

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: Swallow

Scientific Name: *Hirundo rustica*

Irish name: Fáinleog

Group

Belong to the Swallow and Martin (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 Swallow was recorded feeding on some of the 40 farms.



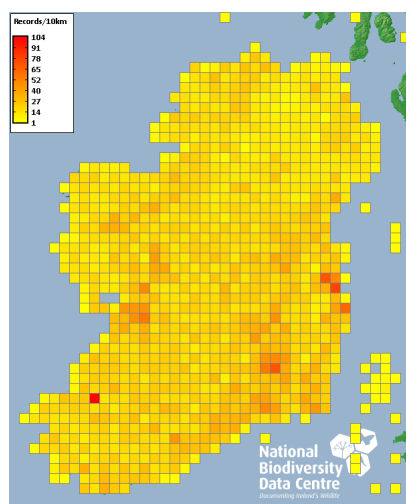
Swallow. Note: Long forked tail streamers and scythe shaped wings.

Identification Tips

- Long forked tail streamers and scythe shaped wings with smaller wingspan than a Swift.
- Body is 15 to 20cm long, wingspan 32cm.
- Glossy, dark blue-black on top with a white underside and a red throat.
- Fly low to the ground or at tree height in darting and gliding motions or perched on overhead wires.
- Often make twittering and chirruping noises.

Distribution

Common summer visitor and widespread.



Source: The Barn
Swallow records as
viewed on
Biodiversity Maps, 2023.

Biodiversity Tip No. 25

Plan for next year's Swallows.

Supply a ledge in a suitable building where Swallows can nest.



Photo: Dorothy Ashcroft

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 Barn Swallow was Amber listed, meaning they are a breeding bird of medium conservation concern.

Management Tips

On the farm:

- Retain permanent pasture for grazing livestock.
- Retain and manage native species hedgerows.
- Retain wetland features, such as ponds and ditches.
- Create a farm pond or wetland feature.

Nesting sites:

- Supply a ledge in a suitable outbuilding, with access for swallows.
- Supply a muddy puddle for nest buildings material in the spring.

Reduce pesticide and herbicide inputs:

- This will help to provide a food supply of insects and midges.

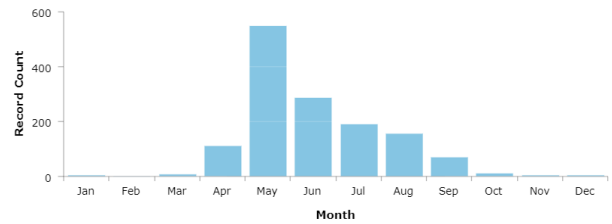


Swallow dipping to drink water.
Photo: Mike Pearson

When?

A summer visitor from mid-March to late September.

Records per month across all datasets



National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland, Barn Swallow, image, accessed August 2023.

[Barn Swallow \(*Hirundo rustica*\) - Detail - Biodiversity Maps](#)
(biodiversityireland.ie)

Where on the farm?

A species of open countryside, especially rich pasture and a suitable place to nest.

Often perched on overhead wires in the farm yard, especially the recently fledged young swallows.

Value

- Farmland and Swallows have a close association, they're a welcome spring visitor to the farm.
- Part of our weather folklore, 'When the swallows fly high, the weather will be fine.'



Swallow
in flight.

Photo:
Mike
Pearson

Further Info

Swallows, also known as Barn Swallows, are always a welcome sight in the Spring when they arrive from southern Africa. They return to Ireland each year to build nests and rear young in the outbuildings they were born in themselves, often reusing nests.

After such a long journey they rarely land on the ground, except briefly to gather mud and grass materials for the nests.

They fly fast and acrobatically, searching for insects (midges, flies) over fields, particularly over grazed pastures, and fresh water. They drink on the wing, dipping and skimming over the surface of water, and most of their food is taken at a low level.

They often sing as they perch on overhead wires or when flying low over water in the company of [House martins](#).

Swallows nest in solitary pairs but enjoy the company of other swallow types when feeding. They have 4-5 white eggs that take a fortnight to hatch. They can have 2 to 3 broods.

In late August, early September, when breeding and other parent duties are coming to an end, they will flock together, before migration.

Similar species

They may be confused with Swifts, House martins and Sand martins. But the Swallow is the only one with a long forked tail.

Need some help with identification?

Just drop us a line, we'll be happy to help:
pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie

Useful Links

Birdwatch Ireland have information here:

[Swallow - BirdWatch Ireland](#)

Try out our free 'Farmland bird' learning platform.

[Ireland's farmland birds \(biodiversityireland.ie\)](#)

Watch out for the Swallow in the spring and record here:

[Farmers' Wildlife Calendar - Climate Tracker \(biodiversityireland.ie\)](#)

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>

Affected by a change in climate?

Swallows' African winter quarters and migration routes may be having a serious impact on the population. Research has shown that swallows are returning to their breeding areas in poor condition and are laying fewer eggs than previously. The expansion of the Sahara desert may be making this formidable barrier increasingly difficult for swallows to cross.

Cold springs with late frosts can cause problems for swallows, as do exceptionally hot and dry summers. Which can cause ponds to dry out, reducing the number of emerging insects. Nestlings can suffer from heat exhaustion and dehydration.

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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
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