

Tree Swallows

Overview and Nesting Preferences

IDES 3302
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Introduction

Tree swallows are a small songbird found across North America. They live near bodies of water that provide flying insects to feed on. They usually feed from dawn to dusk in sheltered areas, no higher than 40 feet from the ground. Tree swallows are very social birds and form large migratory flocks. They often nest close together but rarely share nest cavities. Although they are not a high conservation concern, their numbers are limited by the availability of nest sites due to loss of habitat.

Overview

Nesting Habitat: Lakes, Shores, Grasslands, and Marshes

Nesting: Cavity

Food: Insects

Behaviour: Aerial Forager

Conservation: Low Concern

Physical Description:

Tree swallows are a medium sized swallow, identifiable by their iridescent blue backs and streamlined shape. These songbirds have long pointed wings and a short squared or slightly notched tail.

Adult Tree Swallows have an average length from tail feather to bill of 140mm and a mass between 17to 22g.

Male:

- Blue back
- White below
- Gray wings and tail feathers

Female:

- Brown back (1 year) becomes blue
- White below
- Gray wings and tail feathers

Juveniles:

- Sooty gray back
- White below
- Dusty wash across chest



Nesting

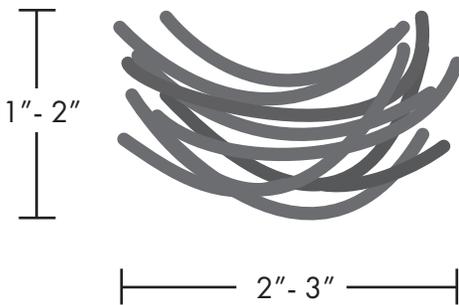
Tree Swallows nest in pre-made cavities such as standing dead trees, old woodpecker cavities, short hollow stumps over water, and nest boxes. Occasionally they will nest in hollow tree stumps, holes in the ground, or building eaves and other unexpected sites. Tree swallows require a nearby body of water to feed on insects over but are otherwise accommodating. Nesting is known to occur between May and July but varies by location.

The females do most of the nest building and can take anywhere from a few days to two weeks to complete. She will press her body against the nest to create the cup shape. Materials are collected near the water or from the ground within 100 feet surrounding the nest site.



Nesting Range

Average nest size



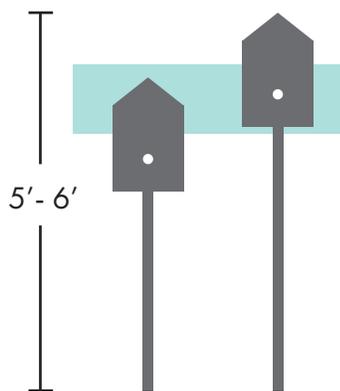
Nest Materials:

- Grass (primarily)
- Pine needles
- Mosses
- Rootlets
- Aquatic plants
- Animal hair
- Artificial materials
- Lined with feathers of other bird species

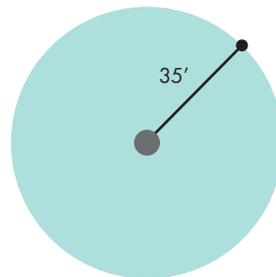


Nesting Period

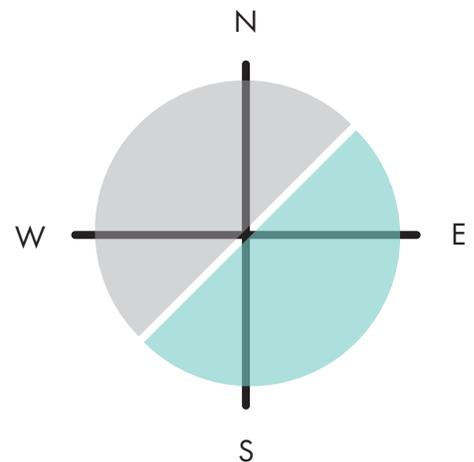
Nest Box Location Preferences



Height of box between 5 and 6 feet



Minimum 35 feet of spacing around nest box



East and South Facing



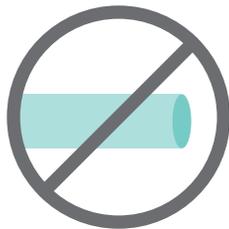
Nest Box Design Considerations

Predators

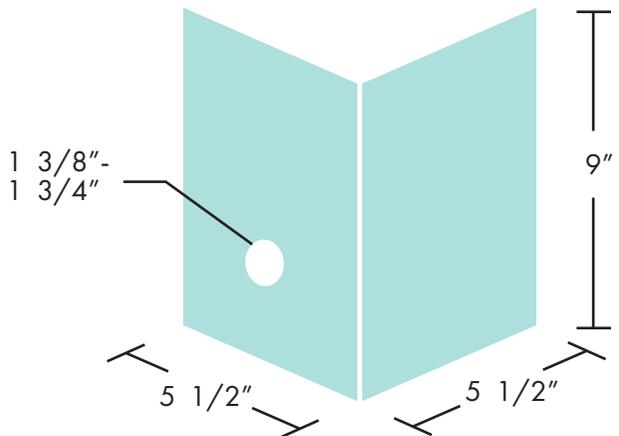
Tree swallows commonly choose to nest in artificial bird boxes although may be threatened by predators and other birds. If competition between bird species occurs, a second nest box can be placed 20-25 feet away. You can help deter predators by not putting a perch in the box. To further prevent predators, predator guards can be installed.

These include:

- Entrance hole extenders
- Collars/Cone baffle
- Stovepipes
- Noel Guards



Nest Box Dimensions



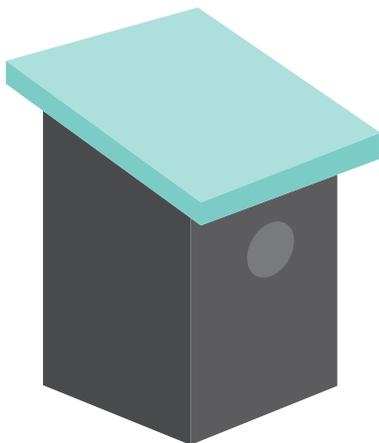
Ventilation

To ensure sufficient ventilation in the nest box, create ventilation holes on all sides for the box, 5/8" in diameter minimum.

Materials

Cedar, Pine, or Cypress preferred

The walls should be made of an untreated, unpainted wood that is thick enough to help regulate temperature (3/4" recommended). The interior walls should be rough to help nestling climb out. A series of horizontal cuts (1/4" deep) can be added on the interior to further help nestlings climb the wall.



Rain Management

It is important to ensure that your nest box remain dry. This can be achieved very simply by sloping the roof, creating an overhand, creating gutters, and drainage holes.

Overhand: 2-4" (front), 2" (sides)

Gutters: Create 1/4" deep cuts under the roof on all three edges to channel water away

Recess Floor: Lift floor 1/4" minimum up from the bottom

Drainage: create a minimum of 4 drainage holes on the base of the box, 3/8"-1/2" in diameter.



Sources

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