

NESTING HABITS & REQUIREMENTS

The Common Swift (*apus apus*)



Swifts, house martins and swallows are building reliant species, relying almost entirely on our built environment for breeding success. They each have entirely different nesting requirements, they choose different buildings and build different nests, which is important to understand if you are wanting to provide for them.

The Common Swift arrives in the UK from the end of April (early May in Scotland) and can still be feeding young in early September! Of our 4 species of concern (swift, swallow, house martin and sand martin) swifts are last in and first out!

WHERE DO THEY NEST? Swifts will nest in nooks and crannies in our buildings, a tiny percentage globally still nest in caves, cliffs and hollow trees but the majority rely on our buildings for breeding success. A swift is 100% loyal to its nesting site returning directly to it from its return migration. They do not relocate easily. The Common Swift was declared a red list species in December 2021 along with the House Martin, contributing factors in their decline are climate change, insect loss and a loss of nest sites, due mainly to unsympathetic building repairs and refurbishments. It is not difficult to cater for swifts and still make necessary repairs, but it needs to be planned, and it needs to be right. If you are lucky enough to witness a swift 'Screaming Party' in the summer months, then this is part of the swifts' process of finding nest sites and in turn increasing an existing colony so maintaining these long term colonies is the key. Swifts do no harm to your building, they do not enter inside your roof space nor do they make a mess. They access under loose slates, gaps in the pointing, or holes in a wall. Most often the points where they make their entry have no ill effect on your building but please consider very carefully any future repairs to roof, guttering, fascia and soffit and top level pointing. It is inexpensive to retain your swifts and there are many solutions available but carrying out works outside of the breeding season is vital, bearing in mind it is illegal to tamper with or block a swift nest site while it is in use. Ask a local swift group to do a survey before considering repairs or even better do the survey yourself it is simple and enjoyable!



Swift: Mike Atkinson



House Martin: Richard Scott



Swallow: Rob Booth

HOW YOU CAN HELP. You can help swifts by watching in the summer months for nest entries, if spotted on your house then consider them in the early stages if you are planning any repairs or scaffold which can block access. The chances are they may have been nesting with you for some years unnoticed.

PROVIDE. There are *two ways to provide* for swifts depending on your situation: swift nest boxes fitted *externally* to a building or swift bricks *integrated* as part of a new build, refurbishment or retrofit. Get good advice on where to buy the best products and where to site them. Sadly, we are seeing only too often poorly situated provisions where installation advice has been ignored which results in nil occupancy, and even a life threatening situation being created for the swifts and in the case of some projects, the loss of entire colonies of longstanding which you are very unlikely to get back. I can't stress enough the importance of seeking advice from swift experts with experience because a swift, once it finds the nest site, will return to it for its entire breeding life. This is a long term commitment but a worthy one! Note: Both swift bricks and nest boxes can be used by house martins and other building reliant species too.

BASIC GUIDELINES FOR EXTERNAL SWIFT BOXES

EXTERNAL SWIFT BOXES need to be installed at a minimum of 4.5 metres from the ground, on a preferred north facing elevation (alternatively, taking in to account the availability of any deep overhangs for shade and avoiding prevailing winds, installation can be on East or West but avoid South). Tucked up to the top most apex on a gable end, unless sharing with house martins when you can install further down, or under open or closed eaves are best spots, replicating the natural places swifts would naturally find homes. Swifts are colonial nesters so, if possible, provide a minimum of two nest boxes. Take care not to block existing nest sites with your new boxes! There should be a clear flyway free from lower storeys, and large trees or climbers which might attract predators, and preferably not too close to opening windows. Contact your local swift group or visit the below links for further advice. Occupancy success at your boxes can take time and patience and a swift caller can increase the likelihood.

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SOME EXAMPLES OF EXTERNAL SWIFT NEST BOXES



Model 30 swift box



Swift & Bat Box. Action for Swifts



Impeckable swift box double

BASIC GUIDELINES FOR SWIFT BRICKS

INTEGRATED SWIFT BRICKS A simple enclosed nesting chamber integrated within the walls of a building. The choice of swift bricks are many and varied if you are working on a retrofit, new build or mitigation project. A new build project may require a 'standard' off the shelf swift brick, installed in to the block work using the minimum 4.5mtr height and same guidance for external nest boxes, although the choice of elevation is not as crucial because an integrated provision is less likely to overheat in the same way, but best practice would be to avoid a southerly aspect if possible. Swifts are colonial nesters so to be effective consider a group of swift bricks for example two or three on a gable end or a 1:1 ratio per suitable unit within a large development. Swifts do not make a mess underneath the boxes or bricks and require no maintenance once installed. There are a variety of swift brick designs available to suit the construction and final look of the build eg: stone or brick faced and options for a rendered finish; to suit brick or timber construction; will fit within cavity walling; some are concrete/woodcrete mix and some galvanised and all should be compliant with BS 42021:2022 (British Standard for Integral Nest Boxes)



Action for Swifts. S Brick



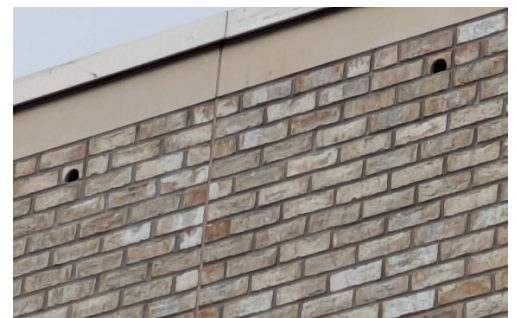
Aberdeenshire Council/C. Smith



C.Smith



Vivara Pro



Aberdeenshire Council/C.Smith

For further information and guidance here are some useful contacts.

NES Swifts (formerly Huntly Swift Group) | E: huntlyswiftgroup@gmail.com | www.facebook.com/savingtheaviators

www.swift-conservation.org | www.actionforswifts.blogspot.com | www.actionforswifts.com