

COLONY NESTING

Approximately 13% of all bird species nest colonially, but what exactly constitutes a colony is a matter of definition. Tufted Puffins, *Fratercula cirrhata*, for example, nest on the steep slopes and rocky crevices on coastal cliffs, often on islands. Each pair excavates its own burrow. A congregation of puffin burrows on a marine island is considered a colony. Sand Martins, *Riparia riparia*, are seldom, if ever, observed to nest in solitude; such a dependence on social nesting would term the bird a colonial nester. A more extreme example of colonial nesting is found in the weaverbird family. The Sociable Weaver, *Philetairus socius*, of southern Africa constructs massive, multi-family dwellings of twigs and dry grasses, with many entrances leading to different nesting chambers, accommodating as many as a hundred nesting pairs. These structures resemble haystacks hanging from trees, and have been likened to apartment buildings or beehives.

Some seabird colonies host thousands of nesting pairs of various species. Triangle Island, for example, the largest seabird colony in British Columbia, Canada, is home to auks, gulls, cormorants, shorebirds, and other birds, as well as some marine mammals. Many seabirds show remarkable site fidelity, returning to the same burrow, nest or site for many years, and they will defend that site from rivals with great vigour. This increases breeding success, provides a place for returning mates to reunite, and reduces the costs of prospecting for a new site. Young adults breeding for the first time usually return to their natal colony, and often nest very close to where they hatched. Individual nesting sites at seabird colonies can be widely spaced, as in an albatross colony, or densely packed like an auk colony. In most seabird colonies several different species will nest in the same colony, often exhibiting some niche separation. Seabirds can nest in trees (if any are available), on the ground (with or without nests), on cliffs, in burrows under the ground and in rocky crevices.

Some birds are known to nest in colonies when conditions are suitable, but singularly in less than optimum conditions. The White-winged Dove, *Zenaida asiatica*, of southwestern North America was known to nest in large colonies when foraging areas could support such numbers. In 1978, in Tamaulipas, Mexico, researchers counted 22 breeding colonies of White-winged Doves with a collective population size of more than eight million birds. But as habitat was transformed through urbanization and/or agriculture, the doves apparently spread out into smaller, less long-lived colonies. Today, these doves are observed to nest both singly and colonially in both urban and rural areas.

Source Wikipedia