

FIRST VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW NEST IN SASKATCHEWAN

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One of many highlights of the S.N.H.S. summer meeting at Val Marie was the sighting of the Violet-green Swallows. A cooperative effort led quite rapidly to the discovery of the first Saskatchewan nest.

On June 14, 1969, no sooner had the cavalcade of cars stopped at the top of the valley near Prairie Dog Butte, when George Ledingham sang out: "Violet-green Swallows!" This species had only the previous year been added to the hypothetical list of Saskatchewan birds, after a sight record by Bill Eddie, Fred W. Lahrman and Fred G. Bard in Regina on April 12, 1968 (*Blue Jay* 26:119, Sept. 1968). Previously there had been one specimen from Manitoba in 1945 but none from Saskatchewan. Some time before the Regina record, J. David Chandler mentioned that he was sure he had seen Violet-greens in the Val Marie

area and wondered whether they might even be nesting there.

Members were very excited as they watched three or four pairs circling the top of the cliff, the white across the base of their tails readily visible under perfect conditions. Some of the juniors of exploring bent had already made their way out onto the top of the butte as soon as the cars stopped. Though not aware of the species of swallow they were watching, Donald Houston and Keith Hobman were soon convinced that several pairs must be nesting on the cliff, since the swallows swooped concernedly very close to them.

I went down to the bottom of the cliff while Arnold Nijssen and David Riome got the eagle banding equipment from my car and pounded the big stake at the top of the butte, attaching 150 feet of rope. After



Photo by Connie Pratt

Prairie Dog Butte, June 14, 1969, above the nests of the Violet-green Swallows.



Photo by C. S. Houston

Cliff below Prairie Dog Butte showing entrance to Violet-green Swallow nest site.

sighting several likely holes with tell-tale "whitewash", I climbed up the rope. Just above me, I saw a Violet-green seize a piece of floating down from the air and enter a crevice on the sheer face of the clay cliff about eight or ten feet from the top. It contained a completed nest, made of grass and lined with white feathers but unfortunately it contained no eggs as yet. The swallow entered the nest twice while it was under observation at a distance.

Throughout much of their range, Violet-green Swallows nest in holes and crevices on cliffs, often far from human habitation. Less commonly they nest in hollow trees or under the eaves of buildings. Their nearest regular nesting sites are in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta and Montana, the Waterton Lakes, and the river valleys of southeastern Montana; they are the most numerous swallow in the Black Hills of South Dakota. They have also nested in nest boxes at Hinton and Penfold in Alberta.



Photo by C. S. Houston

Violet-green Swallow nest in Prairie Dog Butte, June 14, 1969.