



EXCELSIOR

SPECIES: CLIFF SWALLOW

CLIFF SWALLOW – *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

Here's mud in your eye!
Cliff Swallows (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) fly to and from their nests thousands of times in a single day. Each mud nest is made up of about one thousand small, mud pellets. Although the Cliff Swallow can nest solitarily, it usually nests in colonies. Colonies can number up to 3,700 nests in one spot. Cliff Swallows will occasionally lay their eggs in neighboring nests and have been observed actually moving eggs from their own nest into others. When a Cliff Swallow has had a hard time finding food, it will watch its neighbors in the nesting colony and follow one to food when it leaves. When young Cliff Swallows leave their nests they congregate in large groups called creches. A pair of swallows can find its own young in the creche primarily by voice. Cliff Swallows have one of the most variable juvenile plumages, and the distinctive facial markings may help the parents recognize their chicks by sight too. Cliff Swallows do not nest in the Excelsior but can be seen during migration in the spring and fall.

RESIDENT OR MIGRATORY

Migratory

KEY HABITAT FEATURES

Note about coastal Cliff Swallow colony in SF as one of the few. Erosion and predation by ravens are a concern in San Francisco.

DIET

Subsist primarily on a diet of insects which are caught in flight.

ASSOCIATED PLANTS & ANIMALS

California Brome – *Bromus carinatus*, Coyote Bush – *Baccharis pilularis*, Mountain Lilac – *Ceanothus 'Ray Hartman'*, Western Service Berry – *Amelanchier alnifolia*

NESTING INFORMATION

Nests are tidy and well-constructed, formed from balls of mud that birds collect in their beaks. These nests are built on vertical walls, natural or man-made, frequently with some sort of sheltering overhang. Birds of both sexes build the jug-shaped nest. They do not add sticks or straw to the mud structure, but they do line the nest with grass and feathers. Both members of the pair incubate the four to five eggs for 14 to 16 days.



ROUTE HIGHLIGHTS

- » Crosstown Trail, Cayuga and Lamartine Mini Park, Balboa High School, Cayuga Playground



Credit: nathistoc.bio.ucsf.edu