

TREE SWALLOW: FIRST DOCUMENTED NESTING IN MISSISSIPPI

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The Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) nests broadly over North America, from the Atlantic Coast to the Pacific and northward approximately to the tree line in the Arctic. In the states nearest to Mississippi, it reaches a southern limit in far north Alabama, and has nested sparsely across the northern half of Arkansas (James and Neal 1986:242-243, Robertson et al. 1992). For Tennessee, Robinson (1990:149) described the Tree Swallow as having expanded its nesting range from about 1968 onward. Thus, it has been anticipated for several years that Tree Swallows would be found nesting in northern Mississippi.

On 24 June 1995 I saw one Tree Swallow over Sardis Lake, Lafayette Co., at Hurricane Landing. In early evening of 1 July 1995 I noticed a Tree Swallow entering a hole in a dead snag about 3 meters above the water. This was located ca. 400 meters offshore from the boat launching ramp at Coontown Crossing, also on the south shore of the lake. I later learned that "six or eight" Tree Swallows had been seen at the same site on 27 May by Vic Theobald. He saw some swallows inspecting old woodpecker holes in dead trees offshore, and thus suspected a possible nesting. On 4 July in the early afternoon, over a 45-min period of observation, I saw at least three adult Tree Swallows flying in the area. At frequent intervals they entered one apparent nest hole, presumably to feed nestlings.



Figure 1. Adult Tree Swallow feeding a recent fledgling in Lafayette Co., Mississippi.

On 7 July, Keith Meals and I approached the tree by boat and observed four adult birds. I was able to photograph adults at a nest hole and feeding a fledgling (Figure 1). Adult Tree Swallows briefly entered two old woodpecker holes located on opposite sides of the same snag, ca. 2.7 and 3.1 meters above the water level at that time. We also saw six flying immatures, which at times approached adults to solicit feeding, although none was seen to be fed. Three days later no swallows could be seen in the vicinity. Copies of photographs taken on 7 July are on file in the Zoological Collections, Mississippi State University and with the Mississippi Museum of Natural History.

A report of an isolated, nesting by "a colony" of Tree Swallows was given by Lowery (1974:440-441) for Louisiana, but essentially on the Louisiana-Mississippi state line. The record, for which no details, dates (even year) or observer were given, was on Eagle Lake, which is an old Mississippi River cut-off that lies east of the current channel. It is nearly surrounded by northern Warren Co. This record is also the apparent basis for Imhof's (1976:274) statement that the Tree Swallow nests "casually south to Louisiana and Mississippi." However, the Bird Records Committee of MOS has never accepted the Tree Swallow as a nesting species.

Another report of possible nesting by Tree Swallows along the Mississippi River came from Claiborne Co., Mississippi below the mouth of the Big Black River. A party of fisheries biologists doing a biological survey about 1969, before construction of Grand Gulf nuclear power plant, reported later (to W.H. Turcotte) having seen Tree Swallows at nest holes in dead trees along the river (personal communication., W.H. Turcotte, 21 July 1995). However, they did not report verifying the nesting by having observed eggs, nestlings or fledglings, nor were photos or specimens provided. Thus, the 1995 nestings provide the first documented record of the Tree Swallow nesting in Mississippi.

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