

# BIODIVERSITY on your Farm

The National Biodiversity Data Centre has set a challenge for farmers to record some of the amazing biodiversity found on your farm during the year. We have 40 species for you to record.

Are you up for the challenge?

## Species: House Martin

Scientific Name: *Delichon urbicum*

Irish name: Gabhlán Binne

### Group

Belong to the Swallows and Martins (Hirundinidae) bird family with Sand Martin and Swallow.

1 of 457 resident and regularly breeding birds species in Ireland.

### How common on farms

Biodiversity surveys were carried out across 40 farms within the National Biodiversity Data Centre's 'Protecting Farmland Pollinators' EIP project (<https://biodiversityireland.ie/projects/protecting-farmland-pollinators/>). The 40 farms were chosen to reflect farms of differing types and intensity levels. The House martin was recorded feeding on a number of the 40 farms.



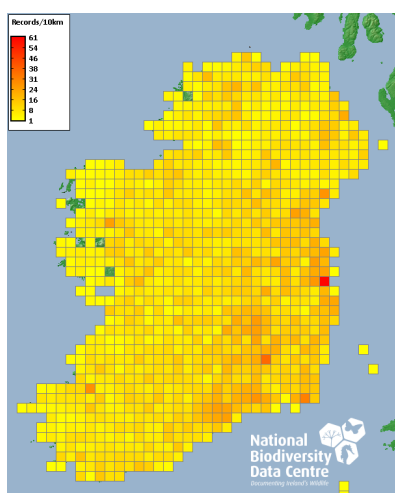
House Martin. Note: Glossy black head, back, wings and tail. Pure white under parts.

### Identification Tips

- Between Sand martin and Swallow size.
- In all plumages, has a large white rump.
- Adults have glossy black head, back, wings and tail, contrasting with pure white under parts.
- Glides on extended triangular wings.
- Rather vocal, with the most frequent call being a dry 'prittt'.

### Distribution

Common and widespread summer visitor, mid-March to late September.



Source: The House Martin records as viewed on Biodiversity Maps, 2023.

## Biodiversity Tip No. 12 Muddy areas are great for nest building House martins.

A muddy pool or puddle, where they can collect nesting material is helpful, especially during a dry spring.



## Conservation Status

Red Lists are an internationally recognised methodology for assessing conservation status. An Irish Birds of Conservation Concern (IBoCC) List was published for 2020 to 2026. It found that the House Martin was Amber listed, meaning they are of medium conservation concern.

## Management Tips

### *Food for House Martin:*

- They spend most of their time on the wing collecting insects.
- Farmland habitat like mature native hedgerows, wet areas and ponds will help to supply their food, as will reducing the use of pesticides.

### *Nesting sites for House Martin:*

- The bird's mud nest is usually sited below the eaves of buildings.
- A muddy pool or puddle where they can collect nesting material is helpful, especially during a dry spring.
- They cannot build their nests on plastic or metal surfaces, so lining eaves with suitable material such as wooden planks, will provide a nest-building opportunity.
- Various artificial house martin nests are available.
- Several pre-fabricated nests can be placed alongside each other to encourage House martins.

## Farmer Biodiversity Action

Co Kildare farmer, Dermot Doran, is a great advocate for Swifts and House martins. **Dermot added 2 House martin nests to his home in 2014, in 2023 he has 23 pairs!**



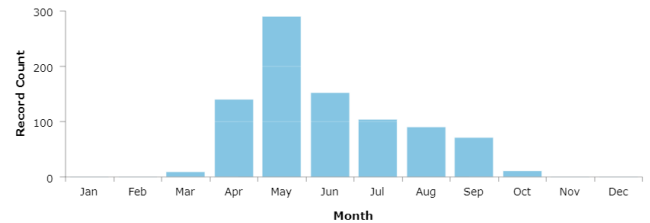
House Martins have built their own nests beside the artificial nests that Dermot added.



## When?

A summer visitor, can be seen between mid-March and late September. The earliest it has been recorded in Ireland is 9 March (2009).

### Records per month across all datasets



National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland, House Martin, *Delichon urbicum*, image, accessed May 2023, <https://maps.biodiversityireland.ie/Species/11296>

## Where on the farm?

Mostly associated with people, found around towns and villages. Can be seen feeding on aerial insects and so is most frequently seen in areas of mixed agriculture, near water and in the vicinity of woodland.

Can be found nesting under eaves of suitable buildings, between 5 and 10 m above ground.

## Value

- Aerial feeders over farmland, like the House martin indicate a good supply of flying insects are available.
- They feed on flying aphids, a natural pest control.
- The area around farm buildings can make an important contribution to farm wildlife.

House Martins, gathering mud in Dermot's farm yard.



## Further Info

It's hard to believe that House martins, weighing no more than an AA battery, are summer migrants and spend their winters in Africa.

They traditionally built their mud nests on cliff faces. In the last 200 years they started to make use of buildings, allowing them to expand their range.

They now favour the close association with people, which has allowed the birds to even use urban areas. They are colonial nesters, with an average group size of 4 to 5 nests, although large colonies have been recorded.

Their intricate mud nests, are built up with layers of bill-sized pellets, they take days to build and are often returned to and used in following years. Both males and females help to build the nest.

The female lays up to five white eggs, which hatch after about a fortnight. The chicks are usually ready to fledge after around 22–23 days. A second brood is usually raised each year.

## Similar species

They can be similar to Sand martin, Swallow and Swift.

The House martin is the only one with a white rump. The Swallow has long tail feathers.

## Affected by a change in climate?

As these birds rely on wet weather to build their nests, and warm weather to gather food, dramatic changes in the weather (such as extreme dry or cold periods) can have a negative effect on their numbers.

The Farmland Pollinator Officer post is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as one of its contributions to assisting implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025.



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine



An Roinn Tithíochta,  
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht  
Department of Housing,  
Local Government and Heritage



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta  
agus Fiadhúlra  
National Parks and Wildlife Service

## Need some help with identification?

Just drop us a line, we'll be happy to help:

[pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie](mailto:pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie)

## Useful Links

Birdwatch Ireland have information here:

<https://birdwatchireland.ie/birds/house-martin/>

Some helpful tips here:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/house-martin/encouraging-them-to-nest/>

## Record here

Your records will help us build a picture of farmland biodiversity in Ireland. If you're happy with your identification, you can submit your record.

- On the National Biodiversity Data Centre website:

<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/biodiversity-on-your-farm#7/53.455/-8.016>

or

- You could also download our free smartphone App for recording in the field

*Android App:*

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=nbdcmobile.biodiversity>

*Iphone App:*

<https://apps.apple.com/ie/app/biodiversity-data-capture/id906361120>