



WE ARE SWIFTS - WE ARE IN TROUBLE

SWIFTS SHOULD NOT BE CONFUSED WITH:



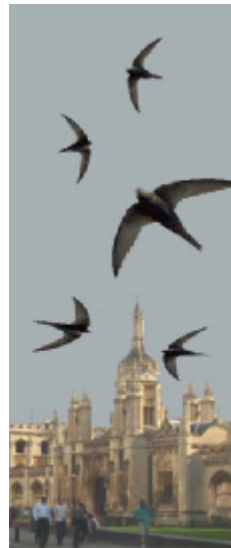
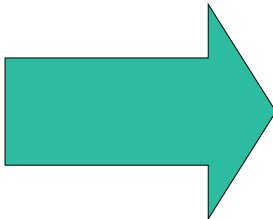
SWALLOW



HOUSE MARTIN

Both have large areas of pale colour, Swifts do not.
Unlike Swallows and Martins, Swifts do not perch on wires.

SINCE YOU WERE BORN



The number of swifts visiting the UK has almost halved.

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

They

- are amazing
- are mysterious
- are very very fast
- eat millions of insects



SOME FACTS ABOUT SWIFTS

- They eat, drink, preen, sleep and mate while flying.
- Their scientific name is *Apus apus*, which means 'no foot no foot'.
- Actually, they have small feet with sharp claws which they only use at their nest site.

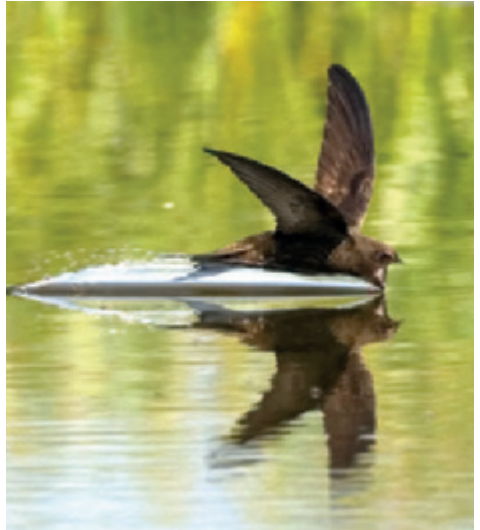


Photo © Marc Guyt

- Swifts have been around for a long time.
- One of their ancestors who died 49 million years ago was found in Germany. They haven't changed very much in all that time.



Photo © Ulrich Tigges

- They fly about 500 miles (800 km) a day.
- During their lives, they fly about 2 million miles - equivalent to more than four trips to the Moon and back!





They eat flying insects like flies, mosquitoes, greenflies and bees (drones) as well as airborne spiders.



- They come to Europe each summer.
- They make their way back to Africa at the end of July.
- They return to their nest sites in early May, a round trip of 14,000 miles!





- They are one of the very best fliers.
- They have very rapid wing-beats: 8 wing-beats per second, followed by gliding and zooming about at very high speed, usually screaming as they go.
- You will hear and see ‘screaming parties’ around the houses.

A 'screaming party'





Photo © Michael Casey

- At night they are able to close down half of their brain and sleep as high as 3,000 metres.
- Swifts, like many other birds, can and do feed during the night.
- They approach their nests at more than 40 miles per hour and come to a stop without slowing down.
- They do not normally land on the ground because it is difficult for them to take off again.

FAMILY LIFE

- Swifts usually stay with the same partners for their whole lives.
- They can live for at least 30 years!
- Mostly, their nests are in spaces under roofs and nooks and crannies in old buildings.



Photo © Ove Claesson

- They catch bits of stuff from the air, like feathers, leaves, petals and bits of paper, then stick them together to make a nice cosy place to lay their eggs inside their nests.



Photo © Graham Roberts

- They lay white eggs, usually 2 or 3.
- Both partners take it in turns to sit on the eggs to keep them warm until they hatch.
- The eggs hatch after about 18 days.

SWIFT CHICKS

- When the chicks hatch, they are blind and have no feathers.
- Many times a day, parents bring the chicks balls of 300-500 insects collected in a big pouch under the beak.
- The chicks open their eyes about 6 days after hatching.
- Their feathers grow and they get quite fat.

Photo © Graham Roberts





Photo © Ulrich Tiggas

Swift chicks in their nest. Chicks have an area of white around their beaks so their parents can see them in their dark nests.

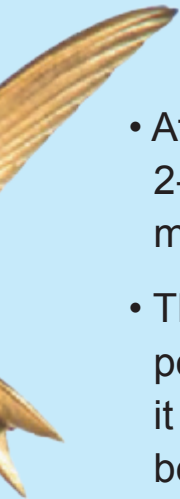


Swift with pouch full of insects

Photo © Anthony Loaring

- The chicks stop eating and lose weight before they leave the nest - you can't fly if you're too fat!
- They do push-ups on their wings and tails to make them strong enough for flying.
- Once they can hold a push-up for 10 seconds and they weigh up to 45 grams, they're then ready to fly away.
- They are 6-8 weeks old when they leave.





- After they leave the nest, they keep flying for 2-3 years until they are ready to find a partner, make a nest and raise a family.
- The year before they breed, they check out a possible nest site for the next year by flying up to it and having a look. They are called 'bangers' because they bang against the nest.
- Young birds can be 100's of miles south only 2 days after leaving their nests.

SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

- Swifts nest in old buildings.
- Old buildings are being knocked down or repaired.
- New buildings have no nooks and crannies for swifts to nest.
- So when swifts arrive back from Africa to raise a new family, they find their nesting places gone - they are homeless!

SO HOW CAN WE HELP SWIFTS?

- Leave existing nest sites undisturbed.
- When repairing buildings, make sure new access holes match exactly the location of the old ones.
- When providing new nest sites make internal nest spaces as they last longer.
- If you can't make internal spaces, put up nest boxes (see next page).
- Tell bird conservation organisations (pages 26-27) where you see swifts nesting.

TYPES OF ARTIFICIAL BOXES

The best type of nest box is one that is built into the structure of a building.

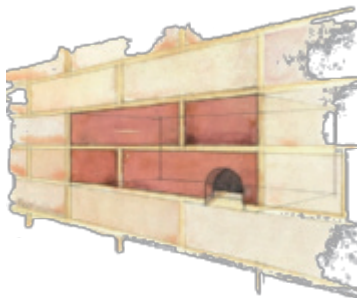


SOFFIT HOLES

IBSTOCK BRICK



Alternatively boxes can be fixed to the outside of a building.



SWIFT BRICK



COLONY BOX



INTERNAL



EXTERNAL

AMNONN'S STORY

Amnonn worked in a smelly noisy motorbike garage in Israel.

He went paragliding in his spare time to be free, in peace and in the fresh air. He was so good that he reached the final of a national competition.

Everyone was losing height.

Amnonn saw some swifts and joined them.

There were swifts all around him spiralling upwards in the thermal. He went up too: he fell in love with them. And, he won the competition!



Amnonn has since then devoted his life to Swift conservation. The people of Israel are now very aware of the need to help swifts. They hold an annual welcoming ceremony at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem to mark the start of the breeding season.



LOCAL CONTACTS



giving
nature
a home

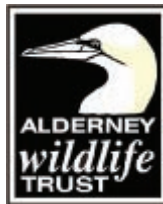
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SOME SWIFT WEBSITES

www.swift-conservation.org

www.rspb.org.uk/helpswifts

actionforswifts.blogspot.com



Action for Swifts

Helping us to stop the extinction of our Islands' swifts:



Will *you* join us to help Save Our Swifts?