Bent 1942).

**Cover:** Cover provided at potential nesting sites in open, habitats such as cropland, grassland, and open, brushy areas.

**Reproduction:** Makes nest of mud pellets, grasses, and feathers. Adheres nest to underside of bridge, under eaves of house, barn, other building, cliff, bank, or other sheltered site with a solid surface for attachment. Mostly nests on human-made structures.

**Water:** Drinks and bathes on wing. Frequents moist areas and bodies of water. Requires nearby mud source for nest construction (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Ehrlich et al. 1988).

**Pattern:** Frequents croplands, meadows, grasslands, open brushy areas. Often feeds over open water; sometimes seen over bays and the ocean. Requires mud and sheltered, solid substrate for nest construction.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, diurnal activity.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** From winter grounds in South America, migrates into California through Central America and Mexico (Bent 1942). Arrives in California in February, and numbers increase through April. Most leave the state by the end of September, but a very few remain all winter.

**Home Range:** Snapp (1976) reported that most foraging was done within 400 m (1300 ft) of the nest. Samuel (1971) reported that foraging took place within 1200 m (4000 ft) of the nest.

**Territory:** Defends territory immediately around the nest (Davis 1937).

Reproduction: Breeds from April into August with a peak from May into July. Monogamous pair usually nests solitarily. May nest close together in barns, under bridges, or occasionally in natural sites. Up to 25, or more, active nests may be found on a large barn or bridge. Clutch 1-7 eggs, usually 4 or 5. Incubation 14-16 days, mostly by female. Altricial young tended by both adults and stay in nest for 17-24 days. May raise 2 broods in 1 yr.

Niche: Preyed upon by domestic cats, other small mammals, snakes, accipiters, and falcons.

#### REFERENCES

- Bent, A. C. 1942. Life histories of North American flycatchers, larks, swallows, and their allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 179. 555pp.
- Davis, E. M. 1937. Observations of nesting barn swallows. *Bird-Banding* 8:66-72.
- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. *The birder's handbook*. Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. *Birds of southern California*. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Grinnell, J., and A. H. Miller. 1944. *The distribution of the birds of California*. Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 27. 608pp.
- Harrison, C. 1978. *A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of north American birds*. W. Collins Sons and Co., Cleveland OH. 416pp.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1979. *Birds of northern California, an annotated field list*. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1988. *Birds of northern California, an annotated field list*. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. Reprinted with suppl. 108pp.
- Samuel, D. E. 1971. The breeding biology of barn and cliff swallows in West Virginia. *Wilson Bull.* 83:284-301.
- Snapp, B. D. 1976. Colonial breeding in the barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) and its adaptive significance. *Condor* 78:471-480.

B344

---

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. *California's Wildlife*. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.