

Swallow

Hirundo rustica

Bird · Summer migrant · Apr-Oct



Photo by Tisha Mukherjee, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

The swallow is one of the clearest signs that summer has arrived, appearing over Dumfries and Galloway's fields and farmyards from April onwards after a remarkable journey from southern Africa. Glossy blue-black above with a deep red throat, pale underparts and long tail streamers, it spends almost all its waking hours on the wing, hunting flies and other flying insects low over grass, water and livestock. Swallows nest almost exclusively around buildings, building a cup of mud and straw pellets on a beam or ledge inside barns, sheds and stables, often returning to the very same nest site year after year. Through summer, pairs raise one or sometimes two broods, feeding young almost constantly during daylight hours. By September the birds start gathering on wires in growing numbers, a signal that the long return flight south is close, and by October most have gone.

BEHAVIOUR

Swallows feed entirely in flight, snatching insects out of the air with sudden twists and turns, often just above the ground or water. They're highly social outside the breeding season, roosting together in huge numbers in reedbeds before migration, and the pre-departure gatherings on overhead wires are one of the most visible signs of the seasons turning. A single swallow can cover tens of thousands of miles in its lifetime.

WHEN TO SEE IT

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Swallows and martins (Hirundinidae)
SIZE	17-19 cm including tail streamers · about sparrow length, slimmer
UK STATUS	Green-listed

Photo by Tisha Mukherjee, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons