

## Harper's Island Sand Martin 2023 Breeding Season Report.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> November we removed all nests from the nesting burrows in the Sand Martin nesting bank on Harper's Island Wetlands nature reserve this morning and took the opportunity to record details of the nests.

- All 24 burrows had evidence of occupation.
- All nests were situated at the very back of the one metre nesting tunnels and four were situated 60 - 64cm from the front of the tunnels.
- Most nests were composed of dead grass/plant material with very few if any containing feathers.
- Four nests had substantial amounts of feathers. As with last year, the feathers looked like gull feathers, probably feathers dropped by preening Black-headed Gulls.
- All 24 nests were empty, no dead chicks.
- Three nests contained one unhatched egg each, one nest contained three unhatched eggs.
- One nest contained at least three hatched eggshells.
- 17 burrows had one nest cup, 4 had nests with two nest cups, one immediately in front of the other. This year we had our first burrow with three nest cups in it.



The number of nests found in each burrow.



Cleaning out the nesting burrows.





A nest at the very back of the nesting burrow.





The nests.



We also found what look like moth pupa cases suspended from the top of the back of one of the burrows. Probably moved in before or after the Sand Martins arrived because the adult moths might have been dinner for them 😊

*Photos by Allan Farrell, report by Jim Wilson 26<sup>th</sup> November 2023*



## ***Harper's Island Sand Martin Ringing 2023***

As in 2022, six ringing visits were made during the 2023 season, the first being on May 30<sup>th</sup> and final visit on August 3<sup>rd</sup>. The same trapping protocol was used as described in 2022, i.e., nets set about an hour before sunrise and a catching period of approx. 90minutes.

***Numbers ringed in 2023 are shown in the table below with 2022 numbers repeated for convenient comparison.***

<b><i>Year</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>Adult Male</i></b>	<b><i>Adult Female</i></b>	<b><i>Adult unaged</i></b>	<b><i>Juvenile</i></b>	<b><i>Retraps from 2022</i></b>
<b><i>2022</i></b>	67	13	24	2	28	
<b><i>2023</i></b>	79	17	19		30	13

As the ringing effort in both years was similar, it isn't surprising that number of birds trapped in each year were also similar - 67 in 2022 and 79 in 2023 with more females than males trapped in each year. Various observers reported full occupation of the nesting bank in both years so, with an expected 48 resident adults, the proportions of adults trapped were 81% and 75% although it appears that the full quorum of females was trapped in 2022. Some incubating adults will be sitting tightly in the later stages of incubation and may not leave the nest during the short trapping periods. Not all birds leaving the nest burrows on any ringing session can be trapped as some will take evasive action by flying to the side before hitting the net or will fly under it.

Assuming each pair has two broods of four young, the potential productivity could be 192 juveniles per year. On this basis, the catches of 28 & 30 juveniles are relatively low but any efforts to improve on these numbers would require extra visits and would likely cause excessive disturbance.

Thirteen birds from 2022 were re-trapped at the colony in 2023. All were adults in 2022; five males and eight females. No juveniles from 2022 were retrapped in 2023.

Of particular interest in 2023 was one adult bird that was "controlled", (ringed elsewhere by another ringer). This bird was a juvenile when ringed at a colony at Owenahincha, Co. Cork in June 2022, a movement of 60km northeast although the bird had travelled to Africa and back in the intervening period.

***Barry O'Mahony 18<sup>th</sup> August 2023***