

Northern Rough-winged Swallow builds nest on garage air-conditioning ducts

by Marilyn Campbell

For several days in July 2009, I had noticed Northern Rough-winged Swallows (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) swooping around my garage doors when I would return from a drive. I initially thought they were hawking insects as they would often swoop over the backyard and driveway. This species has nested under the bridge several yards from my driveway for the past 30 years.

On 17 July 2009 as I opened my basement door leading to the garage, I saw an adult rough-wing in the garage, hovering near the ceiling, and twittering. After it left, I got on a ladder and looked into the area. There, in a shallow opening between the ceiling and some air-conditioning ducts, I could see some nesting material and at least three heads of nestlings. The area was dark, with a bit of light coming in from behind making photography difficult. I finally did get a photo of the nest but no adult coming to it. They were very wary and would not enter the garage, even when I got into my car to observe.

The next morning, as I opened the garage door, an adult came into the nest. It immediately fluttered around, calling agitatedly and then left. It did not return. The night before there had been unseasonably low temperatures. I do not know



Rough-winged Swallow nest between ceiling and air-conditioning ducts. Georgetown, Vermilion County. 17 July 2009. Photo by Marilyn Campbell

if the young might have died from exposure or something else, but the adult did not return to the nest during the remaining two hours I was home before going on vacation.

A pair of Carolina Wrens had raised two broods in the garage earlier in the summer. Then they moved to the front perch deck. After finding the swallow nest, I am wondering if the wrens moved because of the swallows having usurped their territory.

Rough-wings are the only swallows which are usually found around my house because the area is too wooded for Barn Swallows. Rough-wings typically nest in cavities near water. I could find nothing in the literature about rough-wings nesting inside structures, but they do use cavities in man-made-structures.

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Caspian Tern Photos:

Steven J. Huggins took the photos, at left, of the Caspian Tern colony he discovered 1 July 2009 atop a Chicago Illinois building near Navy Pier, Cook County.

The top photo depicts an adult and nestling/fledgling. The bottom photo shows an adult flying in to feed young.