



Swallows – Damage Prevention and Control

Identification and Distribution

Four swallow species breed in Western Australia and of these, the welcome swallow *Hirundo neoxena* and barn swallow *Hirundo rustica* build mud nests attached to buildings and other structures. They are small birds (14-17cm in length) and look very similar: the back is a glossy blue-black, the forehead, face and throat is a bright chestnut, and the belly is white. The tail is deeply forked. Juveniles are paler in colour and have short tails.

The welcome swallow is common across southern Australia and the barn swallow occurs in northern Australia, where it is an uncommon visitor. Swallows are common in open areas nearby water, including farmland, and in urban areas.

Behaviour

Swallows feed on insects and spend most of the day chasing down air borne insects. They are not usually observed on the ground, other than while collecting mud for nest construction. The nest is an open cup of mud and grass, attached to the sides of cliffs, caves or buildings. Swallows lay 3-5 eggs between August and February, and the young leave the nest approximately 2-3 weeks after hatching.

Environmental Law

All fauna native to Australia, including fauna that naturally migrates to Australia, are afforded protection under both State and Commonwealth legislation.

Depending on the type of fauna-related activity, a licence issued by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions may be required. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure, trade, keep or move them unless authorised by a permit. To obtain a licence, the applicant needs to demonstrate that all reasonable non-lethal methods have been attempted and environmental impacts have been assessed. Further information is available on the Department's website.

Swallow-Human Interactions

Colonies of swallows nesting and roosting on buildings and other structures can become a nuisance. Large numbers of swallows can also generate a lot of noise, machinery, infrastructure and produce can become contaminated with faeces, and recreation areas, cars, rooves and other property can be fouled by faeces.

If you find a sick or injured swallow contact the [Wildcare Helpline](#) on (08) 9474 9055 for information on registered wildlife rehabilitators and centres who can assist with your enquiry.

Disease Risk

The nests of swallows often contain mites and insects that will bite humans, although humans are not the preferred hosts of these parasites.

Damage Prevention and Control

Exclusion is one of the most effective long-term solutions, particularly if exclusion barriers are installed before swallows become established.

If swallows are known to roost inside a building, closing doors one hour before sunset prevents access to roosts and the doors can be re-opened one hour after sunset. In warehouses and other buildings, where closing doors may be impractical, PVC strip doors or curtains may be installed. Closing doors may not be enough to fully exclude swallows, and therefore all gaps in the walls and roof should also be blocked to prevent entry.

Plastic netting or poultry wire (mesh size 2cm) can also be installed below rafters and eaves to provide a physical barrier to roosting and nesting. Thin, flexible netting can trap and entangle swallows and therefore must not be used.

Any techniques used to exclude swallows from buildings will likely be more effective if used in combination with other techniques to deter swallows from nesting or roosting in or on the building.

Architectural designs can be used to minimise the suitability of building for swallow nesting and roosting, including:

- Building eaves that form an obtuse angle with the wall or have a concave surface to make it unsuitable for nesting. Fibreglass or Perspex may be installed between the eave and wall to create a concave surface.
- Limiting the width of the overhang to 20cm or less.
- Discouraging nesting by building with smooth surfaces like metal rather than concrete, wood or plasterboard.

Other options for deterring swallows include:

- Install metal or plastic spikes along ledges and window sills. This method is not always successful because swallows can learn to land and build a nest on the spikes.
- Turn off lights at night so that insects are not attracted to the sight.
- Remove sources of fresh water.
- Install fans to create air currents in areas where nests would likely be built.

Another option, particularly where it is impractical to install physical barrier, is to install a platform to catch droppings and therefore prevent their faeces from fouling.

Scaring Techniques

Installing fake predatory birds or snakes is not effective. Employing noise emitting devices and lights are not useful for scaring swallows because they are very tolerant of human activity.

Population Control

Population control using lethal methods should be viewed as a last resort after all other control options have been attempted.

Shooting and trapping is extremely difficult and unlikely to be successful.

Nest removal, by knocking or washing them down, can be effective but must be started at the first sign of nest building before eggs or young are present in the nest, and all traces of mud must be removed. This method is messy, time consuming and may spread nest parasites, and the swallows may re-build nests, so it is best to conduct this in conjunction with exclusionary and deterrent methods described above.

Leaving the nest in place and placing a tennis ball or similar round object in a completed nest is an easy way prevent egg laying and re-nesting at that site.

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