

Tree Swallow Nests in the Coastal Plain of North Carolina

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Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) are common migrants and uncommon winter residents in southeastern North Carolina (Massey and Nance 1989). Although sightings of Tree Swallows during the summer season are not uncommon along North Carolina's coast, evidence of nesting has been reported only in the coastal plain from Currituck and Northampton Counties (Lee 1993, LeGrand 1993). The finding of an occupied nest at Eagle Island in Brunswick County confirms nesting in the southeastern coastal plain of North Carolina and constitutes a noteworthy breeding range extension.

The nest cavity was in a dead snag located in the northwest corner of the flooded north impoundment at Eagle Island. The nest site was approximately 975 m southwest of Redmond Creek and 305 m east of the Brunswick River. The entrance hole was about 4.5 m above the water and there were scattered patches of common reed (*Phragmites australis*) under the snag. Tree Swallows often nest in open habitats near water (Bent 1963, Harrison 1975, Harrison 1984).

A Tree Swallow was first seen near the nest cavity on 21 June 1992. On 28 June 1992 two adults were observed alternating time in the cavity, with the nest left unattended by either adult for no more than 30 seconds. The gray-brown head and white throat of a juvenile bird could be seen peering out from the entrance. A juvenile bird eventually flew from the cavity and perched with an adult. Two juveniles engaged in food-begging behavior with both adults later the same day.

From 6 July 1992 through October 1992, a single white feather could be seen sticking out of the entrance hole. Tree Swallows often line their nests with feathers (Harrison 1975, Harrison 1984) and have a preference for using white feathers (Bent 1963). The presence of 12 Tree Swallows (nine adults and three juveniles) on 6 July 1992 near the stand of snags surrounding the cavity tree suggested that migrant swallows had arrived. Because Tree Swallows are often late spring and early fall migrants, it is not uncommon to find Tree Swallows near the North Carolina coast during the breeding season (LeGrand 1989a, 1990, 1990b, 1992). These migrant birds can make it difficult to distinguish breeding from non-breeding birds.

Tree Swallows are relatively new breeders in North Carolina. The first documented nesting in the state occurred from Ashe County in 1979 (LeGrand and Potter 1980). Since 1979 Tree Swallows have been found nesting at other sites throughout the North Carolina mountains (Duyck 1981, LeGrand 1990, 1990a). Tree Swallows presumably bred in the piedmont at Lake Jordan from 1988 through 1991 (LeGrand 1989, 1991, 1992). In the coastal plain, Tree Swallows have been reported nesting from several locations in Currituck County during 1988-90 (Lee 1993), and presumably bred in Northampton County during 1992 (LeGrand 1993). The presence of an "immature" Tree Swallow reported from Eagle Island on 15 June 1986 suggests that nesting may have occurred in previous years (LeGrand 1987).

The Eagle Island nesting site is over 200 km southeast of the piedmont nesting site at Lake Jordan and over 240 km south of the closest coastal plain nesting site in Northampton County. The breeding range of Tree Swallow has been progressing southward since the 1970s (Lee 1993). This record confirms nesting and extends the

breeding range to southeastern North Carolina. Suitable nesting habitat appears to exist in southeastern North Carolina. Dead trees and bluebird boxes located near flooded areas (i.e. creeks, marshes, reservoirs, impoundments, and beaver ponds) should serve as suitable nesting sites allowing the Tree Swallow to become a more widely established breeder within the state.

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