

## EIGHT SEASONS, AND THREE BANDED BARN SWALLOWS

BY HEATHCOTE M. H. KIMBALL AND JOHN T. NICHOLS

1938-1940

The Kimballs have a shore cottage at Oak Island, Long Island, N. Y., which they visit irregularly, mostly over week-ends. In summer there are usually two or three pairs of Barn Swallows nesting about its porch, and they were of the opinion that the same pair of birds returned each year to one nest which was repeatedly placed in an identical site. To prove this the male of this pair was banded on the left leg (No. 138-9857) June 11-12, and the female on the right leg (138-9858) June 18, 1938.

In 1939 a male and female swallow banded respectively on left and right leg, doubtless these two birds, had returned on May 6, and that summer occupied the same nest-site as in 1938. The question arises whether they were mated again due to recognizing one another, due to both homing to the same nest-site, or from a combination of these factors.

After an absence of weeks following the launching of their brood, they were both observed again at the nesting station on July 22 and August 12, not recorded although looked for the last two week-ends in August. Barn Swallow migration was noticeably under way along the south shore of Long Island and between Long Island and New Jersey August 26-27, and it is assumed they departed for the south at about this time.

On May 5 and again on May 10, 1940, the left-banded swallow was seen about the porch of the cottage, as also two other pairs of Barn Swallows, but the right-banded bird did not return, and had presumably been lost during its migration of 1939-40, as no such bird has been seen since.

1940-1941

So far the record is plain enough. It now becomes confused, and later uncertain. There were no swallows about the porch on May 12, 1940. On May 18-19, two pairs were building, one nest near the location previously occupied by the banded pair, on the same beam a few feet away, but the banded bird was either not present, or its band overlooked—a possibility. On June 9 and 16, however, the left-banded male was at the near nest, its mate an unbanded bird. This nest held five eggs on June 9, first young on June 16, five large young being fed by two adults on June 29. On the 29th, if either old bird had a band, it was not made out, but it is not always easy to see the band on a swallow's leg. The young were still in the nest on July 4, a left-banded bird feeding them, and they left the nest on July 7.

On July 29 the left-banded Barn Swallow was near its nesting site again with three others, after an indefinite absence. Swallows were flocking on August 1, an estimated 150 alighting together on reed-grass tassels toward evening, but a Barn Swallow's nest at a neighboring house held young August 10-11.

On June 1, 1941, a left-banded Barn Swallow had a nest situated close to where those of previous years had been. It was at this nest on June 7, which then held five eggs, and was the only nest on the porch. The young hatched on June 22, were very large on July 4, left the nest on July 6.

It is reasonably certain that the left-banded swallow from 1938 to 1941 was our No. 138-9857, although its band was not checked.

#### 1942-1945

In 1942 a left-banded Barn Swallow was seen close to where such a bird had nested in previous years, on May 13. There was a nest with young on the same beam it had previously used on June 28, young sitting on the porch rail on July 4. The cottage was visited even less frequently in 1943, and the only record for that year is that a nest had fallen to the porch, the young dead, on July 17.

On May 12, 1944, a left-banded Barn Swallow had a nest on the same beam, close to where such a bird had had one in previous years. There were five eggs in this nest on May 28. The eggs had hatched and the banded bird was observed on June 11; it was also recorded, and there were four large young on June 25, which were gone on July 1.

The left-banded bird was back again on July 18, 20, and alighted with four others on an accustomed perch near its nest, the front porch clothesline, on July 29. Various birds are known to return to their nesting station, if but for a day or so, some time after having launched their brood and gone, and this was the third instance of such behavior we had observed in our Barn Swallows.

Barn Swallows arrived at Oak Island unusually early in 1945,—recorded on April 1. One pair of Barn Swallows had a half built nest May 11, and a left-banded bird was observed May 12 and 13, its nest just being started May 12, on the same beam as in previous years. It was recorded again on May 27, its nest about three-quarters built. There was no doubt in our minds but that this left-banded male swallow was our No. 138-9857 of 1938, but, having decided to assemble our eight years of data and place them on record it was essential to check its band. On June 9 it was captured by flashlight at night without difficulty, alongside its nest on which the female was sitting on five eggs, and proved to be a "foreign" bird! It was No. 140-97486, which, according to information kindly furnished by the Fish and Wildlife Service, was banded by Mr. J. A. Hines, as a young bird, at Jones Beach, Long Island, on June 24, 1941. This could not have been the

left-banded swallow at our station in 1941, but very likely was that of 1944.

The chance of such a replacement, where there had been plenty of swallows, none other with a band seen over a period of years, at the identical of two or three occupied nest sites, by a bird of the same sex banded on the same leg, seemed negligibly slight. However, consideration of the case after the fact suggests that more than pure chance was involved. No. 138-9857's new (unbanded) mate of 1940, 41, likely 42, would probably have been younger than he, he the first of this pair to drop out, and this female likely to have retained her (his old) nest-site, and picked up another male, younger and less well established than she. Jones Beach is on the same outer beach strip of Long Island as Oak Island, about 10 miles further west, and from what we know of the return of young birds, it was probable that No. 140-97486 would have returned to this strip, and at least been within the radius of search for an Oak Island swallow seeking a mate. It is even possible that, conditioned by having been mated to No. 138-9857, she would have selected a banded male from those available.

To return to observations later in 1945, on June 23 the banded bird was feeding five young in his nest, and on July 1 the young were leaving it.

On July 29 a left-banded male Barn Swallow, presumably No. 140-97486 again, was in attendance on a late nest with five eggs, on a different beam. The eggs hatched on August 1; young in the nest were large on August 10, one which had fallen outside, dead; and they were flushed from the nest, which was badly infected with bird-lice, on August 19. The left-banded adult male was noted as present July 29, 30, August 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 16, 17 and 19, as feeding the young August 2, 3, 5 and 9, but was now aloof and wary, and attempts to capture it and re-check the band were unsuccessful. On July 30 it was nearby with five immature, and joined by eight other swallows. On August 8 a flock of some 17 swallows came about, and those which approached too closely were bumped away from the nest by the banded bird and his mate.

This record is disappointing because its value is lessened by failure to check bands, which frequently should have been possible, but it has interesting features. There is no doubt of the return of both of a pair of Barn Swallows the following year, mated again, and with an identical nest-site, near where others were nesting. Three cases where the Barn Swallow returned to its nesting station shortly before flocking and migration of the species, and one when it did so at a corresponding date and raised a late brood, indicates that such returns are due to usually temporary recrudescence of the nesting instincts. The fallacy or danger in sight records of banded birds is also shown.

Garden City, Long Island, N. Y.