

Tree Swallow

Tachycineta bicolor

Handsome aerialists with deep-blue iridescent backs and clean white fronts, Tree Swallows are a familiar sight in summer fields and wetlands across northern North America. They chase after flying insects with acrobatic twists and turns, their steely blue-green feathers flashing in the sunlight. Tree Swallows nest in tree cavities; they also readily take up residence in nest boxes. This habit has allowed scientists to study their breeding biology in detail, and makes them a great addition to many a homeowner's yard or field.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Tree Swallows are streamlined small songbirds with long, pointed wings and a short, squared or slightly notched tail. Their bills are very short and flat.

Color Pattern

Adult males are blue-green above and white below with blackish flight feathers and a thin black eye mask; females are duller with more brown in their upperparts, and juveniles are completely brown above. Juveniles and some females can show a weak, blurry gray-brown breast band.

Behavior and Habitat

Tree Swallows feed on small, aerial insects that they catch in their mouths during acrobatic flight. After breeding, Tree Swallows gather in large flocks to molt and migrate. In the nonbreeding season, they form huge communal roosts.

Habitat

Tree Swallows breed in open habitats such as fields and wetlands, usually adjacent to water. They nest in artificial nest boxes as well as tree cavities. Foraging flocks are frequently seen over wetlands, water, and agricultural fields.

Cool Facts

- The oldest Tree Swallow on record was at least 12 years, 1 month old when it was captured and released by an Ontario bird bander in 1998.
- The Tree Swallow—which is most often seen in open, treeless areas—gets its name from its habit of nesting in tree cavities. They also take readily to nest boxes.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 4.7 - 5.9 inches
- Wingspan - 11.8 - 13.8 inches
- Weight - 0.6 - 0.9 ounces

