

Common Name/Scientific name: Welcome Swallow / *Hirundo neoxena*

Australia's most widespread swallow, the Welcome Swallow can be seen fluttering, swooping and gliding in search of flying insects in almost any habitat, between city buildings, over farmland paddocks, in deserts, wetlands, forests and grasslands and every habitat in between. Sometimes they even occur at sea, the name 'Welcome' swallow comes from sailors who knew that the sight of a swallow meant that land was not far away.



Description: The Welcome Swallow is metallic blue-black above, light grey below on the breast and belly, and rust on the forehead, throat and upper breast. It has a long, forked tail, with a row of white spots on the individual feathers. The outer tail feathers (streamers) are slightly shorter in the female. Young Welcome Swallows are buffy white, instead of rusty, on the forehead and throat, and have shorter tail streamers

Feeding & Behaviour in the gardens: Welcome Swallows feed on a wide variety of insects. They catch prey in flight, using their acrobatic flying skills. The prey is guided into the bird's wide, open mouth with the help of short rictal bristles bordering the bill. These bristles also help protect the bird's eye. Where insects are in large supply, Welcome Swallows feed in large flocks.

Breeding and Nesting: Welcome Swallows feed on a wide variety on insects. They catch prey in flight, using their acrobatic flying skills. The prey is guided into the bird's wide, open mouth with the help of short rictal bristles bordering the bill. These bristles also help protect the bird's eye. Where insects are in large supply, Welcome Swallows feed in large flocks.

Similar species seen in the gardens: Swifts (Family Apodidae) are similar in habits and appearance to the swallows, but have longer and more curved wings and differences in their flight. Swifts are rarely seen landing, while swallows are a common sight on wires, posts and other suitable perches. Fork-tailed Swifts have rarely been recorded in the Maroochy gardens. Swallows can also be confused with the martins, of which there are two species in Australia: the Fairy Martin, *H. ariel*, and the Tree Martin, *H. nigricans*. Both species have shorter, more square tails, and white to buff rumps.