

## How can you help?



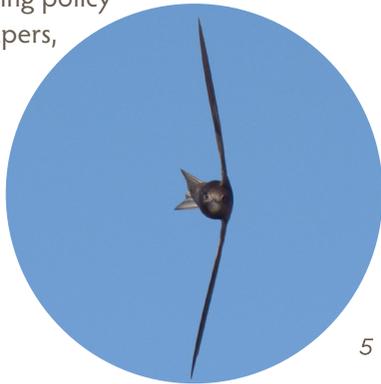
# Hampshire Swifts



# Hampshire Swifts

There are many ways you can help our swifts:

- Count and survey swifts: we still don't know where most of our swifts nest. This information makes it much easier to protect them.
- Identify sites where nest boxes could be installed.
- Make and install nest boxes.
- Report developments which may be damaging swift nest sites.
- Help influence planning policy by writing to newspapers, your council and MP.



## Please help our Swifts



*Acknowledgements:*

- Photograph 1:* Copyright © Klaus Roggel.  
*Front cover* Courtesy of [www.swift-conservation.org](http://www.swift-conservation.org)  
*Photograph 2:* Copyright © Klaus Roggel.  
Courtesy of [www.swift-conservation.org](http://www.swift-conservation.org)  
*Photograph 3:* Copyright © Mark Ranner.  
*Photograph 4:* Copyright © Marc Guyt.  
Courtesy of [www.swift-conservation.org](http://www.swift-conservation.org)  
*Photograph 5:* Copyright © Klaus Roggel.  
Courtesy of [www.swift-conservation.org](http://www.swift-conservation.org)  
*Photograph 6:* Copyright © Alan Lewis.



## Can you help Save our Swifts?

- survey their numbers
- protect their nest sites
- provide new nest sites
- raise awareness of swifts

Please help look after these unique and stunning birds.

Join our Facebook group and check our website for more information and updates.

These beautiful and charismatic birds have declined across Hampshire and the UK by more than 60% over the past 20 years.

We can stop and reverse this decline.

[www.hampshireswifts.co.uk](http://www.hampshireswifts.co.uk)

 Hampshire Swifts

[www.hampshireswifts.co.uk](http://www.hampshireswifts.co.uk)

 Hampshire Swifts

[www.hampshireswifts.co.uk](http://www.hampshireswifts.co.uk)

 Hampshire Swifts

## About our Swifts



Swifts are perfectly designed to live entirely on the wing – they feed, drink, mate and sleep in the air. They only land when nesting. Since swifts only start breeding when they are 2 or 3 years old that means they will remain constantly airborne for up to 3 years.

Swifts feed on airborne insects and spiders. The availability of these is dependent upon weather conditions and swifts are very adaptable when the weather is poor. The adults are able to fly hundreds of miles, if necessary, to find food and their eggs and young can survive long periods without warmth or food.

Because their food is only available in warm weather and breeding requires a full time search for insects to feed their young, swifts can

only live in the UK for a short period each year, when the weather is at its best and when the days are at their longest. For this reason swifts migrate south once they have finished breeding, returning only the following spring.

They return to Hampshire from Africa at the beginning of May and leave again in early August.

Swifts are quite long-lived birds and some have been recorded as living up to 20 years although the average lifespan is around 8 years. This means that over an average



2

lifetime, each swift will fly approximately 150 thousand miles to and from Africa.

Before man started to make a large impact on the environment swifts nested in trees, often in old woodpecker nests and they still do in the ancient forests

found in Poland. They also nest in cliffs and there are reports of them nesting in the side of a deep chalk pit near the town of Odiham. Nowadays swifts nest almost exclusively in buildings – under roof tiles, under gutters or in holes in the walls of buildings. The buildings they nest in are usually in older buildings, including church towers, but they will use new buildings if there are suitable gaps and spaces.

They are loyal to their nest sites and return to the same nest site every year. The season before they start breeding they identify potential nest sites for the following season. Because they have such a short time in the UK they need to start breeding as soon as they arrive back. If these sites are disturbed or excluded, they rarely relocate to a new nest site for that season.

On fine summer evenings swifts gather in “low flying screaming parties”, as excited breeding and non-breeding birds chase each other around the buildings where they nest in high speed, aerobic screaming



3

groups. The presence of these screaming birds can be the only evidence of breeding as swifts often return to their nests very quickly and discretely, making the nest sites very difficult to find such that house-holders are often unaware they have breeding swifts.

Because swifts require gaps and holes in buildings to nest and are often undetected by house owners they are vulnerable to house renovations such as new soffits, replacement of wood with plastic covers or cavity wall insulation which block up the access holes they need. As the housing stock becomes more modern and better insulated nest sites are disappearing and swift numbers are declining rapidly.

Fortunately swifts will readily nest in artificial boxes or “swift bricks” which provide the spaces they need. By installing these on houses, churches or offices undergoing renovation we can minimise the effects of renovation work. In addition we can create new colonies of swifts by putting boxes or bricks up on our houses and churches to compensate for all the nest sites lost over the past few years. In this way we can halt and ultimately reverse the decline of this iconic bird.



4

[www.hampshireswifts.co.uk](http://www.hampshireswifts.co.uk)

 Hampshire Swifts