

# COMMENT

## They're back for another year

By Ted Brown  
tedbit@hotmail.com



A Ted Bit

It was earlier this week that I first noticed them.

I opened the back door of the stable to turn the sheep loose into the yard. Out of the corner of my eye, a little black 'dot' came flying into the stable, cheeping and chirping.

I immediately thought to myself— the barn swallows are back.

You know, the moment I see the first swallows, I think of my dad.

They were his 'feel good first sign of spring,' as they returned from their long migration from the warm southerly climes.

Dad would always start watching for them in mid- to late-April, when the weather was finally mild enough for the windows and doors in the barn to be left open all night, to left the fresh air waft through the barn. When the windows were open, the swallows could come in for shelter.

The one I saw fly into the barn last week was soon followed by another, as they landed on the litter carrier track, suspended from the ceiling of the stable.

They sat there, tittering and tattering back and forth to each other, carrying on a great conversation, as they discussed what renovations needed to be done to the mud nest which is stuck to the whitewashed beam in the barn. It's been there for decades.

My dad maintained that the same swallows, or members of the same family, returned each year to lay their eggs in the same nests. They'd sometimes raise two hatchlings of little swallows in one season.

What he said must be true— otherwise how could they know where the nest was located on the inside of that beam, unless they came back from a previous year of nesting there?

I'm pretty sure those two swallows I saw land in this past week will soon be making

trips in and out of the barn, flying to the nearby marsh area, to return with a little dab of mud on their beaks, or bits of dried grass, which they'll stick to the nest, or the beam, to rebuild it a bit from the previous year.

Swallows' nests seem to be resilient. Although they've been rebuilt from time to time by new generations of swallows, some of the nests in the barn have been stuck to that same old beam more than 40 years.

When they hatch their young ones, I enjoy watching the parents fly in and out of the barn, returning with another mouthful of mosquitoes, which they feed to those little beaks sticking out over the edge of the mud nest on the old beam.

As I watched those two discuss their nest renovations/maintenance, I thought how fast time flies. Before I know it, those two swallows will have had their babies, raised them up and sent them on their way. They might even have a second set, and when the chills of fall start to creep in at night, they'll plan that long trek back to their winter homes in South America.

One more annual thought went through my mind as I watched them assess the state of the old nest.

For years I've wondered, if somewhere in the hugeness of South America, there is another person, just like my dad, watching intently for the return of the swallows, signaling the arrival of spring in the southern hemisphere.

"Did those same little birds have a mud nest down there, and another family down there, that they returned to each and every year?"

I've always hoped there was, someone, just like my dad, keeping watch over 'our' swallows.



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