



CTYBC TIPS

for birding the Gulf Coast

SWALLOWS

Swallows seen in the Spring on the Central Texas Gulf Coast: Purple Martin, Northern Rough-winged, Bank, Tree, Cliff, Cave, and Barn Swallows.

Purple Martins are the largest swallows. The males are all blue and black, with a rather shallowly notched tail. The females have gray necks and gray smudgy mottling on the chest, but blue heads and backs.

Northern Rough-winged Swallows have a squared tail and a buffy throat with white belly and broad white undertail coverts. The rump is plain brown, unlike Cliff and Cave Swallows. The tail can look fanned in flight.

Bank Swallows are bright white underneath with a dark neck band. The tail is notched and narrow. The white of the throat wraps around the side of the neck.

Tree Swallows are all white underneath, with no neck band or coloring on the throat, unlike the other swallows. The male has a blue-green back and head, while the female is gray-brown. The tail is slightly notched, but can look squared in flight.

Cliff Swallows are some of the most common swallows and are usually found in flocks. They have an orange-ish rump and a dark throat with pale forehead, which is opposite the Cave Swallow pattern.

Cave Swallows can be found flying among Cliff Swallows, and look much the same. Cave Swallows have the same orange-ish rump but have a pale orange throat and a darker red forehead than the Cliff Swallow.

Barn Swallows are perhaps the easiest to identify. They have the classic long notched swallow tail that has white spots in a band across the upper side of the tail. The back and head are blue, and the throat is reddish-orange, with a buffy or light orange belly. They can be found alone or with other flycatchers and often nest under porches.

All swallows are difficult to identify when they are flying, which is most of the time. They fly and swerve so fast that it is almost impossible to keep them in binocular sights. Try following just one, and first look at the rump and tail, to see if you've got a Cliff or Barn swallow. Then concentrate on the throat. The colors may or may not be clear, especially in poor light.
