

barn swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Hirundinidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The barn swallow averages six to seven and three-fourths inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). It has blue-black feathers on the back and red-orange feathers on the underparts, with the color more intense under the head. White spots may be seen on the tail as this bird flies. The outer tail feathers are long and thin compared with the inner ones. This arrangement forms the “swallow-tailed” look. The feet and bill are extremely small. Wings are long and pointed. The male and female are similar in appearance.

BEHAVIORS

The barn swallow is an abundant migrant and summer resident in Illinois. It is the most common swallow in the state. This graceful flier swoops close to the ground in open areas, farms, fields, marshes and lakes. Its call is “vit” or “kvik-kvik.” Early April is arrival time for spring migrants. These birds nest in barns, houses, culverts, bridges and other human-made structures. The nest is made of mud and straw. Both male and female carry mud balls in their bills to build the nest over a six- to eight-day period. The female deposits four to six eggs per clutch. Male and female alternate incubation duties during the day, but only the female incubates at night. The incubation period is about 15 days. The barn swallow may nest two or three times per summer. Fall migration begins in July and August. Flying insects are the prey items of this bird.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; Lake Michigan; marshes; peatlands; wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie

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