University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Nebraska Bird Review | Nebraska Ornithologists' Union

1-1-1999

Book Review: "Swallow Summer" by Charles R. Brown

Linda R. Brown

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebbirdrev

Part of the Ornithology Commons, Poultry or Avian Science Commons, and the Zoology Commons

Brown, Linda R., "Book Review: "Swallow Summer" by Charles R. Brown" (1999). *Nebraska Bird Review.* Paper 41.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebbirdrev/41

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Nebraska Bird Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Review of Swallow Summer by Brown (Brown) in Nebraska Bird Review (June 1999) 67(2).
Copyright 1999, Nebraska Ornithologists' Union. Used by permission.

Book Review by Linda R. Brown

Brown, Charles R. 1998, Swallow Summer, by Charles R. Brown. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1978. (371 p. $16.95) ISBN 0-8032-6145-4

Swallow Summer is a first-person, day-to-day account of Charles and Mary Bomberger Browns' fourteenth field season studying Cliff Swallows in western Nebraska. This story also concerns the three bright undergraduate field assistants who shared the experience of the summer of 1995. Charles communicates their discoveries of Cliff Swallow colony behavior in an everyday conversational manner. It was easy for me to catch the excitement they feel in "discovering the questions." I felt their wonder when as this very cold late breeding season slowly progressed, these researchers discovered that indeed many of the swallows were not breeding at all. This rather large contingent of non-breeders in bright plumage seemed to cruise through many colonies, perhaps checking to see where they might have reproductive success in the future. I am "in awe" at what can be learned when over half the individuals in many of the study colonies are banded. During this summer the 80,000th swallow was banded, and two eleven-year-old adults were recaptured.

I liked learning about the "food squeak." This distinctive sound is made only on cloudy days and cooperatively calls other swallows to food, making for a real advantage to living in a large colony. On the other hand, infestations of swallow bugs transported by the birds' feet may be a real limitation to living in a large colony. I am haunted by photos of the differences in development between swallow babies infested with bugs and those who are not. Charles fumigated one colony extensively to study what happens when that site has a lower bug population.

I was pleased that they had done baseline studies of colonies living on natural cliffs as well as colonies living on man-made bridge and culvert structures. They learned that all colonies exhibit similar patterns of behavior regardless of nest site.

This book inspired me and others to try a "Swallow Weekend." In consultation with Charles and Mary, we banded 92 Cliff Swallows off bridges in the Grand Island-Kearney area before the wind forced us to close the nets. None of the now over 100,000 Cliff Swallows banded by the Browns in their Keith County study area was among the birds we banded in the Kearney area. I wonder how far west we need to go to get one of the birds they banded? Participants in Swallow Weekend-1999 included John Dinan, Jeff Runge, Mark Humpert, Laurel Badura, Bill Taddicken, Barb and Paul Tebbel, John Holm, Joan and Chuck Dummer, Neva Ickes, Jo D. Blessing, Paul Johnsgard, Kevin, Kay and Nolan Church, Jackie Canterbury, and Linda Brown.

Swallow Summer is "must reading" for students contemplating field study. Birders, banders, and other field researchers will be fascinated. Anyone who likes to read natural history will savor Swallow Summer.