

## Sand Martin

The Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*) is a migratory passerine bird in the swallow family. It has a wide range in summer, embracing practically the whole of Europe and the Mediterranean countries, part of northern Asia and also North America. It winters in eastern and southern Africa, South America and the Indian Subcontinent.

The Sand Martin's twittering song is continuous when the birds are on the wing and becomes a conversational undertone after they have settled in the roost. The harsh alarm is heard when a passing falcon, crow or other suspected predator requires combined action to drive it away.



The Sand Martin appears on its breeding grounds towards the end of March, just in advance of the Swallow. At first, they flit over the larger bodies of water alone, in search of early flies. Later parties accompany other swallow species, but for a time, varying according to weather, the birds remain at these large waters and do not visit their nesting haunts. The Sand Martin is sociable in its nesting habits; from a dozen to many hundred pairs will nest close together, according to available space. The nests are at the end of tunnels of from a few inches to three or four feet in length, bored in sand or gravel. The actual nest is a litter of straw and feathers in a chamber at the end of the burrow; it

soon becomes a hotbed of parasites. Four or five white eggs are laid about mid-late May, and a second brood is usual in all but the most northerly breeding sites.

**Photograph by W.McBay**