



Return of swallow, return of spring: A Barn Swallow individual that was captured and ringed in Nainital with both a metal (uniquely coded) and a colour ring in 2022, was subsequently re-sighted in 2023 at the same nest, thereby demonstrating site-fidelity in the population

BARN SWALLOW: A tale of homecoming

- AMARJEET KAUR

Each year after her long absence in the warm lands of the south she comes to us with the sunshine and the flowers, and she tells us with her merry chatter that spring is on the way.

- Dr. Giuseppe Pitre



Cultural and traditional beliefs, such as not disturbing a bird's nest in one's house or viewing nesting as a sign of good fortune, have fostered a close relationship between Barn Swallows and humans in Uttarakhand. Often, if comfortable, the Barn Swallow family befriends their human hosts and allows physical approach. In this image, a lady 'greet's' swallow fledglings, who will soon embark on a southward journey with their parents.

In this transitional season, the sun shares the lingering soft warmth of winter, while the wind carries the fragrant promise of new life. Afternoons are hot, yet nights remain cool. Life announces its grandiose rebirth as the Palash (*Butea monosperma*), Silk cotton tree (*Bombax ceiba*), and Purple orchid tree (*Bauhinia purpurea*) burst forth with vibrant colours through their showy flowers. The ceaseless serenades of the Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*) and Common Hawk-Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) collectively announce the arrival of spring on the WII campus.

Amidst this awakening, a small yet resilient long-distance migrant, the Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), embarks on its homeward journey to the human settlements of the Himalaya. Known by various names such as “Dev chidiya”, “Dhan chidiya” or “Gotayi” this bird is welcomed as the harbinger of spring in the hills of Uttarakhand. Revered as a symbol of Goddess Lakshmi, the Dev chidiya returns to its nest, diligently repairing it with nearby damp mud and grass in preparation for raising a new family.

Soon, life bursts forth anew as four or five baby swallows announce their arrival with constant begging calls for food. The adult swallows tirelessly hunt for aerial insects, making a series of rounds throughout the day to feed their hungry chicks, until dusk sets in. The setting sun signals the busy parents to finally call it a day and return to rest alongside their chicks within the safe confines of human dwellings. With the dawn of the next day, the cycle repeats itself until the chicks can fend for themselves.

As dark, moisture-laden clouds start hovering above, June-end onwards, threatening monsoonal downpours, barn swallow families begin preparing for their journey southwards. They bid a temporary farewell to their human hosts, promising to return the next spring! They leave in the hope that their human hosts will welcome them back with open doors, windows, and most importantly, warm hearts.

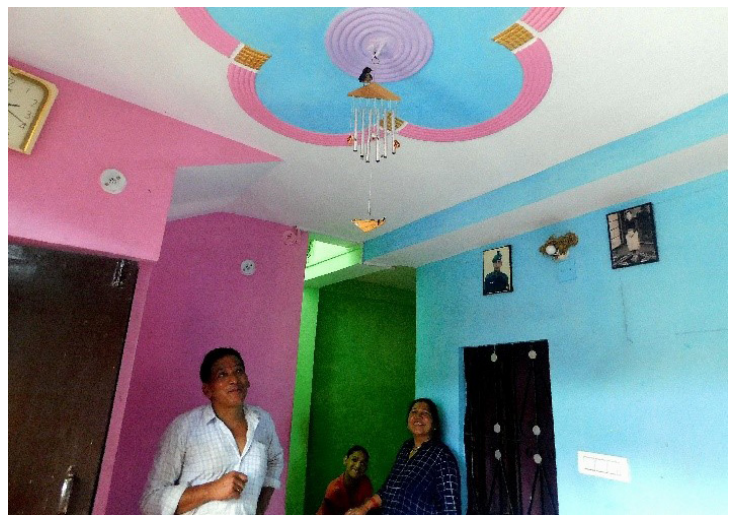
About the Author

Amarjeet began her career as a professional ornithologist with the Wildlife Institute of India in the Amur Falcon research project, tracking the bird’s migration in remote villages of Nagaland and Manipur. She later enrolled into the Institute’s PhD program (affiliated with Saurashtra University) in 2019, focusing on Barn Swallow ecology in the Indian Himalaya Region. Her research navigates the intersection of wildlife ecology and sociology, including documenting local narratives and perceptions about the species.

Email : 10amarjeetkaur@gmail.com



Barn swallow pairs often build nests near each other in available spaces within the same property, this combined presence helps to more successfully warn against and deter away predators. In this bustling Nainital vegetable shop, two Barn Swallows guard their respective nests, ready to start their new families.



Once cave-nesters, Barn Swallows now rely completely on human habitats for nesting. They seek safe spaces in architecturally appropriate shops and houses, having become completely dependent on the warmth and protection offered by their human hosts.



As the season progresses, swallow chicks fill the room with their constant calls, announcing their hatching. Here, a human host has kindly placed a cardboard beneath the Barn Swallow nest to protect it and prevent chicks from falling. The parent swallows appear to appreciate this gesture, using the cardboard as a perch while feeding and guarding their chicks.