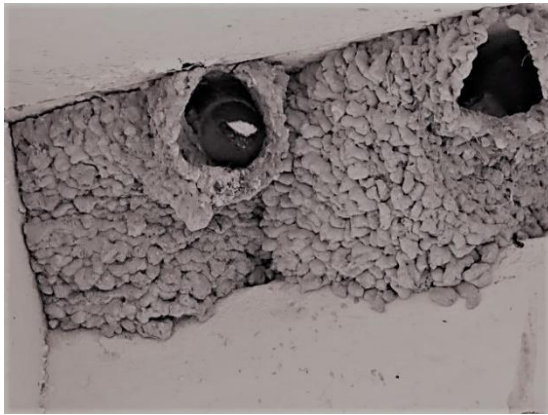


## Cliff Swallow Beneficial Practice Guide for Ontario Rural Residents



Cliff Swallow nests – note gourd shape



Cliff Swallow adults and nestling

Timing of migration and breeding activities in southern Ontario:	
Spring arrival	Mid to late April
Fall departure	Mid to late August
Nesting Dates	Late April and May
Nest cycle (average number of days):	
Nest Building	7-14 days
Incubation	14 days
Fledging (when young leave the nest)	20-24 days
Post-fledging parental care	3-5 days
Post-breeding roosts	August
Migration to wintering grounds	September

### Why help Cliff Swallows:

Cliff Swallows are small birds that can be observed flying in groups around bridges and overpasses in pursuit of flying insects. Though still relatively common, Cliff Swallow populations have experienced steep declines across Canada, possibly due to reductions in available insect prey and loss of habitat. Cliff Swallows play an important role in pest management – they eat hundreds of insects each day!

### Habitat Requirements:

**Nesting:** Cliff Swallows nest in colonies. Once they select a breeding area, Cliff Swallows gather mud pellets to build their nests, adhering pellets to a cliff or other vertical surface, such as the external facade of a building. Commonly used structures include houses, barns, rectangular culverts, and trusses beneath bridges.

**Feeding:** Cliff Swallows eat only flying insects, and rely on healthy insect populations to raise their families. Hay crops and riparian habitat (buffered stream, pond, or swamp) provide good habitat for insect production and a great source of food for swallows.



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## Threats:

House Sparrows: House Sparrows compete with Cliff Swallows for established nesting colonies, and can prevent Cliff Swallows from using nests.

Cats: Domestic cats prey on Cliff Swallows at nest sites and while they collect mud to build their nests.

## BENEFICIAL PRACTICES: How to maintain a swallow friendly property?



*House Sparrow (male)*

- **Provide surfaces for nest sites:** Brick, concrete, and untreated wood provide the best surfaces for mud pellets to adhere. Nests are less likely to be built on smooth surfaces (e.g., painted or metal).
- **Provide access to mud:** A pond or stream with a muddy bank provides for a source of mud for nest building. You can maintain a mud puddle using a garden hose if the nest-building season coincides with a dry spell.
- **Protect watercourses and wetlands:** If you use pesticides, consider reducing pesticide use in proximity to water, including phasing out use of neonicotinoids; and maintain wide natural buffers around ponds, streams, and along drainage ditches.
- **Manage House Sparrows:** [Discourage House Sparrows](#) from occupying Cliff Swallow nests by removing or partially removing nests in the winter.
- **Minimize disturbance at the colony:** Discourage cats from approaching Cliff Swallow nests and mud collection areas during the breeding season. Safer for your cat and the birds if your cat does not roam at large. See [www.catsandbirds.ca](http://www.catsandbirds.ca) for tips and ideas.
- **Food source:** Maintain pastures, hay crop, and riparian habitat (buffered stream, pond, or swamps) within a few hundred metres of the colony to provide Cliff Swallows with food.

## More Information:

- Visit [www.naturecanada.ca](http://www.naturecanada.ca) or Contact [info@naturecanada.ca](mailto:info@naturecanada.ca) or call 1 613 562 3447
- <https://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/ai> or Contact [lpurves@birdscanada.org](mailto:lpurves@birdscanada.org) or call 1 888-448-2473
- <http://www.cliffswallow.org/faq.html>
- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/c/cliff-swallow/>
- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/house-sparrow>



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