



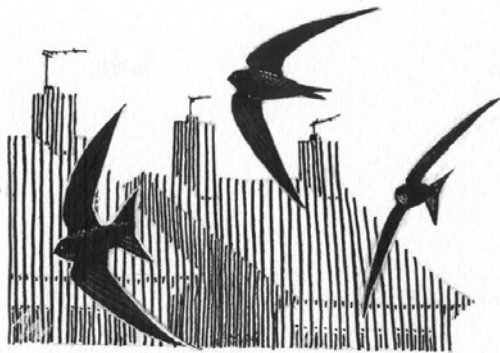
Saving Derbyshire's Swifts

Information for Property Owners & Builders

About Swifts

Swifts, as the name suggests, are one of the UK's fastest birds and their aerobatic flights and exciting 'screaming' calls mean summer is here. Swifts thrive in towns and cities, nesting between May and August in the eaves of houses or in small gaps in the walls of churches, old mills and other buildings and structures. They feed on flying insects, only coming to land during the short breeding season.

Swifts have a very strong fidelity to their nesting sites, returning from their wintering grounds in Africa to the same building and usually to the same nest hole every year. They only have a short time in which to nest and raise their young, so time spent looking for new sites puts breeding success at risk. Swifts are clean and do no damage to buildings. Their nests are tiny and constructed of materials collected in flight.

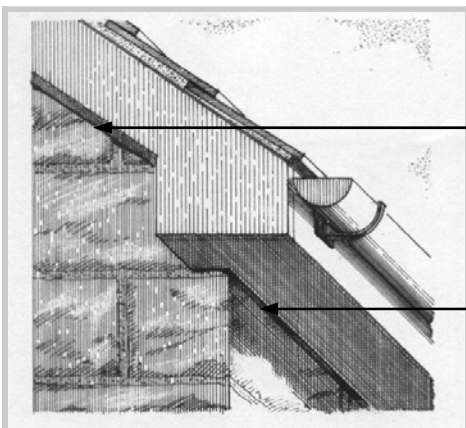


Why swifts need your help

Swifts have shared our buildings for the last 2,000 years. They nest in both older and more recent buildings where they can gain access. However, new building techniques and materials have made it more difficult for swifts to find suitable nest sites. As a result swift populations in Derbyshire and elsewhere are under threat.

Swifts and the law

Swifts are protected by law – interfering with their nests or the birds themselves is a crime. Do not undertake works that may disturb the birds during the breeding season (May–end of August). Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 ALL birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law and it is therefore an offence to intentionally or recklessly: kill, injure or take any wild bird, take damage or destroy the nests of any wild bird while it is in use or being built and take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.



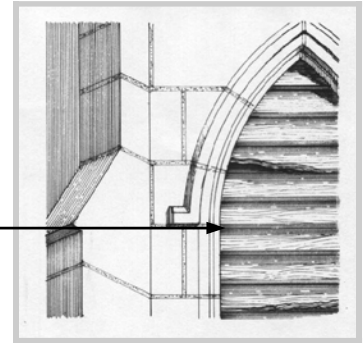
Swifts in houses

Swifts usually nest either in gaps just under the eaves or under barge boarding on the gable end, or sometimes in small gaps in stonework. They may also nest in such locations in other buildings, for example churches, chapels and schools.



Swifts in mills

Old mills and factory buildings in Derbyshire support important colonies of swifts. They may nest between the sills and the top course of stone, or in gaps between stonework. Swifts may nest in church towers, gaining access through louvres.



Swifts in churches

What can you do to help?

Building repairs and renovation

Building repairs are often undertaken in the summer months when swifts and other birds are nesting. In order to work within the law, it is essential to ensure that nesting birds are not disturbed during works. If swifts are known to use the building ensure that builders and architects are aware of the legislation and delay the works until after swifts have departed. Try as far as possible to protect the existing nest spaces for future use. For example, slots can be installed in uPVC boxed soffits to enable swifts to continue to nest beneath eaves. If swift spaces must be lost during works provide new spaces as close as possible to the old sites, either through the use of specially designed nest boxes or by installing specially designed bricks. If you are not sure whether swifts are using the building or if you are not sure how to proceed seek further advice.

New build

If new buildings are planned in an area where swifts are already present, take opportunities to encourage swifts to expand through the provision of nestboxes. Erect nestboxes at 3-5 metres high and avoid placing them where wind, rain or strong sunlight will penetrate. Ensure that swifts have a clear flight to their nest site.

Demolition

If swifts are present in a building due for demolition, to comply with the law you must make sure that swifts have finished breeding and departed for their winter quarters before works proceed. Swifts arrive at their breeding sites in May and usually leave by the end of August, though occasionally a few young birds may remain into early September.

Boxes for swifts

Helping swifts is surprisingly easy and cheap. Making and installing swift nest boxes can be done at low cost using simple DIY carpentry skills. Ready made nest boxes can be purchased from Jacobi Jayne and Company (www.livingwithbirds.com) or CJ Wildbird Foods (www.birdfood.co.uk). Boxes installed beneath the eaves of houses and factories, and behind louvres in churches, have made a valuable contribution to swift conservation in the UK. For further advice on siting and installing swift nest boxes contact Derbyshire Ornithological Society's Conservation Officer via the society's website: www.derbyshireOS.org.uk.

