

Nothing startling or rare was observed in Hazelbrook this past year except for the following:

One interesting observation was of a big red fox who made himself at home on our farm this summer. Early mornings found him crossing our lawn. Any time of day he might be seen in the pastures or approaching on farm roads nonchalantly ignoring me on the tractor. He seemed attracted to the hay mower sounds, always appearing to clean up the meadow voles. So bold I almost worried he'd be run over. Maybe something of the sort befell him; in mid-summer he disappeared. I miss him even if he did clean out my last three old free-range hens.

Although I have never considered myself to be a true "birder", I had a bird watching experience in the summer of '98 which I will remember and hope to repeat. It came about as a result of my efforts to attract Tree Swallows to our property by building from plans supplied by Reg "Dutch" Thompson, several swallow nest boxes and erecting them near the ponds on our Hazelbrook farm.

To my surprise, two of the three were used by pairs of the graceful and handsome birds. The third box was claimed by "House Sparrows" which, although unable to enter the opening, chased investigating swallows away and used it as a perch through the summer.

It was enlightening to watch the parent swallows making trip after trip to the box, almost as if on a time clock, carrying untold numbers of flying insects. Natural insect control indeed. The box I could see from my sun-room window was on a utility pole halfway up our driveway but the parent birds never seemed to alight on the wires after the young were hatched. At last came the morning when no activity at all occurred around the nest box. Gone.

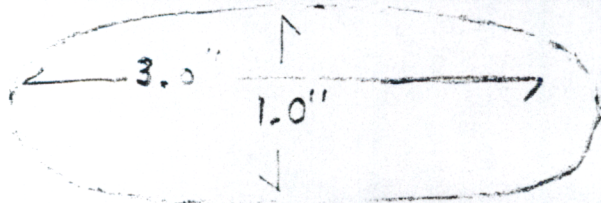
Then, as I sat down to rest from gardening chores, I noticed birds in the big silver maple at the edge of the yard. There were the young swallows - seven of them - perched in the tree, the parents making their non-stop feeding trips to whichever youngster had the widest mouth and fluttered most frantically.

Next day I expected them to be truly away for good but, instead, was treated to an aerial show which I had never before witnessed. All seven young birds were taking periodic flight and, as the parents swooped in with "dinner", old and young met in mid-flight where, wings a-flutter, the mid-flight meal was served and eaten! Needless to say, I didn't get back to chores for some time. What an uplifting sight, to observe the symphony of flight; such a common thing really, repeated wherever Tree Swallows are fledged. But to me a special gift not to be forgotten.

Want to attract swallows? Here are the "house plans" I used. The design of the entrance is supposed to allow the swallows entry while denying sparrows, so keep to the dimensions. Probably more important is the fact that there is a pond near each nest box. For mounting the boxes, an eight foot 2 inch by 4 inch secured to a fence post right beside the pond worked, as did the utility pole within 50 feet of the water. Put them at least 10 feet high since these birds are very territorial, not nearer than one every 300 ft or so.

TREE SWALLOW HOUSE

Inside dimensions: 4 1/4 inches X 4 1/4 inches X 8 1/2 inches.



Locate opening 2 1/2 inches down from top.

Do not add a perch below the opening!