

SWIFTS



and why they need our help...

A Swift is an extraordinary bird, not to be confused with Swallows or House Martins.

Swift

The largest of the three with proportionally much longer wings. Appears all black, never perches, and nests in crevices in buildings. Their nests are not easily visible.



Swallow

Russet coloured face, white belly, black back, with distinctive, long forked tail. Nests in open outbuildings. Often seen perching in groups at the end of the season.



House Martin

All white belly and chin, black on top with a white rump. Nests are found under the eaves of buildings, and are easily visible.



Our Swifts spend 9 months of the year feeding in the skies of Africa...



...but journey all the way to the UK every summer for 3 short months in order to nest and raise their young.

They find little gaps in the eaves and brickwork of our buildings and make their nests just inside, safe from predators.



In prehistoric times, Swifts would choose to nest in holes made by woodpeckers in very tall primeval trees. When man began to cut down the forests that covered the earth, Swifts lost most of their natural breeding places and, as a result, began a slide to extinction. However, once man began to build using stone, the birds adapted over time to find suitable niches in tall buildings to raise their young.

Swifts' Latin name is *Apus apus*, which translates as "footless". They have virtually no legs, and, unlike other birds, all 4 claws face forward, making it impossible to perch. For this reason, Swifts never purposefully land except to attend to the nest, so they rely on what they can find in the air. Their diet consists of many different species of flying insects, aphids and airborne spiders.



They drink by skilfully skimming the surface of lakes and ponds, scooping up drops of water with their lowered beak.



When Swifts are feeding their young, they collect each morsel in a pouch in their throat, creating a bolus of food to deliver to the chicks. In good weather, the parent bird will collect food for about 45 minutes each time before returning to the nest. In cold or rainy weather they must travel further afield to find the insects they need to nourish their young, and so the intervals between feeds may be longer.

Although their feet are of little use to them, their wings are, by contrast, extraordinarily well adapted to a life of continuous flight. They are much longer proportionally than other birds their size, and they are able to manoeuvre with amazing dexterity thanks to the fine tuned development of muscle and feather.



When a young Swift leaves the nest it does not touch down again until it is ready to breed, which is usually around 3 years later. Because it needs to be fully developed and able to fly competently from the moment of leaving the nest, it takes, on average, 42 days from hatching to fledging. This is two to three times longer than other birds of similar size.

But all this becomes impossible if their nest sites are taken away. Here in the UK we are inadvertently removing nest sites at an alarming rate, as buildings are renovated, effectively sealing the gaps that have been happily exploited by Swifts for thousands of years.



More than 60% of Swifts' nest sites have been lost since 1995. Unless we act quickly, they will be extinct in the UK within a short space of time.

Fortunately, there is plenty we can do to prevent this! PTO.

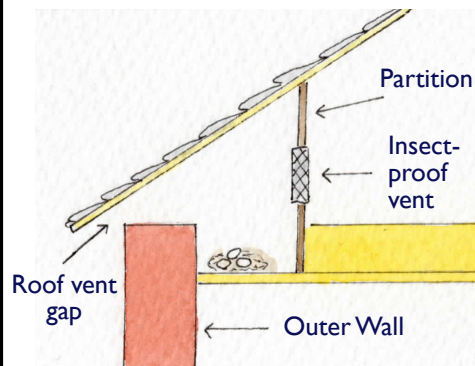
7 Things You Can Do To Help Swifts.

Be Aware!



Most nests are lost because people don't even know they are there! Survey for swifts on warm summer evenings, log your findings on the RSPB's Swiftmapper and tell your local Swift group.

Keep existing nests accessible



If you know that Swifts nest at your house, keep the ventilation gap between the roof and the upright wall open.

Retro-fit a Swift Brick or two.



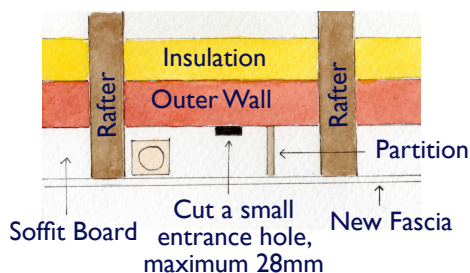
Swift bricks provide a long lasting solution to the provision of nesting places. They are sealed off nesting units that replicate the type of gap a swift looks for in a wall - actionforswifts.com provide a wide range of Swift brick solutions.

Campaign for Swift Bricks



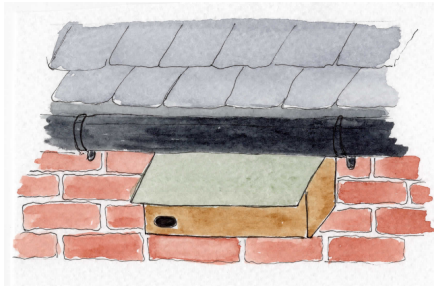
Contact developers, planning departments and politicians to ask for Swift bricks to be included in all new building projects.

Install a soffit box when you replace soffits.



If you are having new soffits fitted, this is a simple, easy thing to do. If you had Swifts accessing a nest through the soffit previously, it is essential to make the entrance as close as possible to the original entrance point.

Install a Swift Box.



Many people who want to help Swifts choose to install Swift Boxes, which are relatively cheap and easy to install.

By also playing attraction calls, the chances of Swifts taking up residence is greatly increased. Your local swift group will be happy to talk you through your options.

Make your garden insect-friendly.

Plant flowers that attract the insects Swifts depend on for food.



Make a pond - no matter how small, it will support a good variety of insects.

Don't use pesticides!



Emergencies and more information

If you see a grounded Swift, or a Swift trying to enter a blocked nest hole, it needs help!

Call your local Swift group, or post a message on Facebook Page

Swift SOS - Coordinating Rescues which will coordinate a rescue.

For more information please contact us on janet@netzerostratford.org.uk

