

Swallows flocking to T.O. woman's home

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Carol Anderson has been to Costa Rica and the Galapagos Islands to watch wildlife and catch glimpses of birds soaring through the air. Now she only has to go as far as her front door to see flocks of birds flitting about.

Like a benign twist on an Alfred Hitchcock movie, Anderson's Thousand Oaks home has been taken over by cliff swallows.

Never mind that she has to wash her cars daily or that sometimes one of the swallows in the 57 nests dive bombs her as she walks down her driveway, Anderson loves the hyperactive birds.

"It's like you are in the middle of a cloud of birds," Anderson said. "It's so amazing to watch them."

They came about two weeks ago, building their mud nests under the overhangs of her newly built house on Read Road. First came one, then another and another until they filled the skies above her home like giant mosquitoes. Under nearly every



Dana R. Bowler / Star staff

Carol Anderson of Thousand Oaks says hundreds of swallows have made nests, such as this one pictured Sunday, at her home.

eave of her house, at least one, but as many as six, of the mud nests that look like warty, hollow gourds cling to her home.

Art Marshall, a bird enthusiast with the Ventura Chapter of the Audubon Society, said swallows will often nest in packs, exploiting a nearby source of in-

sects that they can readily feed upon. Later this year, they'll migrate south as they do every year, he said.

Anderson suspects that the swallows used to come to the area where an old barn once stood. It is a wildlife area, after all.

Just three months ago, an escaped tiger roamed the nearby creek where the swallows get their mud for their nests. But, unlike the tiger that was eventually shot by U.S. Fish and Game officials, the birds are safe at Anderson's home. She's going to let the birds stay until their eggs hatch.

"Now I have three dogs and 300 birds," Anderson said. "We'll have friends until the end of June."

Not everyone along Anderson's road shares her affinity for the swallows. Other residents along the street, where many houses have eaves, also are inundated with the swallows trying to set up a home.

Twice a day, someone from Eileen Bailey's house gets a long stick and the hose out to spray the newly formed nests from her

home. Undeterred, the swallows come back and start again. Two hours after she blasted them down Sunday, new patches of mud dotted her home.

Marshall says that's the best way to get rid of the new nests if someone doesn't want them. It's illegal to take them down after the birds have laid eggs, he said.

Bailey's cars are constantly covered with the swallows' own version of smart missiles. Mud from destroyed nests sits on her driveway and her yard. She's worried about bugs or diseases the birds may carry.

"If there was just a couple of them, I wouldn't mind," she said. "I like birds, but it's the mud all over the place."

Bailey prefers the crows that come in the fall and perch on her fence. The swallows can stay down at Anderson's for all she cares.

And that's fine with Anderson. She loves getting up in the morning and seeing the swallows darting about, building nests and snacking on bugs.

Anderson is hoping her birds, like the swallows of San Juan Capistrano, return next year.