



Attracting/enhancing Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) nesting habitat; do I have the right habitat?

Natural History

- In New England, Cliff Swallows are most often found nesting under the eaves of buildings where they construct bottle-shaped nests of mud. Nests are often clustered or lined up in a row under eaves and occasionally under bridges. Cliff Swallows typically nest in agricultural settings with open fields for foraging and plentiful mud for nest-building.
- Cliff Swallows belong to a group of birds known as aerial insectivores, which forage for insect prey while in flight. Many species in this group are undergoing sharp population declines in northeastern North America. Once an abundant species in New England, many Cliff Swallow colonies are dwindling. Causes of declines include habitat loss, competition from nonnative House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*), and potentially larger-scale factors, such as declines in insect prey, pesticide use, and climate change.

Cliff Swallows respond positively to activities intended to increase breeding success, including:

- Installation of artificial fired clay nests or nest starts, which prevent nests from falling from eaves
- Creation and/or enhancement of a mud source; mud both attracts Cliff Swallows to sites, and is used for nest construction
- House Sparrow control. House Sparrows present at Cliff Swallow colonies can reduce nesting success by 50% or more
- Annual removal and cleaning of artificial nests to keep ectoparasites in check
- At recently abandoned sites, broadcasting audio of nesting Cliff Swallows calls

Do I have the right habitat to encourage Cliff Swallow breeding success?

- Sites that appear to be ideal for nesting Cliff Swallows can be deceiving. There may be habitat features that we cannot detect but that play important roles in nest site selection. Thus, it is best to carry out management at: 1) sites with active colonies; 2) sites close to active colonies; 3) sites were active within previous several years. It is strongly recommended that efforts to attract Cliff Swallows do not take place at locations where House Sparrows are present, unless House Sparrow control efforts are in place.