

PASSERIFORMES

(Songbirds)

Swallows



Family HIRUNDINIDAE (Swallows)

Violet-Green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*)



glossy green, purple

Lily Lake; Rocky Mtn NP



rarely seen perching

Kaibab Lake; Williams, AZ



Kaibab Lake; Williams, AZ



Lily Lake; Rocky Mtn NP



white extends onto rump

Fall River; Rocky Mtn NP

Measurements:

Length: 5" Wing Span: 13" Average Weight: .5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; streamlined body, iridescent green on back, purple on rump, white undersides that **wrap onto side of rump**, almost meeting at base of tail; long, pointed, grayish wings; small, black bill; short, notched tail; white cheek and dark eyes partly surrounded by white; slight sexual dimorphism (males usually more boldly colored)

Notes:

common; gregarious in small groups; found throughout w NA from AK south through MEX, Pacific coast east to TX in varied habitats (forests, canyons, marshlands, open water, etc.); 3 subspecies; feeds on the wing for insects

Mojave presence: migratory/summer range

Comments:

This fellow was buzzing the pond for insects at Corn Creek in the **Desert NWR** in June, 2021. Zipping around like little jets, they are notoriously difficult to get good pics of; they also rarely perch. It takes a lot of practice and luck! Also, the sun has to be reflecting at just the right angle to see and photograph the iridescent colors.



Family HIRUNDINIDAE (Swallows)

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*)



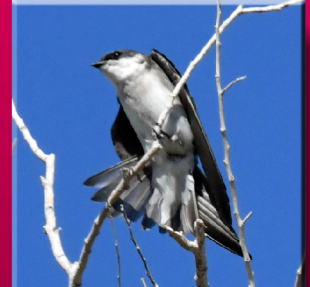
Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve



Bosque del Apache NWR; NM



Corn Creek; Desert National Wildlife Refuge; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWP



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve

Measurements:

Length: 6" Wing Span: 13" Average Weight: .7 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; streamlined body; dark uppersides, bright white undersides (**sharp contrast between dark cheeks and white throat**); broad, dark wings; dark eyes with thin mask; small, black bill; short, forked tail; (**m**) iridescent blue-green on back, head; (**f**) duller and browner

Notes:

common; gregarious; found throughout NA from AK/CAN south to Panama/n SA, Caribbean (rare vagrants elsewhere); feeds mainly on the wing for insects (sometimes forages for berries, spiders, etc.)

Mojave presence: migratory/winter range

Comments:



These swallows are sociable and often found mixed in flocks of other swallow species, such as this **Northern Rough-Winged** (right) at the **Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve** in April, 2021. The individual at left, pictured on the same day, appears similar to the **Green-Violet**, but the white on the rump does not almost meet at the base of the tail



Family **HIRUNDINIDAE** (Swallows)

Northern Rough-Winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)



buffy undersides

Corn Creek; Desert NWR



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve; Henderson, NV



showing some wing

HBVP; Henderson, NV



social gathering

HBVP; Henderson, NV



nice landing

HBVP; Henderson, NV

Measurements:

Length: 5.5" Wing Span: 12" Average Weight: .5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; plain drab brown above, buffy below; dusky to brownish throat; small, dark bill; dark eyes; forked tail; little sexual dimorphism (e.g. male undertail coverts longer than female)

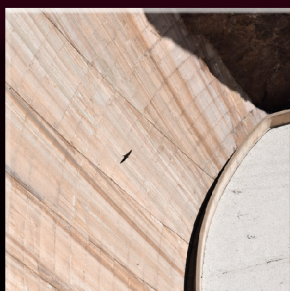
Notes:

common; social, usually in small groups; found in open areas near water throughout NA and Caribbean in summer from s CAN to n MEX/Gulf Coast, wintering farther south to Panama; 6 subspecies; forages on the wing, low and mostly over water, for flying insects

Mojave presence: summer range; some year-round

Comments:

Named for the rough leading edges on its flight feathers, this swallow is the most common to be seen in wetland areas of the Mojave. It is easily discerned from other swallow by its plain, drab brown plumage. It's fun to watch these birds buzz the **Hoover Dam** while flying to and from their nearby cliff nesting sites.

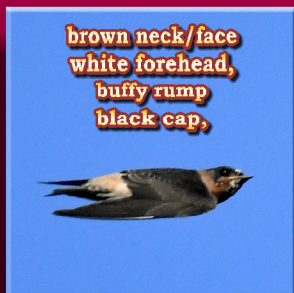


Family **HIRUNDINIDAE** (Swallows)

Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve



Clark Co. Wetlands Park; LV, NV



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve; Henderson, NV



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve

Measurements:

Length: 5" Wing Span: 13" Average Weight: .75 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small, stocky size; brown upperbody, paler below; rufous cheeks and throat; **white forehead patch** (rufous on some populations); buff rump; small, dark bill; dark eyes; short, square tail; no sexual dimorphism

Notes:

common; colonial, social; migrates from SA to summer breeding grounds throughout most of NA, nesting on cliffs and human-made structures in open areas near water; feeds mainly on flying insects above fields and ponds

Mojave presence: migratory

Comments:

These swallows are far less common than other species, such as the **Rough-Winged** and **Tree Swallows**. However, good locations near Las Vegas that occasionally attract these birds include the **Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve**, the **Clark County Wetlands Park**, and the pond area at Corn Creek in the **Desert NWR**. The one shown above at HBVP in April, 2021, was mingling with the two aforementioned species. Even more unusual is finding one perched, which they seldom do, as "cliffies" are usually too busy catching insects on the wing to bother taking a break.

Family HIRUNDINIDAE (Swallows)

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica erythrogaster*)



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve



Bosque del Apache NWR; NM



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve; Henderson, NV



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve

Measurements:

Length: 7" Wing Span: 14" Average Weight: .75 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium-small size; dark upperbody with blue sheen; orangish underparts, cinnamon chin and forehead, narrow partial breastband; long, pointed wings; thin, black bill; long, **deeply forked tail** with white spots on each feather; dark eyes; little sexual dimorphism (males generally more boldly colored than females)

Notes:

common; social; summers throughout NA (species as a whole is cosmopolitan) in open areas (fields, meadows, farms, wetlands, etc.); 6 subspecies worldwide; forages over fields and ponds for insects

Mojave presence: migratory

Comments:



While this swallow tends to avoid desert environments, wetland areas do attract occasional migrants. It is quite comfortable sharing a perch with other species, such as at the [Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve](#) (left). The bird appears dark in poor lighting, but its orangish underparts are evident with good light (right), at [Floyd Lamb SP](#) in Las Vegas.

Phi6



Family **HIRUNDINIDAE** (Swallows)

Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*)



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve



Kaibab Lake; Williams, AZ



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve



Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve

Measurements:

Length: 5" Wing Span: 11" Average Weight: .5 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; brown above, paler rump; white undersides, wraps around cheek; **dark brown breast band**; small, dark bill; somewhat long, notched tail; dark eyes; no sexual dimorphism

Notes:

uncommon; colonial; widespread throughout NA, wintering in SA and migrating to riparian breeding grounds for summer as far north as AK; smallest NA swallow; feeds on insects on the wing or skimmed from the water

Mojave presence: migratory

Comments:

The **Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve** near Las Vegas is a prime wetlands area to witness species of birds that are common to very rare visitors to the Mojave Desert. The Bank Swallow is one of those. The individuals above were photographed in April and December of 2021. I haven't seen any since, but I'm sure I'll encounter these uncommon desert migrants again in the future.

Family **HIRUNDINIDAE** (Swallows)

Purple Martin (*Progne subis*)

male



blue-black overall

Dawson, GA

female



brown uppersides

female



buffy undersides

Dawson, GA



male



Measurements:

Length: 8" Wing Span: 16" Average Weight: 2 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; dark uppersides with blue iridescence; short black bill; dark eyes; long wings, forked tail; (m) entirely blue-black overall; (f) dark brown above, buffy and streaked below

Notes:

uncommon; colonial; prefers open areas, spending summer mainly in e NA (rarer farther west), migrating south to SA for winter; largest swallow in NA; 3 subspecies; often reliant on man-made "martin houses" for nesting; forages on the wing, higher than most swallows (rarely seen perched), over open country and fields for flying insects

Mojave presence: rare (far eastern region); migratory

Comments:

While passing through Dawson, GA, in May of 2021, I stopped at a roadside fruit stand called **Mike's Melon Patch**. Nearby, I spotted a group of "martin houses" occupied by these large swallows raising their young. They were the first martins I'd seen in the wild. These birds are occasionally seen migrating through the eastern Mojave.



Phi8