

Bank Swallow

Riparia riparia

General Information:

-The smallest member of the North American swallow family is an aerial gymnast that twists and turns in the air over its breeding territory. Males and females take turns digging burrows into vertical banks with their bills. Once a hole is made, they use their feet to finish the tunnel, which sometimes are as long as five to six feet. The scientific name refers to their association with rivers during migration and their predilection for nesting along sandy gravelly riverbanks. The dark narrow breast band is difficult to see when the bird is in flight, but the combination of an erratic flight pattern, chocolate-brown upper-parts, paler brown rump, dark brown wing linings, and snowy white under-parts serve to identify this bird.

Song:

-The song of the Bank Swallow is a dry chattering *zzzrt orzzzrt, zzzrt*.

Behavior:

-The Bank Swallow is a gregarious little bird that often migrates and feeds with other swallows. They gather in large pre-migratory and communal roosts. They can catch insects in flight and will occasionally take insects off of the water's surface. Courtship includes dropping and catching feathers in the air, as if playing, by each member of the pair; copulation in the nest burrow often follows such "play" and many feathers are used in lining the nest.



Nesting:

-Incubation 14-16 days by both sexes. The 1-2 broods of altricial young stay in the nest for 18-24 more days and are fed by both sexes.

Population:

-Common and widespread; often near the water. Numbers are stable overall, but species is declining in California due to river bank alteration for flood control.

Conservation:

-Neo-tropical migrant.

Shoreline Restoration Issues:

-To create an environment friendly for the Bank Swallow, you have to live on a water body with a steep slope. The planting of shrubs and coniferous trees appropriate to your site conditions, along with emergent aquatic vegetation is encouraged.