

Tree Swallow Beneficial Practice Guide for Ontario Rural Residents



Tree Swallow landing – note iridescent blue colouring of male



Tree Swallow emerging from a nest box

Timing of migration and breeding activities in southern Ontario:	
Spring arrival	Mid-March to mid-April
Fall departure	Early to mid-August
Nesting	Late April to mid-August
Nest cycle (average number of days):	
Nest building	14 days
Incubation	14 days
Fledging	21 days
Post-fledging parental care	3-5 days
Post breeding roosts	August
Migration to wintering grounds (southern US, Mexico, Central America and Caribbean.	September

Why help Tree Swallows:

Tree Swallows are small birds frequently seen flying high above fields and marshes in pursuit of flying insects. Though still relatively common, Tree Swallow populations have experienced gradual population declines across Canada, possibly due to reductions in available insect prey and loss of habitat. Tree Swallows play an important role in pest management - they eat hundreds of insects each day.

Habitat requirements:

- Nesting: The Tree Swallow nests in semi-forested areas, forest edges, and swamps, in tree cavities such as those excavated by woodpeckers. The Tree Swallow will also readily occupy bird-nesting boxes in open, grassy areas such as hay fields, pastures, and orchards.
- Feeding: Tree Swallows feed exclusively on insects captured in flight, and need open foraging areas such as fields, pastures, and marshes.

Threats:

Predators: Cats, raccoons, snakes, and foxes prey on Tree Swallows, especially at the nest site.

Nest competition: The House Sparrow and European Starling, two non-native species, will occupy Tree Swallow nest cavities before the swallows return in the spring, preventing them from nesting.



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Pesticides: Neonicotinoid pesticides may reduce the amount of food available to Tree Swallows as residues can persist in some aquatic ecosystems and reduce the number of aquatic invertebrates.

BENEFICIAL PRACTICES:

- Install nest boxes: Provide nest boxes for Tree Swallows in open, grassy areas, ideally near a water source (e.g., pond, marsh). Nest boxes should be at least 2-3 m off the ground and include predator guards (e.g., a baffle on the support pole to block access by animals such as raccoons, cats, or snakes). Tree Swallows prefer nest boxes that are south facing. Place nest boxes at least 10-20 m from neighbouring boxes and away from buildings such as houses and barns. Nest boxes for Tree Swallows have the same dimensions as those for Eastern Bluebird.
- Reduce nest competition: Install [European Starling-resistant](#) entrance holes on Tree Swallow nest boxes. Keeping nest box entries blocked until the arrival of Tree Swallows reduces the risk of nest takeover by House Sparrows. Removal of House Sparrow or Starling nest materials, and discouraging their occupation of nest boxes is recommended.
- Maintain a food source: Try to avoid using pesticides adjacent to watercourses and wetlands to help ensure healthy insect populations for Tree Swallows to feed their young.

For more information on Tree Swallows, visit:

1. Visit www.naturecanada.ca or Contact info@naturecanada.ca or call 1 613 562 3447
2. <https://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/ai/tres/> or Contact projectnestwatch@birdscanada.org or call 1 888-448-2473
3. <http://catsandbirds.ca/#sthash.6KyUai8k.Pq8jWV8B.dpbs>
4. <https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/OpenNonWebContent.aspx?content=18525.wba>
5. <https://nestwatch.org/learn/focal-species/tree-swallow/>
6. <http://www.sialis.org/tres.htm>

To build your own Tree Swallow nest boxes, click the following links to get detailed construction plans:

- [Golondrinas Tree Swallow Nest Box](#)
- [Maryland Cooperative Extension Tree Swallow Nest Box](#)



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