

# Nova Scotia Species At Risk Beneficial Management Practices Series

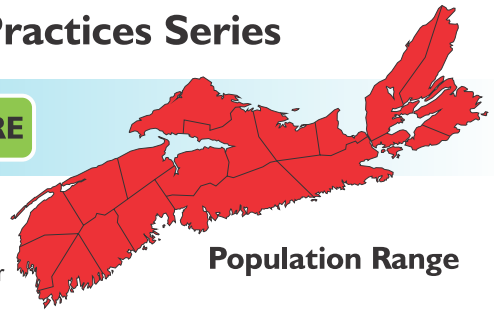
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## Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia*

### STATUS

Threatened	
Not Listed	

### AGRICULTURE



### Population Range

Occurs throughout Nova Scotia. Winters mainly in South America. Has declined by 98% over the last 40 years in Canada.



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Bank Swallow colony

## SPECIES DESCRIPTION

- The Bank Swallow is a small songbird (approximately 12 cm long) with long pointed wings and a forked tail.
- Their upperparts are greyish brown and its underparts are white, with a brown upper breast band running across their chest.
- Males and females are similar in appearance.
- Bank Swallows are a colonial species observed nesting in groups and their song is a continuous buzzy chatter.

## HABITAT DESCRIPTION

- In the Maritimes, Bank Swallows are found in areas with vertical banks such as riverbanks, and bluffs by lakes and the ocean.
- They will also use artificial/human-made sites like sand and gravel pits, road cuts, or stock piles of soil.
- Their nests are burrows with tunnel entrances created in banks.
- Bank Swallows build a simple nest in a chamber at the end of the burrow. Bank Swallow nest in colonies of various sizes.
- Bank Swallows inhabit these burrows from approximately May through August, or in some cases September.
- Dynamic processes (storms, tides) are required to create and maintain vertical slopes suitable for nesting; however, these processes can also remove habitat or otherwise make it unsuitable.
- Storms and tides are examples of dynamic processes that cause erosion.
- As they prey on flying insects, nesting sites are often in close proximity to open areas such as grasslands, meadows, pastures, croplands, wetlands, rivers, lakes and oceans, which often have a higher abundance of insects.

## THREATS

- Habitat loss as a result of erosion and flood control practices, aggregate management, or the loss of pastureland.
- Climate change impacts such as changes in timing of insect emergences, coastal erosion, and severe weather shifts.
- Declines of aerial insect prey resulting from the widespread use of pesticides, habitat loss and other factors.
- Road mortality from vehicle collisions.

## REPORT SIGHTINGS

When possible, report any of your observations of species at risk. Details such as time, date, location (Geographic or UTM coordinates) as well as photos are valuable additions to all reports.

**Contact:** 1-866-727-3447, [speciesatrisk.ca/sightings](http://speciesatrisk.ca/sightings), [sightings@speciesatrisk.ca](mailto:sightings@speciesatrisk.ca) AND the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Renewables, [biodiversity@novascotia.ca](mailto:biodiversity@novascotia.ca).

## KEY TERMS

### Buffer:

A natural or managed strip of vegetation around a natural feature(s) that is left covered in trees/shrubs/grasses/etc. to protect the target feature(s) from surrounding land uses.

### Ecological trap:

An ecological trap occurs when an animal selects what it thinks is high quality habitat, however in reality the habitat poses some risk to the individual. For example, a soil stockpile may look like suitable nesting habitat to a Bank Swallow, but risks being destroyed if the soil is used during the nesting season.

### Integrated Pest Management:

A pest management system that relies on a number of pest control methods. These include biological, cultural, physical, and chemical methods.



## HOW YOU CAN HELP (BENEFICIAL PRACTICES)

- Learn to identify Bank Swallows and report all observations (see contact information on front page).
- Protect or maintain nesting sites or suitable nesting habitat on your property:
  - Bank Swallows prefer to burrow in soils that are soft and easy to excavate, often close to a body of open water;
  - In many cases, Bank Swallow colonies will return to nest in the same area in future years;
  - Maintain suitable vertical nesting faces and coastlines on your property (e.g., avoid dumping material on lakeshores for erosion control). Vertical faces should be of at least 75 degrees for use by Bank Swallow;
  - If appropriate, use fencing to exclude livestock from accessing and potentially trampling known or potential nesting habitat;
  - Encourage the growth of grasses and forbs on the top of slopes to reduce the risk of erosion;
  - Avoid unnecessary human presence near the colony;
  - Inform others who will be using the area about the presence of the colony and the measures being practiced to avoid disturbing the colony.
- Improve the quality of potential Bank Swallow nesting habitat or create new areas of habitat. For complete guidance see Best Management Practices for the Protection, Creation and Maintenance of Bank Swallow Habitat in Ontario: <https://files.ontario.ca/bansbmpenpdffinalv.1.117mar17.pdf>.
- Leave birds and nesting habitat undisturbed during the breeding season:
  - There is a high risk of disturbing nesting when noisy activities or vibrations occur within 50 metres of the bird colony;
  - Avoid long-term use of heavy machinery in close proximity to an active colony;
  - Avoid disturbances near colonies that cause strong vibrations that could result in collapse of nest burrows.
- Provide sources of food by maintaining habitat:
  - Adult swallows must find enough food to raise their families;
  - Access to insect-rich habitats such as pastures with livestock, hayfields, ponds, and wetlands are ideal habitats to encourage successful reproduction.
- Do not place rocks or other materials below nesting habitat, as it can create access for predators. Digging mammals such as foxes, skunks, and raccoons pose a threat to nests, as they can dig into them from above. If you have pets, keep them away from nests.
- Take careful consideration when using pesticides:
  - Consider Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approaches and/or identify ways to minimize the application of pesticides;
  - Follow existing best practices and training guidelines for pesticide application and follow labels carefully in order to reduce impacts on non-target organisms and minimize the risk of pesticide drift or runoff. To review the Atlantic Canada Pesticide Applicator Training guidelines, visit <https://novascotia.ca/nse/pests/>
  - Avoid using pesticides near watercourses. When necessary establish buffer zones around watercourses or other sensitive areas to reduce the risk of contamination from field runoff or drift.
- Avoid creating ecological traps for nesting Bank Swallows. If you have stockpiles of soil that will need to be used, prevent Barn Swallows from nesting in these areas. This can be done by covering the pile with an erosion blanket or tarp.



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Example of suitable nesting habitat adjacent to a hayfield



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Bank Swallow colony

## TO LEARN MORE

To learn more about the Bank Swallow or other species at risk view the **Species at Risk in Nova Scotia, Identification & Information Guide, 2nd Edition** available online at <http://www.sarguide.speciesatrisk.ca/>

### Additional Resources:

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. 2017. Best Management Practices for the Protection, Creation and Maintenance of Bank Swallow Habitat in Ontario. Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2017. <https://files.ontario.ca/bansbmpenpdffinalv.1.117mar17.pdf>

Bank Swallow. (n.d.). Biodiversity Landowner's Guide. <http://www.farmbiodiversity.ca/species-at-risk-2/birds/barn-swallow/>

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