

BLUE SWALLOW

Hirundo atrocaerulea

OTHER NAMES

Blouswael (Afrikaans), Hirondelle Bleue (French)

DESCRIPTION

Length

- Male: 21.0 - 22.0cm
- Female: 14.7 - 15.8cm

Weight

- +/- 13g

Key identification features (adult)

The Blue Swallow has elongated tail streamers and a metallic blue plumage. This can appear black in poor light and so this species can be mistaken for Black Sawwings (*Psalidoprogne holomelas*), which do occur with Blue Swallows but are smaller, have no blue shimmer and have shorter more pointed wings.



ECOLOGY

Diet: The Blue Swallow feeds on aerial insects, which they catch on the wing. Foraging habitat is very specific to the remnant patches of mistbelt grasslands. Aerial insects are caught in low flight over intact grassland. Blue Swallows seldom perch but can occasionally be seen perched on fence lines or drinking.

Breeding: In South Africa the species is reliant on "ecological engineers" such as Aardvarks (*Orycteropus afer*) which provide holes in which they construct a cup nest on the inside wall made from mud with a grass and feather lining. They also utilize natural sink holes. Blue Swallows arrive to breed in September. They normally lay three white eggs, which are incubated by the female for about 14 days, and the chicks are fed for approximately 22 days until they fledge. Blue Swallows can sometimes nest twice before returning to the over-wintering grounds on the equator on the shores of Lake Victoria in April.



CONSERVATION STATUS

The Blue Swallow migrates seasonally within the African continent. It breeds in the eastern parts of South Africa, west Swaziland, eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, highlands of Malawi, northeast Zambia, southwestern Tanzania, west Mozambique and southeast Democratic Republic of Congo. It then winters in northeast Democratic Republic of Congo, south Uganda, northern Tanzania and western Kenya.

The total population is estimated at around 2000 individuals (2005). The South African population was estimated to be less than 40 pairs in 2011/12. The Blue Swallow population is decreasing throughout its distribution range. Globally the Blue Swallow is classified as Vulnerable; nationally it is classified as Critically Endangered (IUCN Red List).

Find out more at www.iucnredlist.org

WHY ARE BLUE SWALLOWS THREATENED?

This intra-Africa migratory species is threatened by destruction and degradation of its grassland and wetland habitats, on both its breeding and non-breeding grounds. The destruction of natural habitat is projected to continue into the future unless immediate conservation action is taken across its entire distribution range. Loss of nest holes through the destruction of 'ecological engineers' e.g, Aardvark, also threatens this species. Other threats to the population are currently unknown but climate change effects may be having an impact.



WHAT IS THE EWT DOING TO CONSERVE THE BLUE SWALLOW?

EWT is actively monitoring all Blue Swallow nests in South Africa and our neighboring countries, promoting awareness and conservation friendly farming (and encouraging conservation stewardship) with all landowners who have Blue Swallows, and conserving current intact habitat. Research into population limiting factors and migratory pathways is also being carried out.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Report sightings, encourage awareness, sponsor the Threatened Grassland Species Programme or the EWT.

