

Observations on the Breeding of the Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*, in North Thailand

Preliminary observations collected during February-November 1992 confirm the breeding of the Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) in North Thailand. McCLURE (1974) stated that this species "does not nest in the tropics," and MEDWAY (1971) reported that "The breeding range of the Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) in Eastern Asia extends from 68°N in parts of Siberia to Southern China." LEKAGUL & ROUND (1991), however, describe the Barn Swallow in Thailand as "Very common winter visitor; apparently breeds locally on a few high mountains." This statement refers to some observations of Barn Swallows entering houses in the extreme north of Thailand, though without confirmation of breeding. My observations thus constitute the southernmost breeding record of the species in Asia.

On 29 February 1992 Barn Swallows were building nests in the houses of the minority hilltribe group, the Akha, in the village of San Jaroen Gow. On the 1st of March swallows were observed sitting on eggs in the nearby Lisu village of Doi Laan. These villages are 5 km apart and situated in the hills on the north-west side of the valley, above the district town of Mae Srui (19° 10'N, 99° 33'E), Chiang Rai Province, and approximately 50 km south of Chiang Rai city. The nests were sited inside the roofs of traditionally built houses, often with three or four nests in one house (Fig. 1, 2). The roofs were made of grass mats on a bamboo frame and the nests were fixed approximately half way up the interior roof slope between 2-4 m above the floor. Access and egress occurred through openings in the roof apex at both ends of the house. The birds were indifferent to everyday family activity in the houses and the Akha and the Lisu tolerated, even welcomed, the birds nesting because they believed they would bring good luck to the household. The Akha sometimes constructed small platforms to prevent the faeces from fouling their living area. Nests were often then built on these platforms.

During the dry season, in February and March, the Akha renovate their houses and this may involve partial or complete renewal of the roof materials. It was curious to find swallows still sitting on eggs on 18 April when on 29 February they had almost completed nest building. This is explained by the whole roof being replaced in March, destroying nests and eggs, and the birds immediately rebuilding and laying another clutch of eggs in the same house. On 19 April a swallow was constructing a nest in a small rice barn and it is probable that this nest was a replacement for one previously destroyed as the barn had been newly thatched. As hilltribe lifestyles change, the traditional houses are being replaced by lowland Thai style houses with solid wooden walls and asbestos sheeting roofs. No swallows have been observed nesting in this style of house probably because there is no access or egress except through the windows and doors, and the roof material offers poor insulation during the hot months which coincide with the breeding season.

On 10 September swallows were observed gathering in moderate numbers on electric wires in the foothills between Mae Srui and San Jaroen. In the village the birds were seen briefly visiting empty nests at regular intervals during the day. Another Akha village was visited on 13 September; Mae Tam Miu is approximately 40 km south-east of San Jaroen in the hills forming the eastern flank of the Mae Srui valley. No swallows

Figure 1. Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) at nest, 29/2/92.



Figure 2. Barn Swallow's nest inside the roof of Akha house.



were observed but the villagers said swallows stayed in the village during the winter months (November to March) but never nested. From this observation it is probable San Jaroen is close to the southern breeding limit of this species. San Jaroen was again visited on 24 October and swallows were still present in the village using the nests only at night for roosting.

I also made a brief visit in May of 1992 to the Jing Hong area of Sibsong Panna in Yunnan. Barn swallows were nesting in the Akha village of Bala and many birds were observed flying around the Dai villages and were probably breeding.

Observations will be continued so that a detailed picture can be built up of the migration patterns, and the breeding cycle and range, of the passage migrants, the stopover winter migrants, and the breeding migrants of *Hirundo rustica tyleri* and *Hirundo rustica gutturalis* in Thailand and adjacent countries.

REFERENCES

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