

Swallow Colony Registry (Swallow CORE) Volunteer Packet



Anyone can help with Swallow CORE. The protocols have been designed to be easy for any bird enthusiast to use. In this way, we hope to encourage participation by everyone from families to scout troops to experienced birders. This project includes four swallow species:

Barn Swallow
Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Purple Martin.

You will need to be able to identify the swallow species and count the number of active nests, so binoculars are helpful.

Volunteers can contribute in different ways, depending on the level of time and interest. This packet includes a description of two different tasks and the associated forms.

Task 1 involves checking one or more colony locations once a year, registering the location if needed, and reporting your observations.

Task 2 involves repeated visits to the same colony during the breeding season and registering the colony if needed.

Swallow CORE is a project of New Hampshire Audubon's Conservation Department. 2010 is a pilot year of the project so we appreciate any feedback.

Instructions

Task 1 – Record Colony Locations

When you are checking colony sites, be prepared to collect all the information needed for a colony registration form. If you know in advance where you are going, you might want to check Step 1 below before you head out.

Check a historic colony on the NH Audubon registry to see if it's still active

New Hampshire Audubon has a list of known colonies for Cliff Swallow, Bank Swallow, Purple Martin, and a few Barn Swallows. The list is available on the Swallow CORE web site: <http://www.nhbirdrecords.org/bird-conservation/swallow-core.htm>. It includes information on location and the year the colony was last known to be active as of January 1, 2010.

Some colonies on the NH Audubon list may no longer be active. This is especially likely for sites in southern NH and those which haven't been checked in several years (note the year in the registry!). Checking on these colonies is an important part of Swallow CORE, and volunteers are strongly encouraged to check these sites to see if they are still being used by swallows. If not, that information is valuable, so be sure to report your findings with a zero for the number of birds.

Go out on your own and look for sites

Please report any active breeding colonies of the four swallow species. You can tell if a colony is active by watching to see if birds are bringing in nesting material, bringing food to a nest, or if young birds are present.

You can locate colonies by knowing where to look or what behaviors to look for. Canoers and kayakers might be interested in paddling a long stretch of one of our larger rivers (e.g.,

Connecticut, Merrimack, Saco, etc.) and looking for Bank Swallow colonies along the way. Current information on their locations will fill some of the gaps in our knowledge. For Cliff and Barn Swallows, if you see birds foraging over open areas in June or early July, it's almost certain there's a colony nearby. Watch the birds more closely to see where they may be going, and look in that area for barns, bridges, or other structures that might host the colony.

Record Your Observations

Step 1. Check to see if the site is already in NH eBird

Go to www.ebird.org/nh

Sign in with the user name: swallowcore

password: swallow1234

Under Submit observations, click Find it on a Map

Look for a blue pin at your site

Step 2

If a blue pin is present marking the colony, you do NOT need to fill out a Site Registration Form. Submit your observations from that colony directly into NH eBird. Be sure to include YOUR NAME in the notes for that observation.

For number of birds, record the number of active nests unless you were able to accurately count the number of adults and young present. In the species comments, note whether you counted nests or birds.

If a blue pin is NOT present – you need to fill out a Site Registration Form AND map the colony location in NH eBird (be sure to use the same colony name in both – see the instructions for the Colony Registration Form). When you map the location in eBird zoom in far enough so that you can identify the specific building, bridge or nest site. Once it is mapped, enter your observations from that colony directly in NH eBird. Be sure to include YOUR NAME in the notes for that observation.

What if there are NO birds?

Follow Step 1 and Step 2 and enter a zero for that species in eBird.

Fill out a Site Monitoring Form and mail or e-mail it in.

(eBird may eliminate entries with zero in the future, so we need this backup.)

Instructions for Filling out the **Site Registration Form**:

The more detail you can provide the better, since ultimately this form will be the record from which all subsequent study of a given colony is based. While you may know exactly where the colony is located, think ahead to some point in time when a different observer may be monitoring the site. They will need to be able to find it, and if they're unfamiliar with the area this could be a significant challenge depending on the level of detail you provide.

Giving the colony a short but descriptive name is a good start. For example, "my house" will not be helpful to anyone but yourself, and "the Smith barn," probably isn't much better. An address can work, but that may be best saved for the more detailed site description. A good hybrid approach might be to use something like "Indian Stream Rd." for sites without clear identifying features and "NH Statehouse" for those that are a little more obvious (not that there's a swallow colony on the Statehouse). Don't forget to include the town! In the actual site description, be as specific as needed, down to things like the address, which side of the barn the

nests are on, and so forth. Always keep in mind that someone else may need to check this colony in the future.

In this age of GPS and GIS, it is equally important to get an accurate set of coordinates for the colony. When you plot the colony in NH eBird the site will automatically be recorded with coordinates. However, if you have a hand-held GPS receiver, take a reading in the field for later confirmation and assistance. In NH eBird, be sure to zoom in as closely as possible so as to get the location accurately. In most parts of the state, you can get to the resolution of individual buildings, and this should be sufficient.

Circle the species of swallow using the colony. In rare cases a colony may contain multiple species (such as a Northern Rough-winged Swallow among Bank Swallows, or a couple of Barn Swallows with Cliff Swallows), and in such cases be sure to circle both species on the form. This will help us track the changing composition of each colony.

Task 2 - Monitor a Colony

By monitoring a colony, you are making a commitment to record the numbers of birds there, and possibly their reproductive success, using the protocols and forms described below. You can choose a site from the NH Audubon registry of known colonies, or you may know of sites near your home that are not on our list.

Whether the site is on the registry or not, you will need to go through Step 1 under Task 1 to determine if you need to map the location in NH eBird and fill out a Site Registration Form which is designed to capture critical data on a colony's location.

Fill out a Site Monitoring Form for your visits to that colony. We encourage you to also enter those sightings in NH eBird under the Swallow Core login:

Go to www.ebird.org/nh

Sign in with the user name: swallowcore

password: swallow1234

Enter your sightings for each date at the colony location

Note: if the colony location is not on the map, please see Task1, Step 2 above

Instructions for filling out the Site Monitoring Form

Use this form to record detailed observations of swallow activity at a colony. At its most basic, monitoring a swallow colony involves making periodic visits and noting the number of nests, but volunteers are also encouraged to collect supplemental data on breeding behavior.

Counting swallows vs. counting nests:

Sometimes it can be difficult to count the number of nests if the colony is inaccessible (e.g., under a major highway bridge, on private land, etc.). If efforts to access the colony are unsuccessful, it is still important to get an idea of how many birds are nesting there. In such cases, counting or estimating the number of birds flying around the colony is a good surrogate. On the Site Monitoring Form, record such information in the "Other Notes" column and write "N/A" in the columns for number of nests.

Minimize disturbance by watching from a distance. If the swallows squawk at you and dive close to your head, you are too close to the colony.

- How often to check – check the colony at least once a week from approximately May 1 through the time the young fledge and the colony departs.
- What to record – record the following information:
 1. total number of nests both old and new
 2. the number of actively occupied nests – look for those with some sign of current activity such as new mud, rebuilt sides, or holes without debris or spider webs. Early in the spring (“Off-Season” below) you will not yet have active nests
 3. the number of young (to the extent possible) – for large colonies this is not possible, but for a few nests you may be able to count the number of young in open-nesting species.
 4. the stage of nesting:
 - Off-Season – spring birds have arrived and are flying around the colony and perhaps engaged in courtship but not actively nest building yet
 - Nest Building – adults are bringing in nesting material and building or refurbishing nests
 - Incubation – watch for an adult sitting quietly on the nest. For cavity nesters, watch for one adult to come in and change places with the other adult.
 - Nestlings – watch for signs of young birds such as adults bringing food to the nest, frequent visits to the nest by both adults, adult carrying a fecal sac (white pouches of young bird’s poop) from the nest, cheeping noise from the nest when adults approach, young birds at the nest hole
 - Fledged – “the colony is empty”! Young birds may still be nearby being fed by the adults but there is no activity at the nest itself.
 - Departed – the nesting season is over and all birds have left the colony.
- Record the presence of any species nesting in the colony that are not swallows. For example House Sparrows may use Cliff Swallow nests and European Starlings may nest in Purple Martin houses.

Swallow CORE: Site Registration Form

Check in NH eBird to see if the colony already has a site registration form – see volunteer packet.

Species: (circle all that apply)	Purple Martin	N. Rough-winged Swallow	Bank Swallow	Cliff Swallow	Barn Swallow
-------------------------------------	---------------	-------------------------	--------------	---------------	--------------

Site Name: _____

Town: _____

Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

For both of the above use DECIMAL DEGREES, e.g., 43.375°, NOT 43° 22' 30" or 43° 22.5'

Site Location details (e.g., address, directions, description, etc.):

Colony substrate (circle one, and provide additional details if needed):

Sand or gravel pit

river bank

other exposed bluff (please give details) _____

natural cliff

bridge

house, barn, or other building (please specify type) _____

other structure (please specify type) _____

Purple Martin house

Observer Name(s): _____

Reporter Information (the person filling out the form):

Name: _____

Address: _____

e-mail: _____ phone: _____

Return this form to: Swallow CORE, c/o Pamela Hunt, NH Audubon, 84 Silk Farm Rd., Concord, NH 03301
Or email to: phunt@nhaudubon.org

