

Summary of the proposed Recovery Strategy for the BANK SWALLOW



As part of its commitment to the protection of species at risk, the Government of Canada proclaimed the Species at Risk Act (SARA) in 2003. SARA requires that a recovery strategy be developed for each species listed as Extirpated, Endangered, and Threatened to reduce known threats and to help species at risk recover. This document highlights the key sections of the proposed Recovery Strategy for the Bank Swallow in Canada.

Species Conservation Status

The Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) is listed as Threatened under SARA. It is also listed as Threatened and Endangered under provincial legislation in Ontario and Nova Scotia, respectively.

Description

The Bank Swallow is the smallest swallow in Canada. Its upperparts are a dark brown that extends to the top of the head. It can be distinguished from other swallows by a large brown band across the upper part of the chest. The rest of the body, including the chin and throat, are white. Both sexes look alike.

Population and Distribution

The Bank Swallow has an extensive distribution. In Canada, its breeding range includes all provinces and territories except Nunavut. It also has an extensive distribution on its wintering grounds in Central and South America, with higher concentrations in the Southern Cone Grasslands of Chile, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Habitat Needs

Bank Swallows nest in colonies found in vertical or near-vertical banks composed of exposed and unconsolidated silt or sand deposits generally located along river bluffs, lakeshores or coastlines, but can also opportunistically establish nesting colonies in human-made habitats. They forage over open country and aquatic habitats that support insect populations, and usually roost in wetlands of cattail, Phragmites or other tall vegetation.

Threats to Species' Survival

Causes of the Bank Swallow population declines are unclear, but multiple factors likely have a cumulative impact on the species. The most probable threats are:

- Broad-scale ecosystem modifications in the breeding, migration, and wintering areas of the species resulting in lower abundance and availability of aerial insect prey
- Loss of natural nesting sites from erosion control measures or changes in hydrological regimes
- Reduction in prey availability as a result of climate change and widespread pesticide use



Distribution of the Bank Swallow in America (adapted from BirdLife International 2016)



Population & Distribution Objectives

The distribution objective for the Bank Swallow is to maintain the extent of occurrence of the species in Canada.

The long-term population objective (by 2053) is to achieve a stable 10-year trend while ensuring that the population size remains above 90% of the 2021 level.

Broad Strategies & Approaches

Despite uncertainties regarding causes of Bank Swallow population declines, building international partnerships that will address common drivers of aerial insectivore declines and maintain important habitat for the species should be prioritized. To address the threats to this species and its habitat, some of the high priority approaches are listed below.

- Promote habitat stewardship and compliance to laws and regulations to avoid disturbance of colonies in natural and human-made settings
- Identify and implement incentives aimed at landowners for limiting pesticide use and promoting Integrated Pest Management practices
- On breeding grounds, engage with provinces, territories and Indigenous communities to encourage nature-based solutions that mitigate shoreline erosion and maintain natural nesting habitat
- Identify priority areas for conservation and informing historical changes in wintering habitats with international partners
- Restore lost or severely degraded wetlands, especially in areas with suitable nesting habitat

How You Can Help

- Learn more about the Bank Swallow, the threats to its survival and its habitat needs at www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry.html;
- Practice voluntary stewardship activities and beneficial management practices, for example:
 - Work in cooperation with Environment and Climate Change Canada and/or local conservation groups to conserve critical habitat; and avoid activities that could harm the species or its habitat.
 - Submit observation data to conservation data centres such as eBird.

Critical Habitat

The critical habitat identified in this recovery strategy is insufficient to meet the population objectives. Critical habitat is identified based on confirmed nesting occurrences in natural settings reported between 2001 and 2017. Critical habitat is delineated along shorelines within 5 km of the colony occurrence, and is found within a 500 m buffer around delineated shorelines. Biophysical attributes are generally defined by the presence of

- (1) a vertical or near-vertical face made of erodible material, for nesting habitat;
- (2) open habitats that produce insects, such as wetlands, salt marshes, grasslands, and hayfields, for foraging habitat.

More information is needed on the availability, characteristics, location and relative importance of roosting sites to designate the extent and geospatial location of those components of critical habitat.

Activities Likely to Result in Destruction of Critical Habitat

These include, but are not limited to, activities that eliminate or damage nesting or foraging sites, modify the natural processes that maintain or create nesting sites, or modify the natural processes that maintain productive foraging sites. Some examples include:

- Erosion control measures
- Conversion to incompatible land-use (e.g., housing, urban, commercial, industrial, etc.)
- Alteration of hydrological regime through, e.g., creation of reservoirs used for hydroelectricity, construction of dams or channelization
- Application of pesticides without consideration of Integrated Pest Management practices

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