

# Our Swallow Neighbors



*Tree swallow*



*Bank swallow*



*Cliff swallow*



*Barn swallow*



*Violet-green swallow*



*Northern rough-winged swallow*

Swallows are one of the many bird species that include Silver City and our region in their travels. The Tree and Bank swallows migrate through here on their journey northward.

Cliff, Barn, Violet-green, and Northern rough-winged swallows reside with us throughout the summer to nest and raise their families. These swallows rely on insects for 99% of their food.

## Master Builders

Barn, Cave and Cliff swallows all build their nests from mud. Cliff swallows build their gourd-shaped mud nests in colonies. Each nest has an opening just large enough for the bird to enter and exit. Barn and Cave swallows' nests are bowl-shaped and only partially enclosed.

mud available for swallows to construct their nests. The birds carry tiny pellets of mud in their beaks and form them into the correct shape. It can take 11,000 mud pellets to construct one nest! From three to five eggs are laid and are incubated for 20-26 days, requiring a lot of energy from the parent birds working together to tend and feed the young. From the start of nest building to departure of the young (fledglings) takes from 44-58 days, depending on weather and food availability.



*Cliff swallows gathering nesting material*

The mud that swallows need for building material is found where springs and seeps bubble up from the ground or at the edges of earthen cattle tanks, ponds or stream banks. Despite our dry climate, we do have

## Hard Working Hunters

Each day, a swallow can consume 60 insects per hour. Insect control is a valuable service that swallows provide to people. In our area, the mosquitoes the swallows eat can transmit diseases, such as West Nile Virus, which are harmful to humans.



*West Nile virus carrying mosquito*

## Swallow Protection

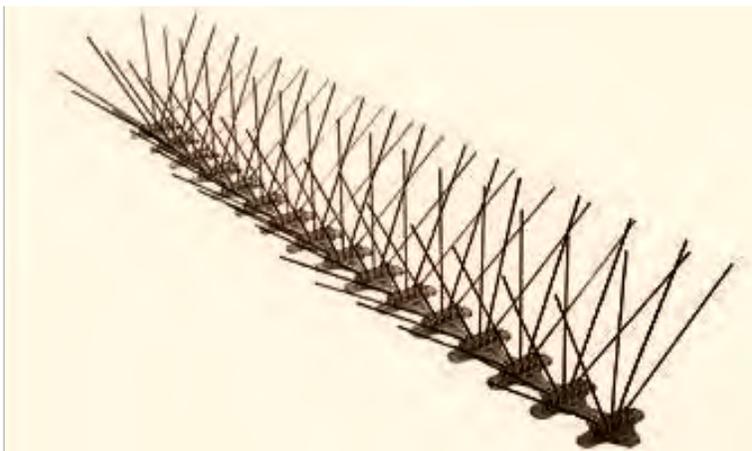
Swallows are a protected species under federal law. It is illegal to remove nests that birds are occupying. If a nest is destroyed, the swallows must find a new site, which can be very hard. Destruction of nests directly hurts swallow populations and thus is a danger to the species ability to thrive.



*Young Barn swallows in their nest*

## Swallows Do Not Harm People or Buildings

Although bird droppings can be viewed as a nuisance, there is no evidence that swallow droppings in our region carry any disease that affects people. Mud nests do not damage most building materials, despite statements to the contrary from some commercial sources that sell bird repellants. Sometimes swallows are attracted to places inconvenient for people, such as above the doorway of a public building. Installing “swallow guards” above the doorway can prevent nesting in these areas. Mesh netting or lengths of plastic or metal spikes can deter nest building.



*“Swallow guards” can be used to deter nest building*

## Lending A Hand

It's easy to not harm swallows and other birds, as well as insect pollinators such as butterflies and bees!

Simply avoid using pesticides and harsh cleaning products, like bleach, anywhere outside of your house. Be aware that pesticides include all types of insect control (insecticide), rodent control (rodenticide) and weed control (herbicide) products. Stick to mild biodegradable soaps for outdoor cleaning of lawn furniture, etc.

For making your own safe, homemade, insecticides go to [www.treehugger.com/lawn-garden/8-natural-homemade-insecticides-save-your-garden-without-killing-earth.html](http://www.treehugger.com/lawn-garden/8-natural-homemade-insecticides-save-your-garden-without-killing-earth.html)

*Be bird, butterfly and bee friendly!  
You'll be happy with the results, and so will they.*



*Barn swallows being fed*

### References:

The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America, David Allen Sibley, Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology. [www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu)



**Southwestern  
New Mexico  
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[www.swnmaudubon.org](http://www.swnmaudubon.org)