

Los Angeles Times CALENDAR weekend

WITH THE KIDS

Flocking to San Juan Capistrano

The winged wonders return to their spring home with fanfare, parades, pageantry and street frolicking.

By Brenda Rees
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Don't expect the skies to darken and turn black with the flapping of exhausted birds this weekend at the San Juan Capistrano Mission. There's nothing quite so dramatic at the "Return of the Swallows" celebration, the family event that welcomes the Franciscan mission's famous feathered friends back from Goya, Argentina, 7,500 miles away.

"You very rarely see whole flocks of them at one time," says Michelle Lawrence, executive director of the mission. "All of a sudden, you'll see one here and there, and then there's more and more. Before you know it, they're everywhere."

Capistrano swallows have conjured up romantic images for years. They've been immortalized in words ("Legend of the Swallows Return" appeared in the 1930 anthology "Capistrano Nights" published by Father St. John O'Sullivan with Charles Saunders) and then in music (Leon Rene's 1939 hit "When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano").

Today the winged wonders return to their spring home with fanfare, parades, pageantry and street frolicking.

On Friday, the mission welcomes children's choirs, historical reenactments, Aztec dancers, mariachis, Ramona Pageant dancers and Ballet Folklorico of San Juan. Saturday the whole city joins the party, with streets closing down from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. for the annual Swallow's Day Parade.

Family Day is Sunday at the mission, where there will be more music and dance, crafts and more history.

After all the noise and excitement of this weekend, maybe those birds can get some well-deserved peace and quiet.

Return of the Swallows Celebration

Mission San Juan Capistrano, 31414 El Camino Real, San Juan Capistrano.

8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday through Sunday.

Adults, \$6; seniors, \$5, and children, \$4. (949) 234-1300