



Photo by Alistair Fraser

Kootenay Bank Swallow Survey

Issue #3: Spring 2019

Kootenay Bank Swallow Survey: History, Purpose, and Accomplishments

We are entering the fifth year of KBSS. The project was launched in 2015 to help address information gaps on the status of the Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*), a nationally threatened species, in our region.

Field work in the first year focused on evaluating methods of estimating numbers of swallows at active colonies, based on nest counts conducted in the Pend d'Oreille Valley. Breeding season counts were expanded during the second year to include most of the West Kootenay. In addition, a catalogue was developed to track all known colonies throughout southeastern BC.

The past two seasons, 2017 & 2018, have seen many important additions made to the catalogue, as volunteers continue to report updates on their local colonies and to document new sites across the region.

In addition to field studies and catalogue development and upkeep, KBSS presentations were made to Rocky Mountain Naturalists, West Kootenay Naturalists' Association, Columbia Mountains Institute, and Creston Valley Bird Fest.

We also worked with Habitat Section staff from the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations

and Rural Development, and in cooperation with Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources, to provide recommendations on best management practices for operators and owners of gravel pits and quarries, in order to reduce disturbance to swallows during the nesting season.



Photo by Alistair Fraser

Assessing and monitoring regional numbers of a nationally threatened species



Ootischenia Landfill (2017). KBSS photo

Stewardship Spotlight

In the summer of 2018, KBSS contributor Peter McIver was contacted by a staff member from the Regional District of Central Kootenay regarding a Bank Swallow colony at the Ootischenia Landfill. Sand needed to be removed from the bank after breeding had concluded for the season, and Peter's knowledge on the birds' biology and nesting requirements permitted him to provide remediation advice. Peter visited the site with the environmental technician and gave recommendations on re-shaping the bank following removal of material so that the site remains suitable for nesting swallows on their return this year.

Nest Predation

Like most songbirds, Bank Swallows are subject to natural predation events. Linda Van Damme submitted this photo (right) of a colony in the Creston Valley. The larger excavations were likely made by a raccoon. Low banks such as this one are particularly vulnerable to mammalian predation.



Photo by Linda Van Damme

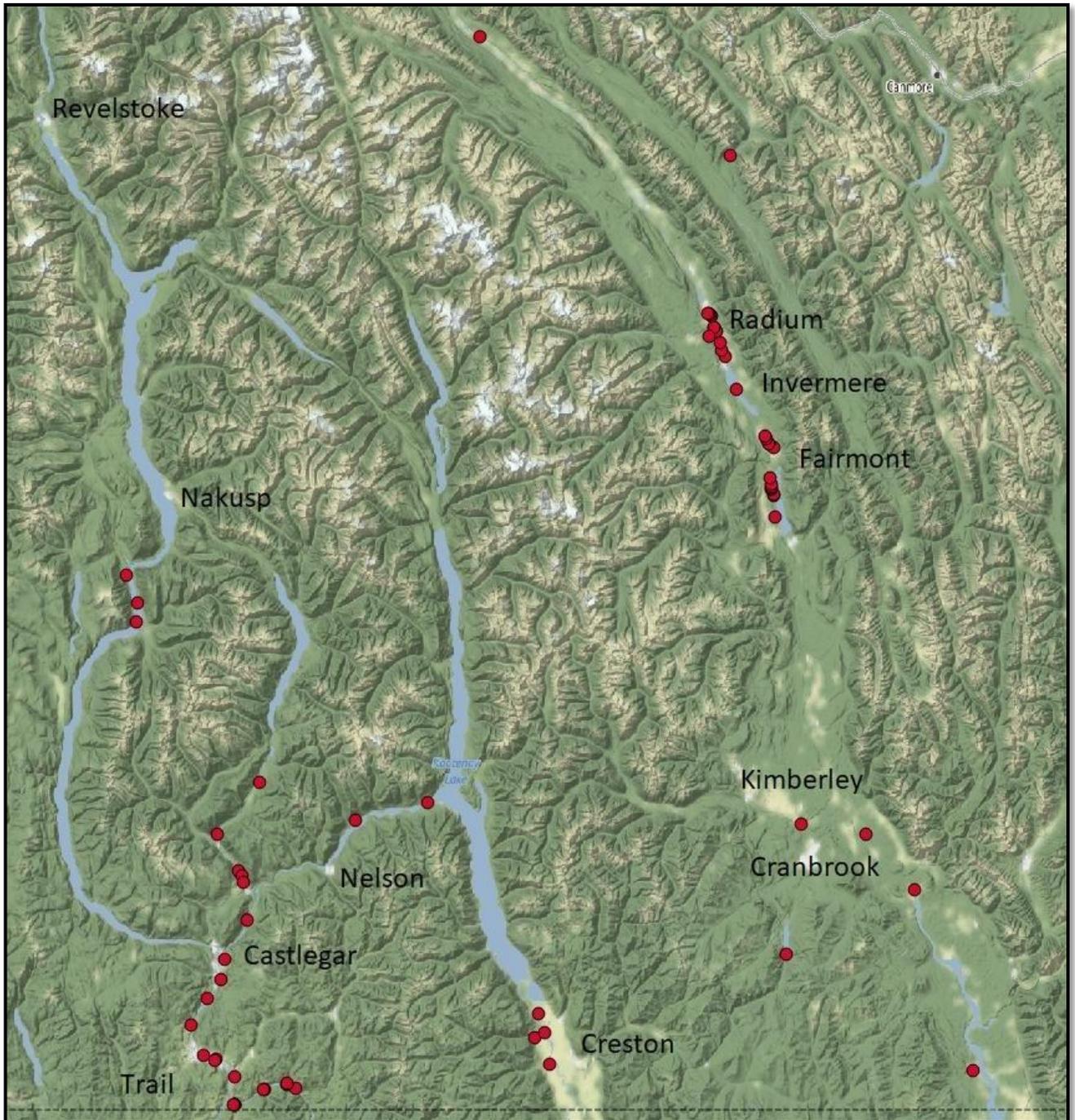


Columbia River

KBSS photo

Colony Characteristics

Bank Swallow colonies come in many shapes in sizes. What they all have in common are a near-vertical, sparsely-vegetated or bare bank face, in substrate that is soft enough to excavate, yet stable enough to maintain its integrity through the nesting season.



The above map shows the locations for the 60+ sites that have been reported in the past four years and that are included in the catalogue of active Bank Swallow colonies. Do you know of a site that's not on the map? Please contact us!

Some colonies reported to KBSS are not shown; for example, those for which detailed location information is missing, those that

haven't been confirmed as active in the past four years, and those for which the number of burrows was not available. For these reasons, most eBird reports are also not included. Very small colonies, which might host only Northern Rough-winged Swallows, are omitted unless the presence of Bank Swallows was confirmed by the observer.



Recovery of Species at Risk in Canada

The process for recovery of wildlife perceived to be at risk or declining begins with an independent assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). In 2013, COSEWIC designated the Bank Swallow as Threatened in Canada based largely on evidence of declines in numbers of over 95% over 40 years. Causes of the decline remain under study, but likely involve a combination of several threats, including habitat loss and a reduction in abundance of its prey, flying insects.

The federal government responded to COSEWIC's assessment in 2017 by publishing an Order to list the species as Threatened under the Species at Risk Act. The next step is the development of a recovery strategy, which will outline measures to stop or reverse the swallow's decline and identify critical habitat. Action plans then provide steps to be taken to implement the recovery strategy. More information can be found by going to canada.ca and searching "species at risk".

Contribute your observations in 2019!

Please report all breeding colonies in the Kootenay region in 2019. For sites that were reported previously, indicate whether they are still active and if there have been any significant changes. Please check the map for coverage and report all new colonies encountered. *A visit in June or July is ideal.* Here's how to report:

- identify colony locations
- take photographs of colonies
- count numbers of burrows (in the field or from photographs)
- record date and number of adults observed
- OR, request a data form from the address below.

Data collected through KBSS will be incorporated into the national Bank Swallow recovery strategy which is currently under development.

Contact Janice Arndt, Project Coordinator, for more information, and to submit reports and photos:

kootenaybankswallows@gmail.com, or 901 Highway 3A, Nelson BC V1L 6J5.

The following individuals participated in the survey in 2018: Daryl Calder, Rachel Darvill, Gary Davidson, Tracy Flynn, Rob Fox, Thomas Hill, Marlene Johnston, Mary McGovern, Peter McIver, Marianne Nahm, Paul Prappas, Verena Shaw, Stan Soukeroff, David Swain, Linda Van Damme, Paul Whalen, Nancy Wilson, and Stewart Wilson. Michael McMann and Bill Merilees provided valuable historical information. **Thank you!** Also, THANK YOU to the West Kootenay Naturalists' Association and the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program for continuing to partner with us. Kootenay Conservation Program is a new partner, providing KBSS information to potential new volunteers through their Stewardship Solutions initiative (see kcpstewardship.ca).