

TREE SWALLOWS, *TACHYGINETA BICOLOR*, FOUND NESTING IN NORTH ALABAMA NEAR DECATUR

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On the morning of 18 July 1987, Ann Miller, my wife Rose Marie, and I were birding the Swan Creek Management Area north of Decatur when we encountered a large concentration of swallows. Present were Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), Purple Martins (*Progne subis*), Bank Swallows (*Riparia riparia*), and Rough-winged Swallows (*Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*). In an area near the northwest quadrant of the main body of water, in a grove of willows, we located a significant number, at least 25, of immature Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) perched among the dead limbs of a willow. Also present were six adult-plumaged Tree Swallows.

In a nearby dead tree we found a circular hole and when we examined it with a spotting scope, we could see the heads of two flightless, young Tree Swallows. The nestlings exhibited "gaping" behavior—opening their mouths as wide as possible—at every passing swallow. We soon observed that the young swallows were being fed at frequent intervals (perhaps every five minutes) by a pair of adults who responded to the gaping young by filling their open mouths with food. When we closed to within ten meters or less, one of the adult birds would enter the nest cavity and cover the young.



Figure 1. Tree Swallow at nest cavity. Swan Creek Management Area, Decatur, AL (Photo by Ann Miller).

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

TREE SWALLOWS, Cont.

We were convinced that the presence of dependant, flightless young being fed by adult birds in a nesting cavity represented convincing evidence of the first successful breeding by Tree Swallows in the state of Alabama. Furthermore, the number of immature Tree Swallows present on the site would indicate a likelihood of several successfully fledged broods from the same colony of swallows in the Swan Creek Management Area.

The immature birds had a pewter color of greyish brown on the back, creamy white underparts indicative of Tree Swallows, and an incomplete buffy breast band. The adult birds had entirely creamy white underparts, but were in an intermediate plumage of blue and green "splotches" above. The dependant young were in a juvenal plumage as were the immature birds observed out of the nest, except for a band of white feathers over the base of the bill.

When Ann Miller and Harriet Wright Findlay returned to the site several days later to photograph the young swallows in the nest hole, they were disappointed to find that the nestlings had already fledged. Unfortunately, the first reported nesting by Tree Swallows in Alabama could therefore not be documented by photographs of the adults feeding the nestlings. A picture of one of the adults perched near the nest cavity was obtained, however, and is presented with this article as evidence of breeding (see Figure 1).

