



Title: *“Lean on me”*

Description: Huddled welcome swallow fledglings

Photographer: Henrik Moller

Where, when: St Arnaud, Nelson lakes National Park, February 2021.

Sustainability? Welcome swallows are gorgeous – like most insect feeders (“insectivores”) they are fast-moving and high-energy creatures. Their real challenge is to get through winter when the cool temperatures suppress insect emergence. Famous studies in the United Kingdom forests showed that the small insectivorous birds there need to catch an insect every 4 seconds of a winter’s day – and when they are feeding young, the parents capture around 2.5 times their own body weight per day. That’s life in the fast lane. I particularly like the way swallows build nests and live around buildings.

In my opinion, the introduced birds are under-rated by most New Zealanders. Our concern for threatened native species has meant that we don’t often appreciate the common species at our doorsteps. Our studies of introduced farmland birds showed that they are 22 times more abundant than in UK and Europe where some of the species are even of conservation concern (due to the effects of intensified agriculture).

Growing awareness and care of introduced birds is part of a much bigger change in New Zealand’s biodiversity management and research. New Zealand society will soon have to decide whether to embrace the introduced species as part of our new heritage – those species have found their way into our lives and landscapes, our experiences, our literature, and more generally, our appreciation of nature. In my opinion we are often blinded by native versus introduced species divide. From an ecosystem functioning and social engagement point of view we need to accept that a species’ origin is just one factor in ecosystem-focussed environmental advocacy and management.

Photo notes: These recent fledglings huddled together on a motel roof to support each other in a stiff and cold breeze.

1/800s, 600 mm focal length, f/6.3, ISO-100.

Digital specs: 2114 x 1,410 pixels (3 MP).

Key words: Welcome swallows, *Hirundo neoxena*, introduced, birds, insectivores, Henrik Moller, Aotearoa, New Zealand, Sustainability.

Price: \$120 (incl. GST) for use of the digital image.

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Donation: The price includes a \$100 donation to a sustainability organisation or project of your choice, or otherwise for *the Fifeshire Foundation* in Nelson <https://www.fifeshirefoundation.co.nz/>.

I recommend that the donation goes to *the Fifeshire Foundation* because they promote social sustainability and resilience. Amongst many ways they help, they have fund young people, for example with school fees or one-off expenses like getting a drivers' license. That support fits the photo of the young swallows being buffeted by wind, but more generally, sustainability is nurtured when communities are healthy and people support each other – the Fifeshire Foundation do just that.

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