

AN UNUSUAL CASE OF BARN SWALLOW MORTALITY

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On 4 June 1978 we found a dead, adult Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) hanging from a twisted loop of horse hair suspended from an empty, adherent Barn Swallow nest beneath a secondary highway bridge in Franklin County, Washington. The 10 m long, wooden bridge, situated 1 m over an irrigation canal in a farmland area, contained 45 active Barn Swallow nests. The looped horse hair, incorporated into the nest rim, was twisted several times around the swallow's neck causing death by strangulation. Of the 45 active swallow nests on the bridge, 43 had eggs (mean-3.8) while 2 contained young (mean-3.0).

Between 27 May and 17 June 1978 we inspected 100 bridges and culverts in Franklin County and located 625 Barn Swallow nests. Although we commonly found horse hairs projecting from the nests, no additional horse hair induced mortality was evident. Liljedahl (Iowa Bird Life 32:44, 1962) reported finding two recently fledged Barn Swallows tangled in mule tail hair beneath a nest in a barn. He speculated the birds had become tangled in the hair while in the nest. In the case reported here, the adult evidently was visiting the nest and became tangled in the horse hair which apparently had been part of the nest lining.

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Barn Swallow

Sketch by Narca Moore