



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia*

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The Bank Swallow is a highly social species nesting in colonies sometimes reaching up to 2000 nests. It is the smallest of all swallow species that nest in Massachusetts and can be found foraging for small insects over open water bodies or fields. The plumage of sexes is similar throughout the year. Adults are brown-gray above and white underneath with a distinct brown band across the breast.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: Bank Swallows are one of the most widely distributed swallows in the world, but they have declined sharply throughout eastern North America. The Breeding Bird Survey reveals a 5% annual decline of Bank Swallows in Massachusetts, where the distribution is dictated by the availability of adequate nesting sites. Their North American breeding range extends from much of Alaska and Canada, and south to northern California, eastward throughout the north central United States encompassing New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New England. Bank Swallows are distributed throughout Massachusetts in association with riverbanks and coastlines. Population size can vary over short time periods due to the temporary nature of nesting habitat and variable mortality on wintering grounds due to weather events.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: The Bank Swallow prefers to nest in the banks of rivers and streams, ocean bluffs, sandbanks, and gravel pits. These swallows rarely use artificial nesting sites, but they can benefit from human-made structures (e.g., gravel quarries). Colonies are usually associated with water bodies due mostly to adequate soil structures for nesting. They are generally not found in dense forests due to the lack of suitable nesting locations. As with other swallows, foraging occurs in open areas, such as wetlands, agricultural fields, and over open water.

THREATS: Loss of nesting habitat is often due to erosion control and water flow management, which either alters banks used for nesting or increases erosion of banks. Populations are thought to have declined in Connecticut in relation to a decrease in gravel-mining operations. Many of the aerial insectivores are now in decline, and this may be a result of a mismatch in timing between when birds are nesting and their food resources are most abundant. Such a mismatch is thought to be caused by climate change and has resulted in documented population declines in some species.

REFERENCES:

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A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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