



Hampshire Swifts

Hampshire Swift Survey 2018

"The discovery of a suitable nesting site is, undoubtedly, the most important event in the life of a Swift"

Background:

Swift survey methodology capitalises on two characteristics of Swifts. Firstly, in the vicinity of their breeding sites they form distinctive low-level screaming parties. Secondly, in any given area the majority of Swift nests will be located on a small number of sites (hotspots) as most buildings will not have breeding Swifts. Note that given the opportunity Swifts will often nest communally, either on one building or adjacent buildings, but will also nest singly if that is the only opportunity.

For these reasons the survey is divided into 2 phases: in the first phase, you use the presence of low-level screaming parties and associated behaviours to determine the approximate locations or "hotspots" in which Swifts are nesting. In the second phase we shall watch these locations intensively in order to determine the precise location of the nest holes being used.

Timings:

Surveys should be carried out during the months of May (mid-May onwards), June and July (many Swifts will start return migration in July so focus on the first 2 or 3 weeks of July). In order to fully assess your area for the presence of nesting Swifts you'll need to survey at least **twice per month. There is no upper limit as we've found that repeated visits often result in more nests being found.**

Time of Day:

During the first phase of the study surveys should be carried out in the evening, during periods of peak low flying swift activity, from 2 hours before sunset to 30 minutes after sunset.

Once you have determined approximately where Swifts are nesting visits can be done at any time during the day, including the evenings.

Weather:

Only carry out surveys in dry, still conditions.



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Fieldwork Methodology

Activity

Phase I: Identification of Swift “hotspots”

Visit the area to familiarise yourself and plan a survey route which covers all roads and public rights of way, pausing at chosen vantage points.

Plan **evening** visits, starting 2 hours before sunset and finishing when the light has gone, to completely survey the area, recording the location of all low-level screaming parties* of Swifts and related behaviours such as “banging*” and “arcing*”. Repeated visits will confirm these locations and you may find more sites of interest. Once you are confident that you have identified all the hotspots of Swift activity in your survey area then move onto Phase II. Note that you may be lucky enough to identify a nest site during this phase so these should be recorded as described below.

Phase II: Locating Swift nest sites

The emphasis of the survey is now to spend as much time as possible in the “hotspots” watching and waiting for Swifts to enter buildings and recording the precise location of each nest hole* used. Listen carefully for the calls of birds inside the nest sites

These visits can be performed throughout the day as well as in the evenings as Swifts will return to their nests with food for their nestlings at regular intervals, at increasing frequency as nestlings become bigger and more demanding.

This phase is also ideal for engaging the local community and locals may be able to point out known nest sites.



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Data Recording

It is important to ensure accurate record keeping during your fieldwork: records can be added to the map provided, the recording forms which you have been given or your own notebook. Whatever method you use it is critical to ensure that for each phase of the survey the following data are recorded:

Phase I: Location of low-level screaming parties: date / address & grid reference* / approx. number of Swifts in each party, any additional information on other behaviours such as banging and arcing

Phase II: Nest site location: date / precise address and 8 figure grid reference* / number of nests / what type of nest (i.e. is it a nest box or a natural site in the building? / precise description of where the nest is (sufficiently detailed so that another observer could find the hole)(photos are also very useful).

Data Entry

- When at home, **enter your records online on the Hampshire Swifts Survey database.** www.hampshireswifts.co.uk .
- You do not need to post your forms or maps back to us.
- If you are unable to enter data online, please take a photo or scan of the recording form and map and email it to info@hampshireswifts.co.uk .

If you see low-level screaming parties or identify Swift nest site locations outside of your survey square, please also record these on the website.

Your safety:

Your safety is of utmost importance. If possible, carry out surveys with someone else. If at any time you feel unsafe during the survey, abandon it immediately and take steps to make yourself safe. Do not survey after dark.

Privacy of others:

Swifts are likely to be nesting or flying around private properties. Please use your discretion when carrying out your surveys and avoid any behaviour that could be seen as intruding on people's privacy. Do pre-emptively speak to people about what you are doing and why. If the audience is interested then give them one of the provided leaflets on your work.

If you have any queries, please contact:

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*Definitions

Low level screaming parties: Low level screaming activity is defined as a group of screaming Swifts flying at high speed at or below roof level. The presence of low-level screaming parties is a good indication that Swifts are nesting close by. These parties can consist of young birds breeding for the first time as well as established pairs so may contain different numbers of birds: please note the largest number you see. **Do not** enter records of higher flying Swifts even if they are calling.

Arcs: As soon as a low flying party is seen, watch the flight path carefully and identify any parts of a building (usually the lower edge of a roof/gable) where the party comes within 1-2 metres. This flying habit is called an arc. In the comments section, you can note which part of the building the swifts fly close to (e.g. gable).

Bangers: Swifts without nests fly up to possible nest holes and 'bang' or touch the place with their wings. They are investigating the availability of nest places. Sometimes they do this alone and sometimes a group of swifts will fly past and several of them will bang. If the nest is occupied they will be seen off with loud screams from the residents.

Identification of Swift nest sites: Swift nests can be difficult to identify and finding nest sites depends on the Swift being seen to enter or leave the nest. This is usually done at high speed. Swifts return to their nests at different frequencies depending on the time of day, weather and the stage of the breeding season. On windy days in May and early June Swifts return with nesting material, especially in the morning. For nest sites we need to know the precise location of the building using an 8 or 10 figure grid reference and the address & post code of the building, the aspect (e.g. north side) and as precise a description as possible of the nest location (under eaves, under roof tiles, beneath gutters etc and whether or not the nest site is a nest box). Note that if you are lucky enough to identify Swift nests on more than one building please enter separate records for each building. Nests can be difficult to pin down and we've found that repeated visits often result in more nests being found.

Grid references are best obtained using www.gridreferencefinder.com