

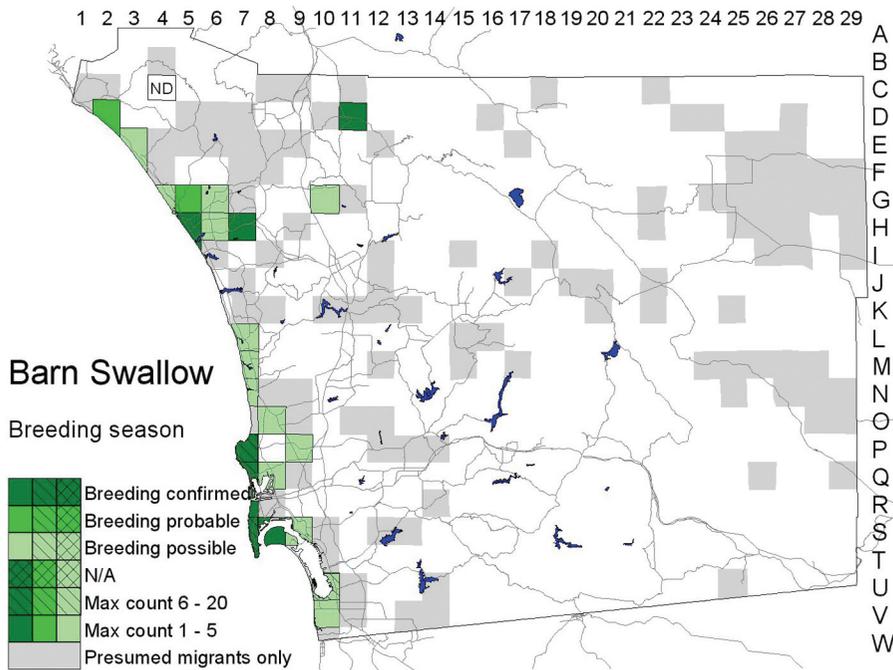
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

The Barn Swallow is one of the most widespread and familiar birds of North America, but San Diego County is peripheral to its breeding range. Here the species occurs mainly—though commonly—in migration. Along the Pacific coast, Los Coronados Islands off Tijuana are its southernmost nesting site. The small San Diego breeding population still clings to its ancestral nesting habitat in sea caves, though nesting on man-made structures, now the rule over most of the species' range, may be on the increase. In winter the Barn Swallow is rare but increasing.

Breeding distribution: Sea caves at La Jolla (P7) and Point Loma (S7) were the Barn Swallow's original breed-



Photo by Jack C. Daynes



ing habitat in San Diego County and still consistent sites for small numbers, such as six at La Jolla 27 May and 27 June 1999 (L. Polinsky) and eight at Point Loma 15 June 1998 (V. P. Johnson). As long ago as 1912, though, when a pair nested on the Hotel del Coronado (T9; WFVZ), Barn Swallows began taking to man-made structures over or near the water. From then through 1980 there was little evidence of population increase, but this trend may now be accelerating. Between 1997 and 2002 we recorded the species as at least possibly breeding, outside its migration seasons, in over two thirds of the atlas squares along the coast. There is some spread a short distance inland from Oceanside. Farther inland, as throughout the 20th century, we noted breeding Barn Swallows only sparingly: near Pala (D11),

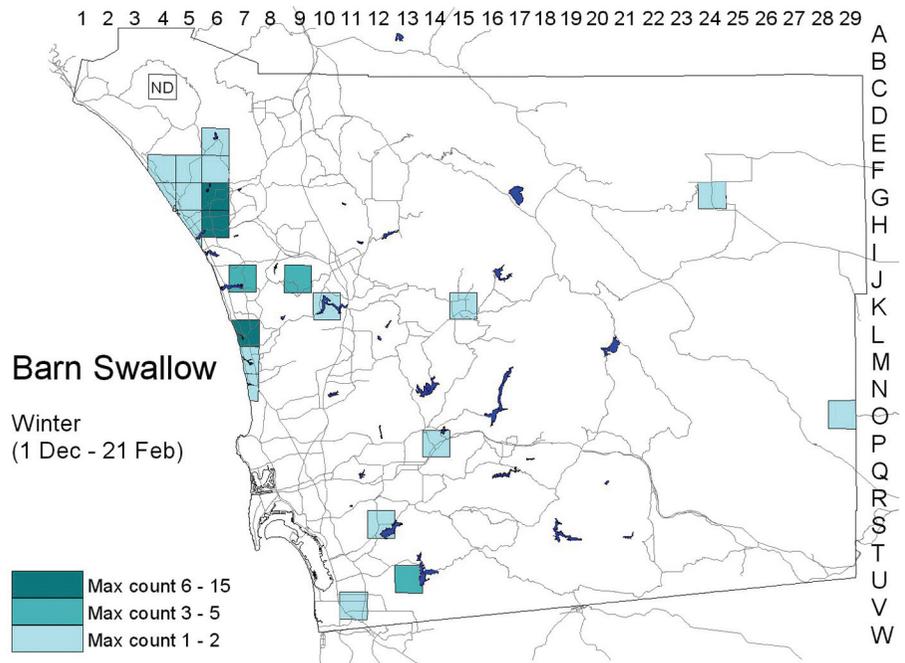
two at an active nest 18 May 2000 (V. Dineen), Hidden Meadows (G10), three on 26 May 2000 (J. O. Zimmer), and Kearny Mesa (P9), three on 25 June 1997 (K. Kenwood). There are also a few scattered records of single individuals in mid-summer, not coded for “suitable habitat,” at Oak Grove (D16) 13 June 2001 (K. L. Weaver), San Pasqual Valley (K12) 27 May 1998 (E. C. Hall), Sweetwater Reservoir (S13) 23 June 1997 (P. Famolaro), and, most surprisingly, Borrego Sink (G25) 4 June 1998 (R. Thériault), although the species has bred in the nearby Salton Sink.

At most of the known or presumed nesting sites, Barn Swallows are few, sometimes only an isolated pair. The largest numbers during the breeding season are around the Chula Vista Nature Center in the Sweetwater River estuary (U10), with up to 20 between 10 and 14 June 1998 (B. C. Moore).

Nesting: The Barn Swallow’s nest is built of mud pellets, like the Cliff Swallow’s, but when finished is only an open-topped bowl. Thus the nest of the Barn Swallow closely resembles that of the Black Phoebe and is built in similar situations, on a solid support and sheltered from above. Outside the sea caves, our observers noted nests under the eaves of nearby buildings (along Coast Walk in La Jolla) and underneath boat docks at the Catamaran Hotel and Mission Bay Yacht Club (Q7) and the San Diego Yacht Club (S8).

Our rather meager records of Barn Swallow breeding from 1997 to 2001 imply egg laying from about 1 May through mid June and thus fit within the spread of the equally meager previous records (eggs as early as 24 March, nestlings as late as 6 August).

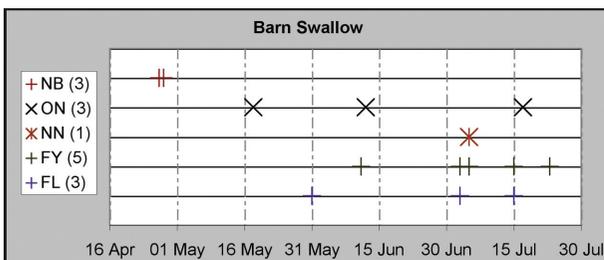
Migration: In spring, Barn Swallows arrive typically in early March, occasionally late February. Four near Hills of the Moon Wash (G27) 22 February 2001 (D. Seals) and two in Borrego Springs (G24) 24 February 1998 (P. D. Ache) were clearly spring migrants. Perhaps because it is less gregarious, the Barn Swallow appears less numerous as a spring migrant than some of the other swallows;



the maximum reported 1997–2002 was 50 at O’Neill Lake (E6) 3 March 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg). The last of the spring migrants depart in the third week of May: 23 May 2000, three in the Tijuana River valley (W10; W. E. Haas); 23 May 2001, four near Tecolote Canyon (Q9; T. Plunkett).

Fall migrants begin returning in early July, giving the Barn Swallow a migration schedule like that of shorebirds nesting in the Arctic. Early fall dates are 2 July 1997 (Poway, M12, P. von Hendy) and 3 July 2000 (west base of Otay Mt., V14, S. D. Cameron). Fall migrants increase through July and August, peak in September, and remain common until the end of October, later than the other swallows except the Tree.

Winter: At this season the Barn Swallow is rare but annual and increasing, as throughout the Southwest. From 1982 to 1992 the total number of Barn Swallows reported on San Diego County Christmas bird counts was 13, whereas from 1992 to 2002 it was 81. Most winter records are along and near the coast from O’Neill Lake in the lower Santa Margarita River valley south to the San Dieguito River estuary, Del Mar (M7), and the largest winter counts are in this region: 12 at Whelan Lake (G6) 22 December 2001 (D. K. Adams, G. L. Rogers, and J. L. Coatsworth), eight at Buena Vista Lagoon (H6) the same day (J. C. Lovio), and 15 at San Elijo Lagoon (L7) 23 December 2001 (E. Garnica). Nevertheless, a few have shown up farther inland, as far as Ramona (K15, one on 2 January 2000, D. and C. Batzler), Lindo Lake (P14, one on 20 January 2002, M. Sadowski), and Lower Otay Lake (U13, three on 3 January 2001, V. Marquez). Most notable are the first winter records ever for the Anza–Borrego Desert, of two at Borrego Springs (G24) 25 December 2001 (P. D. Ache) and two at Carrizo Marsh (O29) 9 February 2001 (P. D. Jorgensen). The Barn Swallow has become a regular winter visitor in small numbers to the Salton Sink, though, just 25 to 30 miles farther east (Patten et al. 2003).



Conservation: With a trend of increase and adaptability to man-made structures as nest sites, the Barn Swallow appears unlikely to present a conservation problem. The natural nest sites are inaccessible. The species' recent colonization of the drainage culverts in the city of Riverside (Lee 1995) suggests that further spread is in store for San Diego County. The Barn Swallow's noncolonial habits suggest it is less likely to suffer to the same degree from the problems afflicting the Cliff Swallow. The Barn Swallow's increase in winter could be a symptom of climatic warming, which is seen primarily in an increase in winter low temperatures.

Nevertheless, trends can be reversed: the Barn Swallow's colonization of the Imperial Valley in the 1970s, by a few pairs, proved ephemeral (Patten et al. 2003).

Taxonomy: Some geographic variation is expected in a species like the Barn Swallow with a nearly world-wide distribution. But the subspecies *H. r. erythrogaster* Boddaert, 1783, distinguished (in adult plumage) by its deep rufous underparts and virtual lack of a dark breast band, is the only one nesting in North America.