

# Species Status Assessment

**Common Name:** Cliff Swallow                      **Date Updated:** 2024-12-20  
**Scientific Name:** *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*    **Updated By:** Tgh V.Bonaiuto  
**Class:** Aves  
**Family:** Hirundinidae

## Species Synopsis

*(a short paragraph which describes species taxonomy, distribution, recent trends, and habitat in New York):*

The cliff swallow, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*, is a social bird species with a wide range across North and South America with occurrences as far north as western Alaska. This species uses mud to create nests under cliff overhangs (Brown et al 2020). This species was once found primarily in the western mountains, however the expansion of development across North America has allowed their range to increase with more available artificial nesting habitat under bridges, building, and other structures. Cliff swallows inhabit open to semi-wooded habitat, cliffs, canyons, and farm country, generally near meadows, marshes, and water.

While more common in the great plain's region, and less common in the northeast of the United States, cliff swallows can be found during their breeding season in a variety of locations in New York, from highly developed New York City to lesser developed locations in northern New York.

## I. Status

### a. Current legal protected Status

i. **Federal:** Not listed

**Candidate:**

ii. **New York:** Not listed: protected native

### b. Natural Heritage Program

i. **Global:** G5

ii. **New York:** S5B

**Tracked by NYNHP?**

### Other Ranks:

New York 2025 SGCN status: Species of Greatest Conservation Need  
COSEWIC: Not listed in Canada

IUCN Red List: Least Concern  
 Northeast Regional SGCN: Not listed

**Status Discussion:**

Cliff swallow has most recently been assessed by the IUCN as Least Concern in 2016, due to the large range and population of the species (Birdlife International, 2016).

In the northeastern United States, efforts to restore cliff swallow populations have included the listing of the species as Threatened in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, as well as limited, localized, conservation efforts targeted at the species (Brown et al. 2020).

**II. Abundance and Distribution Trends**

Region	Present?	Abundance	Distribution	Time Frame	Listing status or S-Rank	SGCN?
North America	Yes	Increasing	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend for US		
Northeastern US	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend		
New York	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend		Yes
Connecticut	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	S4B	
Massachusetts	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend	S2	
New Jersey	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	SC; S3B,S4N	Yes
Pennsylvania	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-	S4B	

Region	Present?	Abundance	Distribution	Time Frame	Listing status or S-Rank	SGCN?
				2022 trend		
<b>Vermont</b>	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend	S4B	
<b>Ontario</b>	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend	S4B	
<b>Quebec</b>	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend	S3B	

*Column options*

**Present?:** Yes; No; Unknown; No data; (blank) or Choose an Item

**Abundance and Distribution:** Declining; Increasing; Stable; Unknown; Extirpated; N/A; (blank) or Choose an item

**SGCN?:** Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item

### **Monitoring in New York**

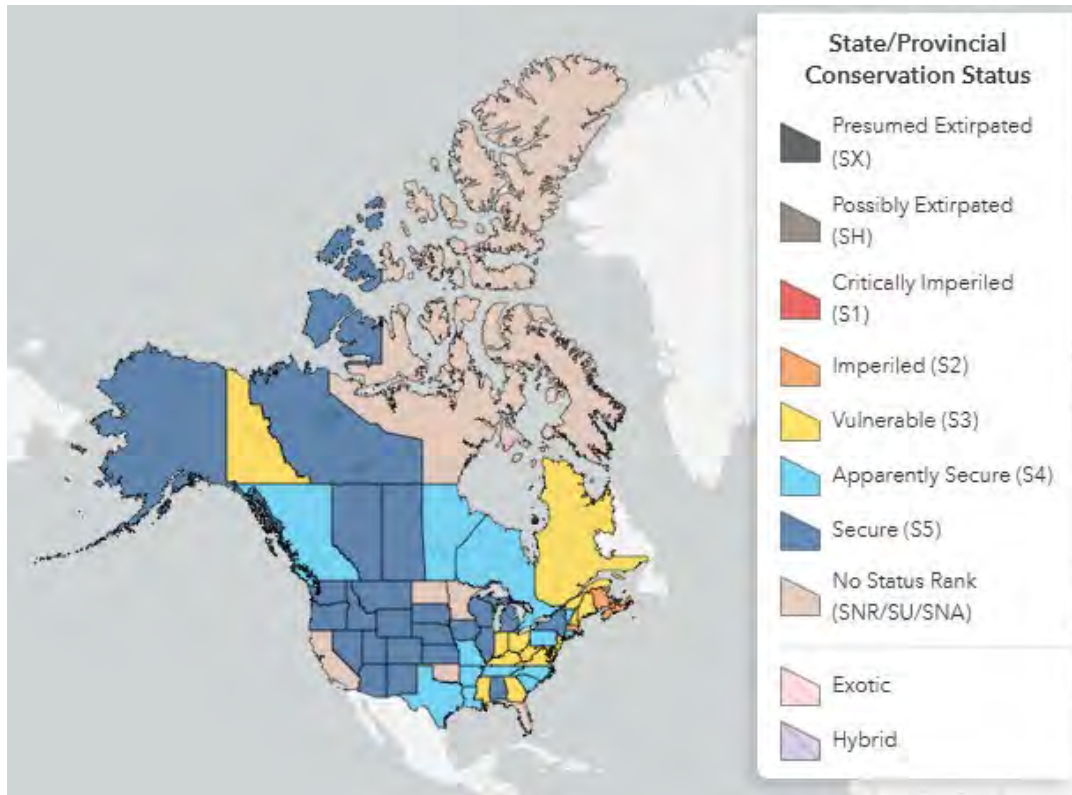
*(specify any monitoring activities or regular surveys that are conducted in New York):*

None

### **Trends Discussion**

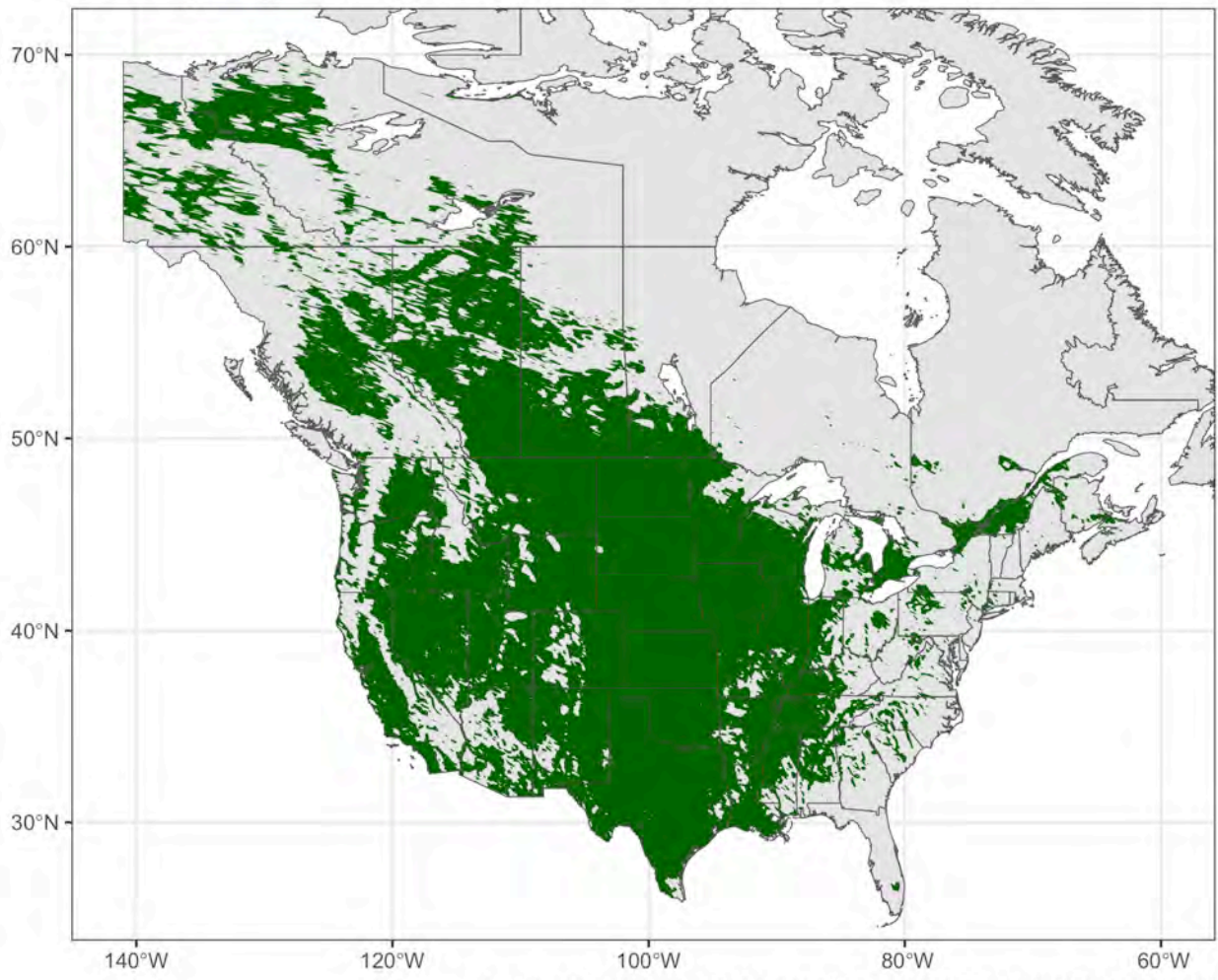
*(insert map of North American/regional distribution and status):*

Cliff swallows are thought to be relatively stable based on recent Breeding Bird Survey data, however the species as a whole has declined long term (25-30% decline) (NatureServe 2025).



**Figure 1.** Conservation status of cliff swallow in North America (NatureServe 2025).

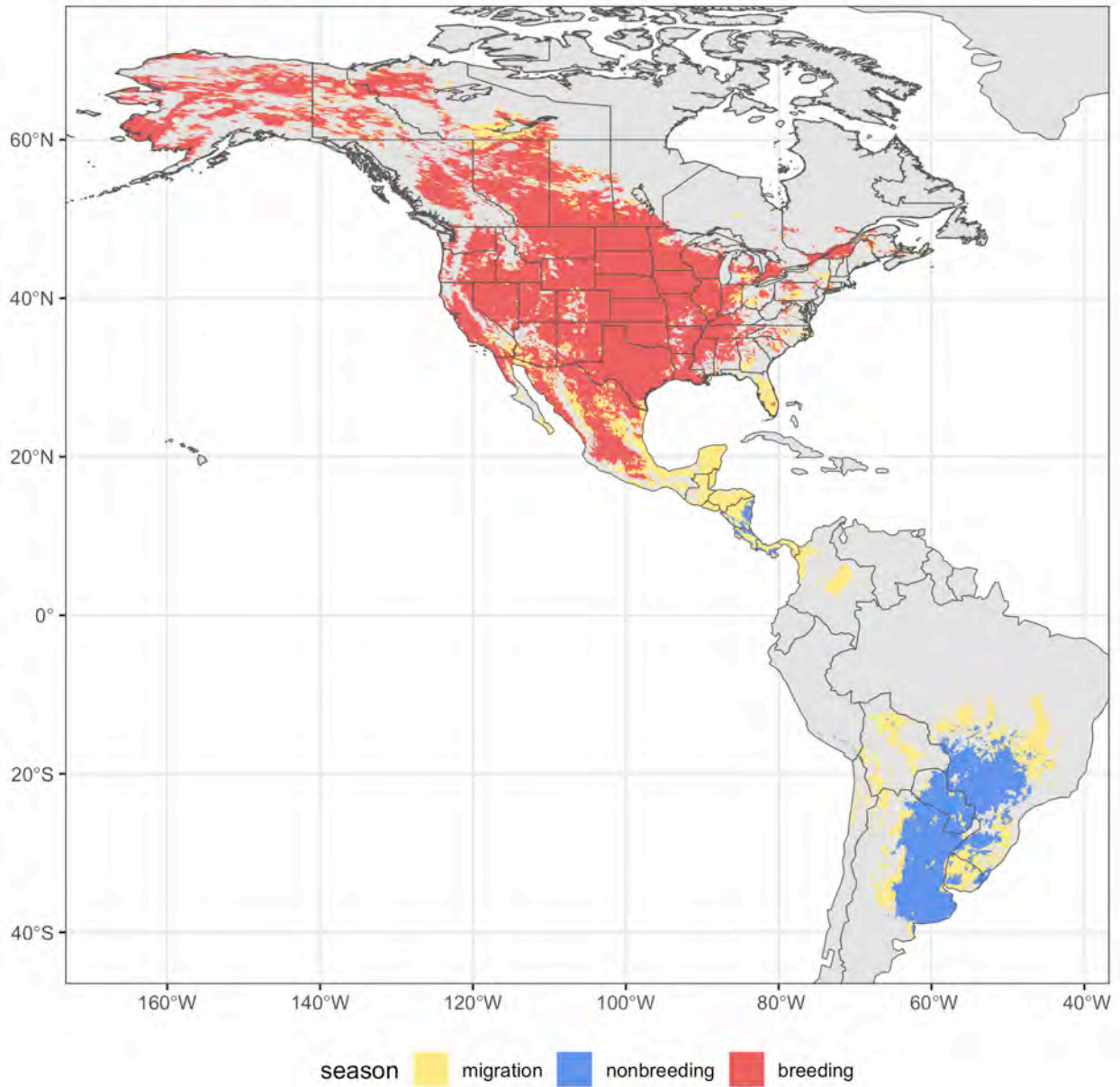
Breeding range map for Cliff Swallow



Range map data from eBird Status and Trends, Data Version: 2022; Released: 2023

**Figure 2.** Breeding range for cliff swallow (eBird).

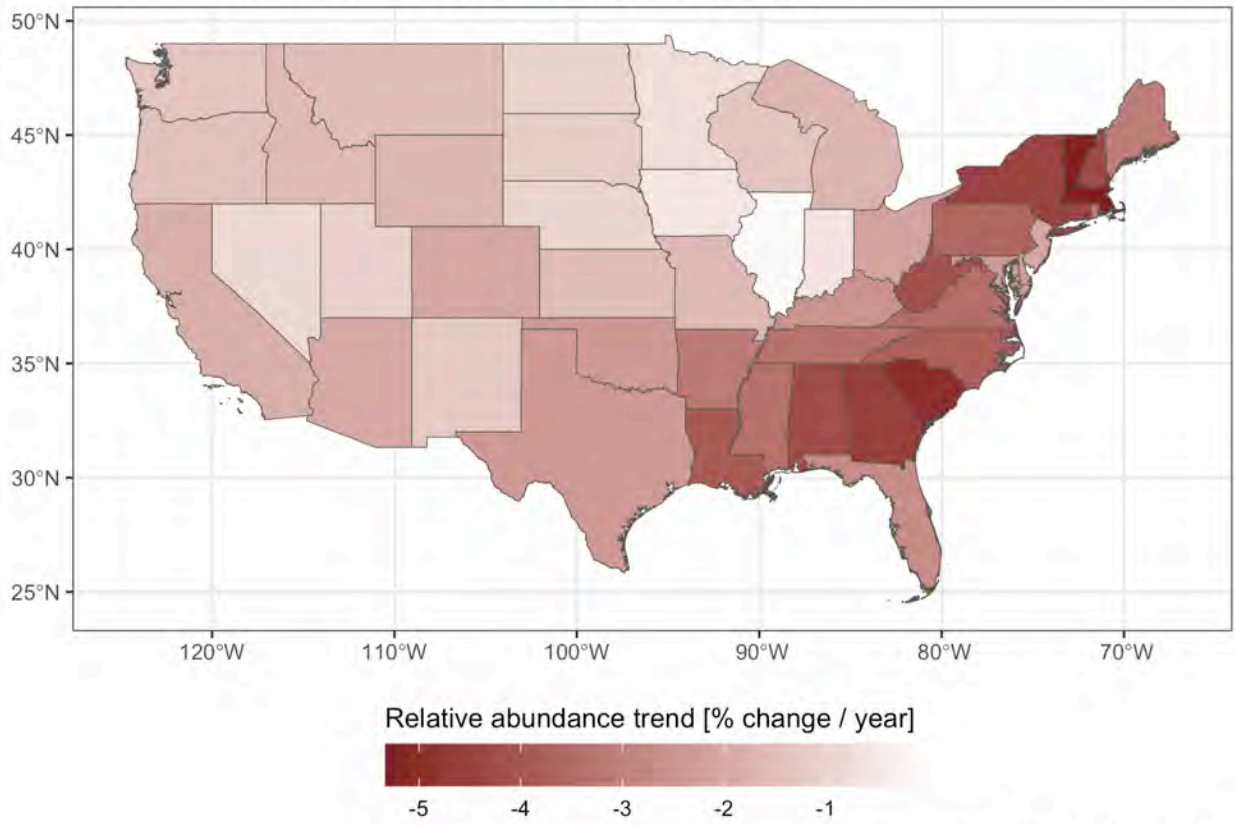
Year-round range map for Cliff Swallow



Range map data from eBird Status and Trends, Data Version: 2022; Released: 2023

**Figure 3.** Full (year-round) range for cliff swallow (eBird).

Cliff Swallow state-level breeding trends 2012-2022



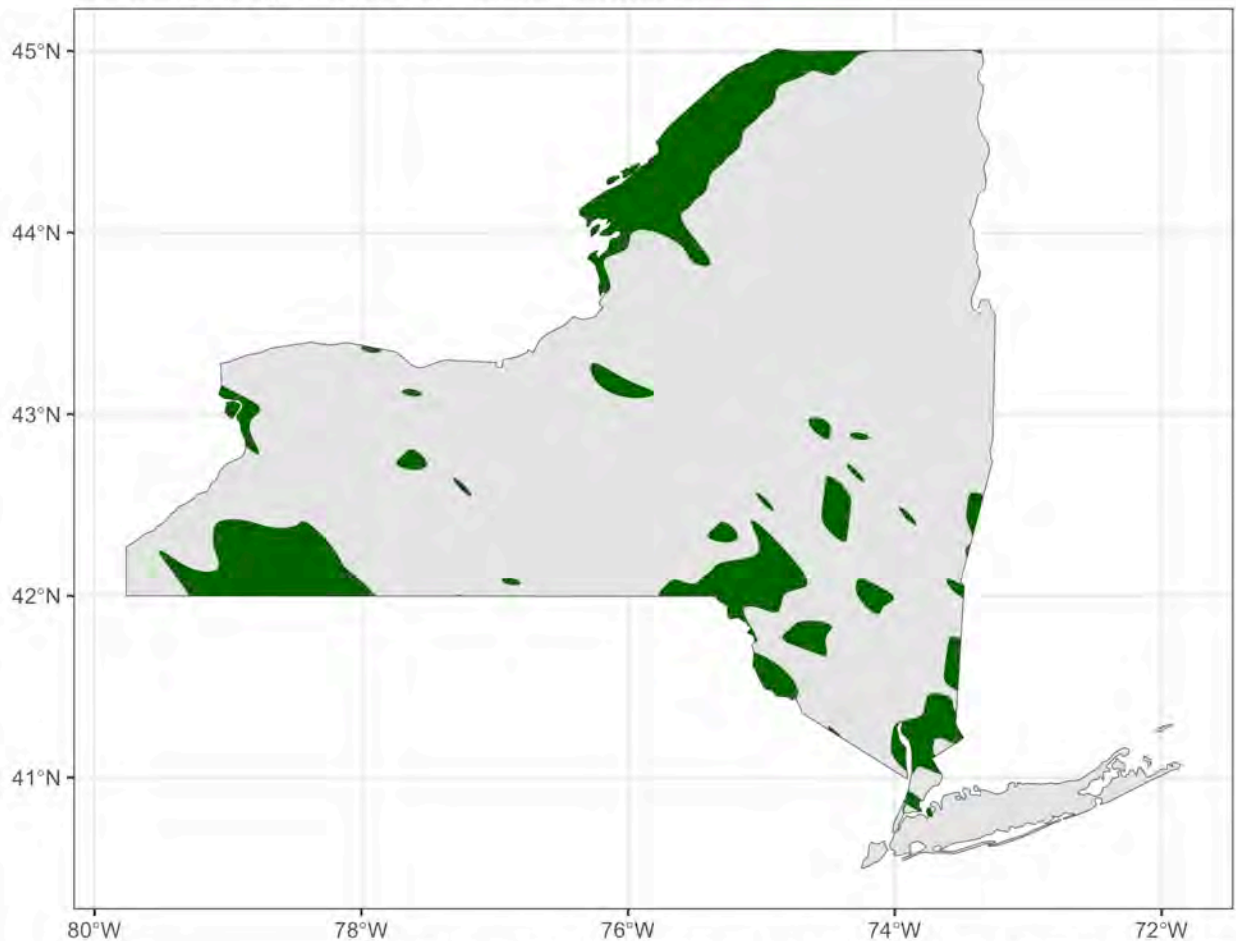
Trend data from eBird Status and Trends, Data Version: 2022; Released: 2023

**Figure 4.** Breeding trends, by state, for cliff swallow (eBird).

### III. New York Rarity

*(provide map, numbers, and percent of state occupied)*

Breeding range map in NY for Cliff Swallow



Range map data from eBird Status and Trends, Data Version: 2022; Released: 2023

**Figure 5.** NYS breeding range for cliff swallow based on eBird data.

**Details of historic and current occurrence:**

The first Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) (1980-85) documented occupancy in 1250 blocks, 23.4% of the survey blocks statewide (Andrle and Carroll 1988). The second BBA (2000-05) documented occupancy in 1105 blocks, 20.7% of the survey blocks statewide (McGowan and Corwin 2008).

The third BBA (2020-25) is currently underway and utilizes a different number and layout of survey blocks across New York, making direct comparison with the first two Atlases difficult. There were 5,333 blocks in the first and second BBAs, and there are 5,710 blocks in the current BBA, of which 1,815 are considered priority blocks. To date, cliff swallow has been documented in 405 priority blocks, 11.4% of all priority blocks statewide during the third BBA (NY BBA III Overview, 2024).

## New York's Contribution to Species North American Range:

Based on eBird data, 0.02 percent of the population breeds in New York, while 0 percent of the non-breeding population occurs in New York. Among all states with breeding populations, New York ranks 38 of 42.

Percent of North American Range in NY	Classification of NY Range	Distance to core population, if not in NY
1-25%		

*Column options*

**Percent of North American Range in NY:** 100% (endemic); 76-99%; 51-75%; 26-50%' 1-25%; 0%; Choose an item

**Classification of NY Range:** Core; Peripheral; Disjunct; (blank) or Choose an item

## IV. Primary Habitat or Community Type

*(from NY crosswalk of NE Aquatic, Marine, or Terrestrial Habitat Classification Systems):*

NatureServe broad habitat types: Cropland/hedgerow, Aerial, Shrubland/chaparral, Savanna, Grassland/herbaceous, Cliff, HERBACEOUS WETLAND, Aerial, Riparian, Aerial, Herbaceous wetland, Aerial

### Habitat or Community Type Trend in New York

Habitat Specialist?	Indicator Species?	Habitat/ Community Trend	Time frame of Decline/ Increase
Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

*Column options*

**Habitat Specialist and Indicator Species:** Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

**Habitat/Community Trend:** Declining; Stable; Increasing; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

### Habitat Discussion:

Most numerous in mountainous regions and at high elevations. Nests under eaves of wooden buildings, under bridges and on dams.

Cliff swallows inhabit open to semi-wooded habitat, cliffs, canyons, and farm country, generally near meadows, marshes, and water. They build bottle-shaped mud nest in colonies on cliffs, under eaves of buildings, under bridges, and similar sites sheltered by an overhang. Many return to same nesting area in successive years, but colonies tend to switch nesting sites between seasons, evidently due to a buildup of insect parasites in the nests. Cliff swallows commonly repair and use old nests.

## V. Species Demographics and Life History

<b>Breeder in NY?</b>	<b>Non-breeder in NY?</b>	<b>Migratory Only?</b>	<b>Summer Resident?</b>	<b>Winter Resident?</b>	<b>Anadromous/Catadromous?</b>
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

*Column options*

**First 5 fields:** Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

**Anadromous/Catadromous:** Anadromous; Catadromous; (blank) or Choose an item.

## **Species Demographics and Life History Discussion**

*(include information about species life span, reproductive longevity, reproductive capacity, age to maturity, and ability to disperse and colonize):*

Gregarious at all seasons. Periodically, populations may decline drastically due to prolonged spring or summer rains and reduced food availability (Terres 1980). Parasitic swallow bug (*Oeciacus vicarius*) sometimes is abundant enough to reduce reproductive success in large colonies.

## VI. Threats

Threat Level 1	Threat Level 2	Threat Level 3	Spatial Extent	Severity	Immediacy	Trend	Certainty
1. Residential and Commercial	1.1 Housing & Urban Areas	(construction/disturbances)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
2. Agriculture & Aquaculture	2.1 Annual & Perennial Non-Timber Crops	(conversion of grasslands, reduction in insects)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
4. Transportation & Service Corridors	4.1 Roads & Railroads	4.1.1 Roads (construction)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
8. Invasive & Other Problematic Species	8.2 Problematic Native Plants & Animals	8.2.7 Ectoparasites (swallow bugs)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
9. Pollution	9.2 Industrial & Military Effluents	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
9. Pollution	9.3 Agricultural & Forestry Effluents	9.3.3 Herbicides & pesticides	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
11. Climate Change	11.3 Changes in Temperature Regimes	11.3.4 Increase in temperature fluctuations	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.

**Table 1.** Threats to cliff swallow.

Cliff swallows are threatened by parasitism by swallow bugs, parasitic insects that live in swallow nests and feed off nestlings. This parasitism results in lower body mass and survival rate for nestlings (Brown et al 2021).

As an insectivorous species, conversion of grasslands to agricultural lands, as well as excessive use of pesticides, threatens the cliff swallow’s food supply. Toxins may bioaccumulate in insectivorous bird species, although the affects on cliff swallows is not well known (Brown et al. 2020).

While construction of bridges, buildings, and culverts provides additional breeding sites for cliff swallows, it may also pose a threat to already existing nests, whether from direct damage as a result of construction or general disturbances to individuals.

**Are there regulatory mechanisms that protect the species or its habitat in New York?**

Yes: ✓ No: Unknown:

If yes, describe mechanism and whether adequate to protect species/habitat:

This species is included in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703-712) and is protected as a native species under the NYS Environmental Conservation Law.

**Describe knowledge of management/conservation actions that are needed for recovery/conservation, or to eliminate, minimize, or compensate for the identified threats:**

Action Category	Action	Description
C.7 Legislative and Regulatory Framework or Tools	C.7.2 Create or amend policies, guidelines or best practices	Need reduction in use of pesticides
C.8 Research and Monitoring	C.8.1.1.1 Characterization, demographic study, population or inventory	Monitor population trends and aerial insect food source availability and quality

Table 2. Recommended conservation actions for *cliff swallow*.

**VII. References**

**This SSA drew heavily from these resources:**

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