

Bank Swallow

Riparia riparia



Julio Mulero

PEI's Eroding Coast and Vanishing Habitat

PEI's coastline is fragile. It is made up of sandstone and claystone, and is prone to erosion. Between 0.5 and 1.5 meters of coastline is lost every year, and those numbers are expected to increase as water levels rise with climate change.

Humans try to prevent coastal erosion by installing armoring and 'riprap' along the shore. These methods are expensive, ineffective in the long run and destructive to the environment.

Armoring destroys nesting habitat for bank swallows. It also increases erosion on neighboring beaches, affecting the plants and animals that rely on those ecosystems.

IDENTIFICATION

- **Male and Female appear similar**, with a brown back, white belly, dark band across chest and extending down chest, forked tail, small bill and long wings
- Juveniles are similar to adults but have light-coloured edges on their back feathers
- An aerial insectivore— feeds on insects in flight, including: beetles, wasps, bees, ants, butterflies, moths and other flying insects



Ken Billington

An adult bank swallow in flight



Jill Rollins

HABITAT ON PEI

Bank swallows nest colonially in burrows in sandstone cliffs, high dunes and gravel and sand pits. They are found across PEI in large and small groups, in close proximity to the shore.

BREEDING BIOLOGY

Bank swallows usually arrive on PEI in May. Before they even have mates, the males choose a colony, a nest site within it, and begin to dig a burrow. Females arrive later, survey the males and their burrows and then select a mate. Burrows may be reused from previous years if they have not been eroded or infested with parasites.

Nests are placed deep inside the burrows, and burrows can be quite deep (average 60 cm). The nest itself is a flat mat of grass and leaves. In June, 4-8 eggs are laid and are incubated by both parents for 13-16 days. Juveniles fledge 18-24 days after hatching.

By late August, most bank swallows have left for their wintering grounds in Mexico, the Caribbean, and central South America.



Shirley Gallant

Bank swallows returning to a nesting colony



CONSERVING OUR COASTAL BIRDS

Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia*



Contact Us

If you would like to report a bank swallow sighting, please contact Island Nature Trust.

Phone: (902)892-7513

Email: projects@islandnaturetrust.ca

“Endangered species are sensitive indicators of how we are treating the planet, and we should be listening carefully to their message”

Donald Falk
restoration ecologist

THREATS

Bank swallows and other aerial insectivores are declining. No single reason for their decline has been identified, but there are many known threats. The bank swallow’s biggest threat on PEI is loss of nesting habitat as a result of increased erosion, reclamation of sand pits and quarries, and installation of erosion control measures along shorelines.



A PEI shoreline armoured with rocks

Bank swallows and all aerial insectivores may also be facing a changing food supply. Abundance and timing of insect populations fluctuate locally for many reasons; however extensive pesticide use, climate change and environmental contaminants can intensify these fluctuations. Sufficient food is critical to long-distance migrants. If adequate energy reserves are not reached on breeding grounds, bank swallows may die before reaching their wintering grounds.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Report bank swallow sightings to a local group such as Island Nature Trust. Try to record the number of pairs you see, number of *active* nests and total number of nest burrows. Citizen scientists and the data they collect are crucial in our understanding of local bird species
- Avoid the use of insecticides whenever possible
- Think twice about installing rock armor or other erosion prevention methods along the shore. If you decide to armour your shoreline, check first for nesting bank swallows and avoid construction work during the bird breeding season

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