

## TWO NOTES ON THE BARN SWALLOW

By Russell J. Rutter

The fine article on breeding Barn Swallows by Frederick S. Schaeffer in the November-December 1968 issue of EBBA News recalled two notes on this species that have been lying unpublished in my files for several years. I think they may add a little to Mr. Schaeffer's excellent report.

The first concerns the remarkable viability of nestlings of this species and I shall quote directly from notes made at the time to avoid memory lapses. It should be mentioned that this observation was an incidental part of my work as an interpretive naturalist for the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests in Algonquin Park, Ontario, which will partly account for lack of an even more detailed study.

On Saturday, June 17, 1967, a small nestling was picked up by a camper at Lake of Two Rivers and given to a campground attendant who gave it to me. It was in a paper carton on a piece of soiled cloth. The age of the bird could only be guessed at. Its eyes were not yet open and it was covered by a short blackish down with no sign of beginning feathers. I guessed it to be not more than three days old but did not even try to guess the species.

The weather was cool and wet, the temperature varying between 44 and 60 degrees from June 17 to 21, with a north wind. Visible insect life was at a minimum. But the little mouth sprang open at the slightest vibration of its carton nest, so I took the only food available, an earthworm, and broke it in small pieces that were eagerly swallowed when dropped into the waiting gullet.

I was spending the night in Huntsville, 40 miles away, so I moved the bird to a large tin can, added a few feathers from an old Tree Swallow nest to its bedding and took it home with me. At home I hung a 40W light bulb in a large carton, placed the can against the lighted bulb to supply heat, and left this makeshift nursery in the basement, fully expecting to find a dead nestling in the morning.

But when I nudged the carton next morning a tiny gape was more urgent than ever, so again it was filled with earthworm fragments and taken back to the Park Museum. There was intermittent sunshine that day so I left the can with bird in the car, parked where it would receive as much natural heat as possible. At every opportunity, but not more than a dozen times during the day, I visited the car and dropped a few pieces of earthworm into the waiting mouth. As the day cooled toward evening, several times I found the little bird quite cold to the touch and too lethargic to beg for food. Then I held it in my closed hand until it revived, which it did very quickly, and it was at once ready to eat again.

To shorten the story somewhat, this routine was followed for a week with little variation except the addition of a very few flying insects, such as house flies, when they were available. I just would not have believed that so young a bird of such a specialized habit as a swallow could survive this haphazard care, but seeing was believing. By mid-week both wing and tail feathers had erupted, accompanied by enough body feathers to identify a Barn Swallow. At the end of the week it was giving quite noisy food calls and obviously had no intention of dying. It would then be about ten days old.

At this time we had a Barn Swallows' nest containing young on a projecting beam about 15 feet above the back door of the Museum. These young were about a week old and noticeably not as far advanced as my orphan. Looking ahead to at least another ten days of playing mother swallow to an increasingly demanding family, I had a thought. There was no room in the nest, already overflowing with a large brood, so I placed my bird in an empty facial tissue box, along with its rag and feather nest, hoisted a ladder, and pushed the box against the side of the nest, fixing it to the beam with a thumbtack.

By this time my young swallow had become a public figure and a small crowd gathered to see what would happen when an adult arrived with food. There was no problem. The box didn't even arouse curiosity, but the instinct to fill an open mouth worked perfectly, and part of the food went to the new arrival.

So it went until July 1, and on that day there was no feeding in the box. Instead, there was a new bird in - or on, for it was now overflowing the nest, noticeably larger than its adopted siblings, and pushing forward to take the lion's share of food. By the middle of the next week, when it would be approximately three weeks old, it was first to leave the nest, but was followed during the next two or three days by the others.

If this was a typical Barn Swallow, is it any wonder that the species is so successful over such a wide range?

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The second Barn Swallow story goes back to 1963, when we had a nest balanced on a telephone wire insulator on the west side of the Park Museum. Days were wasted while the birds tried to get a foundation to stay in place, but this was accomplished and incubation was in progress when the female was found dead from unknown causes beneath the nest on June 4. I had banded this female on May 16, 1962, when I caught her by hand at night in a nearby storeroom.

I had not watched closely their incubating schedule, but had noticed that the female always went on the nest in the evening and the male retired to a nightly roost nearby.

On the day the dead female was found, the male sat on the nest most of the day, but, as I feared, left for his roost as usual in the evening. The next morning he returned and again spent most of the day on the nest, but left in the evening. The third day he was still there, but very restless, and incubated not more than an hour or two all day. The next day he did not go on the nest but remained nearby, usually on the telephone wire and often singing and calling. When other Barn Swallows passed over he always dashed after them, only to return to his hopeful vigil.

It was obvious by now that he intended to hold his territory and try for a new mate, and on the fourth day after he had stopped incubating he had one. At first she only perched on the wire for a few minutes and then took off again, with the male in distressed pursuit. But each time she stayed longer, and within two days she was inspecting the abandoned nest. Almost at once she initiated the construction of another nest on top of it, to the visible delight of the excited widower.

This nesting was successful, and after the young had left I removed the two-story nest for inspection. The first nest had been used considerably as a foundation, so there was much less work involved in building the second. The most surprising thing about it was that only a minimum amount of lining had been placed over the five eggs left by the first female. The eggs could actually be seen through the new lining, and perhaps more surprising still, none of them were broken!

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#### SEQUENTIAL TRIO OF WARBLER BANDERS RETURN

By G. Hapgood Parks

I dare say that returning banded warblers do not glut the records of very many banders. Although a fair number of the warblers we have banded at Monhonon's Cove in Milbridge, Maine, have subsequently returned to us, the summer of 1968 brought us for the first time the unique experience of netting three which had been banded in numerical sequence during a preceding year. They were:

<u>Band No.</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Banded (1967)</u>	<u>Returned (1968)</u>
110-93414	Black-throated Green	July 18	August 24
110-93415	Black-throated Green	July 18	August 6
110-93416	American Redstart	August 2	August 30

(The considerable time lapse which appears in the banding dates was caused by a long spell of dense fog that made netting impossible.)

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