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CLIFF SWALLOWS (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) BREED IN GLADES AND HIGHLANDS COUNTIES, FLORIDA

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Continued documentation of changes in breeding ranges of birds demonstrates the flexibility birds show to constantly shifting environments. Because of their preference for human-built infrastructure like bridges as nesting sites, swallows (*Hirundinidae*) can provide valuable insights into the ecological impacts of humans on avifauna. Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), Cliff Swallows (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*), and Cave Swallows (*P. fulva*) have all expanded their breeding ranges across the southeastern United States including Florida, aided, in part, by the construction of bridges which provide nesting habitat (Brown et al. 2020; Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Here we document the first breeding record of Cliff Swallows for Glades and Highlands counties, Florida, in 2024, with nests on a bridge over a canal. Previous state records include Martin and Palm Beach County, south of Highlands/Glades and Orange County, north of Highlands/Glades (Engstrom *in press*).

Cliff Swallows nest in canyons and rock ledges and have expanded their breeding range into eastern North America following the construction of features such as highway culverts, bridges, and buildings since European colonization. They breed as far south as Oaxaca, Mexico and are increasingly breeding residents in the southeastern United States, including Florida (Brown et al. 2020).

In 2024 and 2025, we documented Cliff Swallows breeding on a bridge over a canal that forms the boundary between Glades and Highlands Counties. On 9 August 2024, PL observed nesting Cliff Swallows at the Indian Prairie Canal bridge on State Road 70 (27° 12’ 35.2” N, 81° 08’ 57.6” W). He observed at least 5 adults, with one presumably feeding 2 nestlings in a mud nest under the bridge (Lewia 2024). The same day, ST observed the dark heads with white forehead, orange around the neck, pale orange rump, and squared-off tail that separates Cliff Swallows from Cave Swallows (Thyme 2024).

On 16 August 2024, PL and ST returned to the bridge, where we immediately saw and heard Cliff Swallows flying around the bridge.

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We crawled under the south side of the bridge – Glades County – and observed two nestlings peeking out of the top of a mud nest 15-20 feet away from us, built against the support beam of a bridge, approximately 3 meters above the water. The nest was almost exactly in the middle of the bridge, near the county line. The same wall just above the nests contained several active mud-dauber wasp nests (likely *Sceliphron caementarium*). Dozens of swallow nests were present under the bridge; only the one Cliff Swallow nest appeared to be active.

On 17 June 2025, ST and JK returned to the bridge and observed a minimum of four Cliff Swallows in the area and 40 Barn Swallows (Thyme and Krell 2025). Under the bridge, we counted one occupied Cliff Swallow nest and numerous occupied Barn Swallow nests. The differences in nests were obvious: the Barn Swallow nests were open-cup, and the Cliff Swallow nests were gourd-shaped, with an opening on one side through which swallows could enter or exit. We observed parents bring food to their nestlings (Fig. 1), and nestlings poking their heads out of the nest awaiting food deliveries.

Cliff Swallow nesting in Highlands County has been suspected in recent years. Ron Smith (2021) noted two Cliff Swallows at the CR-41A canal 4.6 miles east of the Indian Prairie Canal, commenting in their eBird checklist, "apparent nesting under bridge within Barn Swallow colony . . . A first summer season record for Highlands County!" Patrick Blake (2021) also noted potential nesting behavior a day later.

In 1975, P. W. Sykes (1976) reported active Cliff Swallow nests in Martin County, southeast of Highlands - a first for the state. At the time, the closest breeding colony was at the Georgia-South Carolina border (FWC 2003). Cliff Swallows bred at the same spot in 1979 (Sykes 1979). The second Florida Breeding Bird Atlas reports 13 potential breeding locations (6 confirmed) (Engstrom *in press*). Our observation

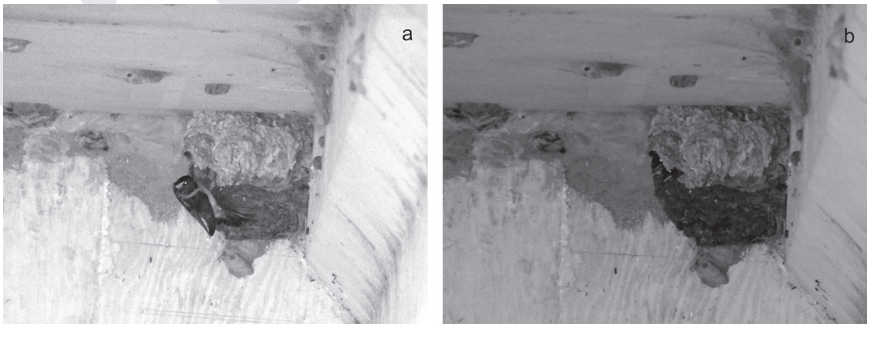

Figure 1a: Adult Cliff Swallow bringing food to nestlings, 17 June 2025. 1b: Nestling Cliff Swallows at the entrance of their nest, 17 June 2025, Photographs by Joseph Krell.

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would be the first confirmed for Glades or Highlands County – in line with Greenlaw et al.'s (2014) observation that the Cliff Swallow is an "irregular, rare (but increasing?) summer resident" in Florida.

These observations contribute to our understanding of Cliff Swallow range expansion in Florida, highlighting the importance of bridges as nesting habitats in a rapidly changing landscape. Continued monitoring of similar bridges will likely result in more and better documentation of swallow range expansions.

Acknowledgments

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