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## Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

The Cliff Swallow is one of the smallest swallows in the United States. It is found throughout much of Canada, the United States, and Mexico during the breeding season. Once absent in the southeastern United States, the Cliff Swallow's numbers are increasing in this region. The bird occurs in Florida primarily during migration and has former breeding records from near Lake Okeechobee.

**Habitat.** Cliff Swallows are associated with marshes, prairies, and open farmland. They feed primarily on flying insects, but occasionally may feed on berries (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Cliff Swallows nest in colonies, sometimes containing several thousand pairs. However, pioneer colonies contain only a few pairs. Gourd-shaped nests are constructed of mud on rocky cliff faces, but human-made cliffs buildings, bridges, culverts now provide adequate and abundant nest sites everywhere and have aided in the spread of this species eastward and southward into the southeastern coastal plain. Three or 4 white eggs spotted with brown are incubated for about 13 to 15 days, and nestlings fledge after 22 to 26 days (Brown and Brown 1995).



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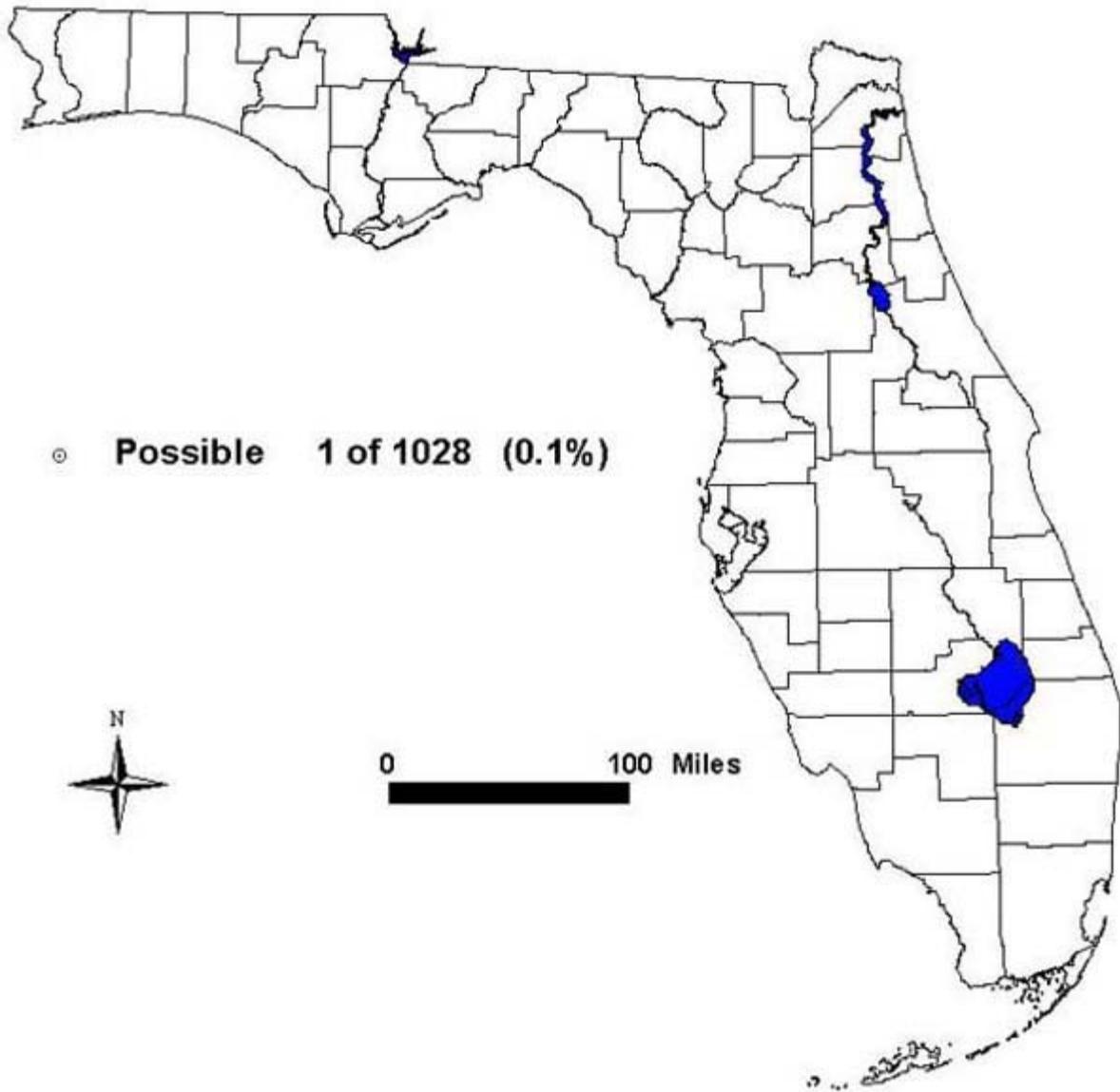
**Seasonal Occurrence.** Cliff Swallows migrate through Florida in April and May and during their southward migration between July and October (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Nesting has been observed in June (Sykes 1976).

**Status.** The Cliff Swallow was found nesting in Florida for the first time in June 1975, when Sykes found 9 nests 2 of which were active, under the U.S. Highway 441 bridge over the St. Lucie Canal at Port Mayaca in western Martin County on the eastern shore of Lake Okeechobee (Sykes 1976). These birds may have been nesting there the previous 2 years when Sykes saw Cliff Swallows during his Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) route in those years. Because the nearest known nesting colony was 840 km (522 mi) to the north at the Hartwell Dam on the Georgia-South Carolina border, the BBS office discounted these birds as being obviously late migrants (P. W. Sykes, pers. commun.).

The Cliff Swallows did not nest under the Mayaca bridge in 1976 and 1977, but in 1978 Sykes discovered 2 occupied nests among a group of 5 nests under another bridge about 4.5 km (2.8 mi) to the north of the original colony (Sykes 1979). In the intervening years since 1978 the Port Mayaca draw bridge has been demolished and replaced by a high-rise concrete bridge. While blockbusting in western Martin County in 1991 we found no nests or swallows under this bridge, but a Cliff Swallow was seen several miles north flying about 6 m (20 ft) above a road and under the tree canopy on a beeline flight southward down Highway 441. We were unable to follow the bird, but obviously it was heading toward a destination it had in mind, suggesting a nest site. It was the only Cliff Swallow seen over a period of several hours at large in the quadrangles bordering the lake. We checked several bridges along the highway but did not find any signs of nesting. Hence, it remains unconfirmed for the Atlas period.

Herbert W. Kale II

# Cliff Swallow



○ Possible 1 of 1028 (0.1%)



0 100 Miles

A horizontal black scale bar representing 100 miles, with '0' at the left end and '100 Miles' at the right end.