

Almost all older Islanders know the Barn Swallow. This metallic-blue, cinnamon-chinned migrant's quickly spreading forked tail graced most barn yards and backyards for many decades with its beauty and elegance. Distinguished by its shape, colours, and long forked tail, these acrobatic fliers plucked insects on the wing and off the surface of the water. They gathered mud, straw, and feathers to build their nests on the rafters of machinery sheds, over lights and window tops in porches, and many other areas where shelter from wind and rain protected their nests. Generations of Islanders looked forward to their return in spring and enjoyed their presence as they ate hoards of biting and other insects.

Once very common on the Island, our breeding population of this species has declined dramatically in the past several decades. Atlantic Canada has seen a Barn Swallow population decline of 7.6% per year with British Columbia experiencing 14% per year. Bird Studies Canada's research suggests that the North American population has declined by 50% in the past 20 years. Some have theorized that changes in farming practices, the loss of open, roofed porches and open sheds and barns, and bad spring weather are the primary causes. This is probably part of the cause but a general decline of many other aerial foraging species such as the Common Nighthawk, Chimney Swift, and Whip-poor-wills suggests more ominous reasons. For older residents, think back thirty or forty years ago about the frequency of cleaning vehicle window shields and head lights as insect bodies were smeared on these and other vehicle parts. Think also about the numbers of flies around yards and farms. Much has changed in the way we manage structures, habitats, and agricultural production.

Unfortunately, finding funds and staff to support long term population monitoring systems, to determine the cause of declines, and to test methods to build populations has been very difficult. One of the things you can do is to protect nest sites and treasure their presence in the areas you frequent. In addition, donations to Bird Studies Canada and other worthy research organization will help in monitoring populations and the research needed to improve the fate of these birds. The contribution of nest records is useful (see Island Naturalist issue # 175) as is the submission of data on local occurrence.

NATURALISTS IN ACTION:

Bruce Pigot of Mount Stewart has always been a keen observer of nature. For over four decades he has contributed significantly to the conservation of natural history records especially along the Hillsborough River's Mount Stewart marsh and the nearby Deroche Pond system. At public meetings, he consistently supported various conservation efforts and sat on the Island Nature Trust's land management committee. He also served on the land stewardship committee of the Hillsborough River Association and supported the designation of the Hillsborough River as a Canadian Heritage River.

From the Society's viewpoint, perhaps his most important contributions are in his educational efforts as he willingly shared his extensive natural history records with others, including students, naturalists, biologists, and researchers. Bruce always has time to talk about important things like birds, mammals, marshes and ponds.

For many decades, Bruce Pigot has been one of those unsung heroes who quietly has worked (often with wit and understatement) to protect habitats of all kinds. His offering of land on Allisary Creek allowed the establishment of a Ducks Unlimited Impoundment there, the creation of birding and hiking trails, enrichment of the wetland habitat on the edge of the Mount Stewart saltmarsh, and much more.

Some of his specific contributions include: conducting, and documenting surveys of tern colonies in 1965 and 1966 (Island Naturalist # 111); identifying the location of a stand of White Ash near Mount Stewart and recording the former presence of hop hornbeam in the Mount Stewart region; collaborating with Charlie Bartlett, formerly of the CWS and the Fish and Wildlife Division, on waterfowl studies on the Mount Stewart marsh and Black Pond; collecting and submitting specimens and supporting data to the National Museum of Canada; serving as one of the core biological resource people who worked on the nomination documents for the Canadian Heritage Rivers proposal document for the Hillsborough River; researching and writing articles for the Island Naturalist and the Hillsborough River Tidings; identifying and confirming the first provincial breeding record for the Northern