

Swallows – what will this year bring??

I have written about swallows 3 times before (May 2006, Sept 2017 and Sept 2022) but they seem to be a popular subject so here I go again!

As I write this in late March we have seen a few swallows whizzing through over the marsh but I am not expecting our “regular” swallows till about 17th April. I really look forward to seeing them (the early ones will probably be ones which nested last year) but my delight is tinged with trepidation. Being involved with swallow breeding is like East Enders and very stressful – who is going to nest where and with whom and what will happen to the odd one out? (We had 5 swallows last year – this involved a huge amount of flying around and screeching and very little progress on nests.) Will the youngsters survive hot weather up under the asbestos roof? Will the nest collapse? Will the adults get used to us in the pumphouse or will they continue to screech blue murder every time we go in? And will they nest in sensible places where we can put cardboard underneath to catch the copious droppings from up to 6 youngsters?



In an effort to keep part of the pumphouse swallow free and therefore also free of their droppings, Peter built a shed-within-the shed. (This also gave him a more compact area in which to work and provided extra storage.) The swallow-free part worked for a while until he left the door open for a couple of days. They were certainly fast workers – within those two days a beautiful mud nest had been constructed in a convenient corner so we had to leave the door open for that year. The door stays closed now though – however a wren built a nest and produced a brood in the old swallow nest – he could get under the gap under the door!

Several friends and acquaintances on the peninsula have tried to make their sheds or garages both swallow and people friendly by building a contained loft space with swallow access, which keeps the swallows out of the main building. This seems like a good idea but it can take the birds a while to use them – I think they really like a big space to fly around in but beggars can't be choosers. I know at least one of these lofts is now regularly used. And my theory about “big space to fly around in” is ruined by the enthusiasm and speed with which swallows will build nests in bird hides. Leave the hatches open for 24 hours and they will have taken up residence. Indeed we have experienced Welcome Swallows in Australia taking up residence in our camper van, happily twittering on the curtain wires within hours of parking (admittedly they did not have much choice – the only other option was the small corrugated-iron building containing the long-drop toilet which had no suitable ledges).

So what will the swallow saga bring this year? We wait with trepidation!

Rosemary Royle

Postscript: By April 12th there were four swallows flying around - some confidently zooming through the window into the pumphouse, others not so sure. April 12th is actually pretty early for them. There may well be more to come! (Now five swallows 26/4)

