

Recent Notes on the Cliff Swallow in Mississippi

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The Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) has, until recently, been known to nest in Mississippi only in Tishomingo County, in the extreme northeast (Turcotte 1975). The best-known colony is on the State Highway 25 bridge across Yellow Creek, 9 miles north of Iuka. In 1975, three apparently active nests were reported at the Bull Mountain Creek bridge on State Highway 25 near the south boundary of Itawamba County (Phares 1975). Also the same year, single nests were found at two bridges on the Natchez Trace Parkway in southwestern Mississippi, one each in Claiborne County and Hinds County (Turcotte 1975).

On 11 June 1978, I found a Cliff Swallow nest at the Graysport crossing of Grenada Lake, north of Gore Springs in Grenada County. At this point, a county road crosses the south arm of the lake on a long concrete bridge. Several Cliff Swallows were hawking for insects over the lake along with about 40 Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*). Although the sides of the bridge were difficult to see except from the water, I was able to see one active Cliff Swallow nest near the south end of the bridge, on the west (outer) side of the westernmost of several concrete beams which ran lengthwise beneath the north-south bridge. The nest, made of bright red mud and looking freshly-built, had the typical re-ort shape. During the 15 minutes I watched it, the adults exchanged places on the nest every 2-3 minutes. Another pair of Cliff Swallows kept returning to a spot near the middle of the east side of the bridge, but a nest there would have been impossible to see. Thus it seems that at least 2 pairs of Cliff Swallows were nesting on the bridge, along with many pairs of Barn Swallows.

The Graysport bridge is about 70 miles west-southwest of the Bull Mountain Creek nesting locality. On 20 June 1978 I spent about 30 minutes at the latter place, but saw no Cliff Swallows nor evidence of any Cliff Swallow nests, although about 50 Barn Swallows were present.

I observed the Cliff Swallow colony at Yellow Creek for about 1½ hours on 19 June 1978. The active nests were all on the west side of the concrete bridge, about 10 feet above the water. I counted 23 active nests; at least half of these contained young, several probably contained eggs, and 6 of them were still being built. Several pairs of swallows brought beakfuls of mud to their nests as I watched. Of these 23 nests, all but one were located over water in the central part of the bridge. Although there were many old nests on the east side of the bridge, the only sign of current activity there was one pair which appeared to be nest-building. At least 3 Cliff Swallow nests had been appropriated by House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*), as indicated by

pieces of grass or straw protruding from the entrance. One of these, on the east side of the bridge, contained large, noisy young. The two on the west side may not have been active, although a female House Sparrow briefly entered one. Besides Cliff Swallows and House Sparrows, at least 3-4 pairs of Barn Swallows were nesting under the bridge.

The Yellow Creek bridge is slated for removal during construction of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. However, an enormous, high-clearance replacement bridge is presently being built a short distance west of the old one. I predict that Cliff Swallows will begin nesting on the new bridge, and that this colony may become much larger than the original one. The new bridge is very similar to one over the Tennessee River at Pickwick Dam, Tennessee - only 10 miles north of the Yellow Creek bridge - which currently supports several hundred pairs of nesting Cliff Swallows.

The Grenada Lake nesting, plus those on the Natchez Trace Parkway, may be forerunners of a range expansion by Cliff Swallows into the Gulf Coastal Plain, following on the heels of the recent and massive invasion of the same area by Barn Swallows (Kennedy 1974, Jackson and Burchfield 1975). Cliff Swallow numbers appear to be increasing rapidly in the Tennessee Valley of Alabama (D.M. Brown and C.D. Cooley, pers. comm.) and in northern Arkansas (Stewart 1976), and first nesting records have been established recently in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida (Sykes 1976). Cliff Swallows seem to be attracted to Barn Swallow colonies, and nearly all Mississippi nestings have been with, or close to, nesting Barn Swallows. Like Barn Swallows (Jackson and Burchfield 1975), Cliff Swallows in our area nest mainly on concrete bridges, although they seem on average to prefer longer bridges than do Barn Swallows, especially those near large bodies of water. (The Yellow Creek bridge is only a few yards from Pickwick Lake on the Tennessee River, and the Florida nest-site reported by Sykes (1976) was only 200 yards from Lake Okeechobee.) The number of large concrete bridges and water impoundments is rapidly increasing in Mississippi, and it seems possible that Cliff Swallows may colonize at least the northern and central parts of the state in substantial numbers during the next 10 to 20 years.

Literature Cited

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Northern Phalarope at Pascagoula - First Photographic Record*

For Mississippi

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On 6 June 1979, JAT and MBH found a Northern Phalarope (Lobipes lobatus), in the northernmost diked pond of the area known as the Pascagoula River Marsh in Jackson County, Ms. This represents the first spring record and the fourth state record of this species in the state. The 6 June observation was of a bird believed to be a male Northern Phalarope coming into breeding plumage ∴ its coloration was not as bright as suggested in current field guides. It was immediately recognized as to species by the presence very close by of a female Wilson's Phalarope, (Steganopus tricolor). We observed that the Northern Phalarope was notably smaller though somewhat chunkier in appearance ∴ with a shorter, thicker neck and a thin, needle-like bill which was short by comparison with the bill of a Wilson's Phalarope. The bird was active, swimming and spinning constantly.

On the following day, 7 June, PVD secured photographs of the bird which adequately show color and pattern, hence we have omitted the plumage description. PVD observed the phalarope until mid-afternoon of the 7th, but it was not seen thereafter.

The Northern Phalarope is of rare occurrence, not only in coastal Mississippi, but throughout the interior of the United States as well, it being a bird of the open oceans and, in migration, of coastal bays. The species was first seen in Mississippi by James A. Sanders, in Attala County, on 11 September 1976 (Sanders 1976). That bird was present from 11-13 September and was also observed by Ray Weeks. On 21 September 1976 another winter-plumaged Northern Phalarope was found by Larry Gates at the Hattiesburg lagoons in Forrest County (Gates 1976). It could not be located on the following day. The first coastal occurrence of the species was noted on 10 September 1977 by JAT, Kim Eckert, and Robert P.

*Photo on file at Mississippi State University