

# Guardians for the Swift

TAKING ACTION TO HELP SWIFTS



**BirdWatch Ireland**  
protecting birds and biodiversity



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The content is drawn from a host of guidance materials produced in recent years including the work of Swift Conservation UK (Edward Mayer), Swift Conservation Ireland (Lynda Huxley) Northern Ireland Swift Group and the RSPB whilst drawing from our own knowledge and experience from within the BirdWatch Ireland team and branch network.

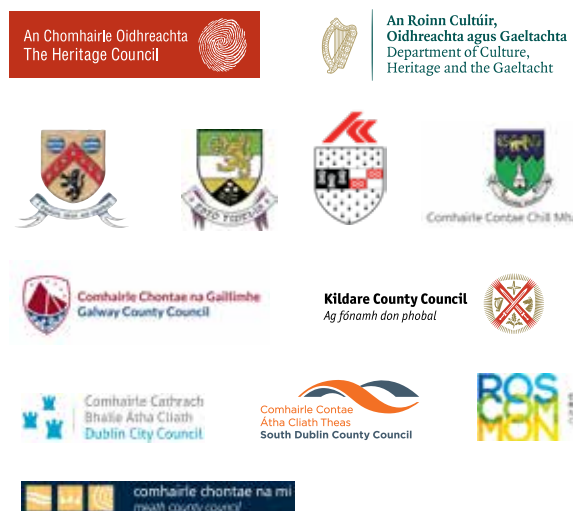
We thank all those who provided photos to illustrate this document (POTOGRAPHERS TO BE LISTED HERE WHEN WE KNOW WHICH PHOTOS ARE USED IN THE FINAL DOCUMENT: NAME THEM HERE ? Thanks to the RSPB for allowing the use of their species illustrations and photo bank.

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## Introduction

### Why have we produced these guidelines?

Swifts in Ireland are in decline. We have lost 40% of our Swifts in the last ten years. Many groups across Ireland and the UK have taken action to help Swifts in recent years, but much more is needed. Lots of information on Swifts, from nest box design to building renovation was already available, but in lots of different places, so this plan aims to bring together all the relevant guidelines into one place. This document is designed as a guide for anyone who wants to take practical measures to help Swifts, at a small or large scale. Whether you are a home owner or business person hoping to provide a nest site at your property or a local authority motivated to include provision for Swifts in County Development Plans, this document is relevant to you.

Swifts are FAST!  
The top speed recorded by a Swift in a recent study was over 110km per hour.

### Who is this document for?

These guidelines are aimed at all groups and individuals who want to help conserve Swift populations in Ireland - Tidy Towns groups, Local Authorities, Schools, Businesses, Home Owners, Community Groups, Planners and Architects.

### What's included in this document

The following pages include information on:

- Swift Ecology and Conservation Status
- Advice on:
  - » Looking after existing nest sites
  - » Installing nest boxes and nest bricks
  - » Installing caller systems
  - » Nesting places in eaves and soffits
  - » What to do if you find a grounded or injured Swift
- Taking action for Swifts
- Case studies
- Useful links and information on Swift groups in Ireland

Swifts are often mistaken with Swallows and Martins but they are actually more closely related to Hummingbirds!



Making nest boxes

## What are Swifts?

Swifts are a family of birds with around 100 different species distributed across the globe. Although similar in appearance to Swallows and Martins, the Swift's nearest relatives are thought to be the hummingbirds, native to North and South America.

The Common Swift (*Apus apus*) is the only Swift species that we have in Ireland. It is a small migratory bird (larger than a Swallow, smaller than a Starling) which arrives in Ireland to breed from southern-Africa around late April and stays until mid to late August.

Swifts pair for life and breed throughout the country. They are more common in urban areas, building small cup nests in small crevices in buildings, as well as under the eaves of houses. Natural nesting sites include holes in trees and cliff edges, but the species has evolved over time to nest mostly in buildings.

Swifts are site-faithful, meaning they will return to the same nest site for many years.



Swifts close to nest site in Cahir, Co. Tipperary

Swifts spend the majority of their lives in flight, drinking, feeding, mating and even sleeping in the air. Non-breeding Swifts can spend up to ten months in continuous flight.

The Latin name *Apus apus* means "without feet" which actually refers to their short legs rather than the lack of feet. Swifts legs and feet have been adapted to cling to vertical surfaces rather than perching on wires and walking on the ground.

If they find themselves on the ground, it can be difficult for them to take off again. Swifts feed on invertebrates (spiders, flies and other small insects) captured in flight. They are among the fastest of birds with our Common Swift able to reach speeds of over 110km per hour.

Their call is a loud piercing scream and the birds will often form 'screaming parties' during summer evenings, when 10-20 Swifts will gather in flight around their nesting area, calling out to each other excitedly.




Close-up of a Swift

The average Swift weighs about 40g - the same weight as a Cadbury's Crème Egg!



## Confusion species

The arrival of Swifts, Swallows and Martins really epitomises the beginning of summer, but it's easy to mix these species up, especially when they are flying. The good news is there are key differences between these species that can make telling them apart relatively simple, once you know what to look out for.

Bird	Size	Appearance	Nest site	Time in Ireland
<b>Common Swift</b> 	16-17cm long with a wingspan of 38-40 cm	Blackish-brown except for a small white/grey patch on their chin. Short tail with sickle-shaped wings that can resemble a crescent or boomerang.	Cavity nester usually under eaves of houses or within holes and crevices on other buildings. Common in urban areas.	May to September
<b>Barn Swallow</b> 	17-19cm long with a wingspan of 32-25cm	Primarily dark blue with a red face and white underparts. Very defined long forked tail.	Bowl shaped nests made out of mud in suitable spots in barns and other buildings. Common in farmland.	mid-March to late-September
<b>House Martin</b> 	13cm long, with a wingspan of 26-29cm	Steel-blue above with a white rump, and white underparts, including the underwings and legs. Small forked tail.	Builds a dome-shaped nest made out of mud usually under the eaves of houses. Common in urban areas.	mid-March to late-September
<b>Sand Martin</b> 	12cm long with a wingspan of 26-28cm	They have a brown head, back, rump and wings. The underparts are white except for a wide brown breast band. Small forked tail.	Nest in burrows dug into river banks and quarries. Common in wetlands and rural areas.	mid-March to September

If you see a bird perching on a telephone wire or post it won't be a Swift as they do not perch like other similar species.

## Swifts are in trouble

The Swift is perhaps the most intriguing of our urban bird species. In recent decades, Swift numbers have been in decline throughout many parts of their range and their distribution is shrinking. BirdWatch Ireland's most recent scientific data shows an alarming drop of almost 40% since 2008 Swifts are now on the "amber list" of birds of conservation concern.

Throughout most of their breeding range, Swifts nest in cavities in walls or in spaces under eaves of houses and old buildings. Because of this, they are a well-known bird in urban areas. Swifts nest in every county in Ireland and while we don't yet have detailed surveys for every county, it's thought that numbers are falling in all counties, mirroring national and international trends.

Swifts are long-lived for small birds, the oldest recorded Swift was 17 years, 11 months and 5 days old.

Reasons for the scale of the declines are not fully clear, but we think that loss of nest sites due to building renovations and construction of modern buildings without suitable cavities is a large part of the problem. The impacts of climate change and falling numbers of invertebrate food are also important.

Luckily Swifts are not without friends and many individuals and groups have been working tirelessly to try to stop the drop in Swift numbers. The Northern Ireland Swift Group have taken the lead over many years and Swift Conservation Ireland has pioneered new approaches to nest box projects, especially in the west of Ireland.

Groups such as the Dublin Swift Conservation Group have also had major successes. BirdWatch Ireland has coordinated a successful Citizen Science led National Swift Survey since 2014 and works to create awareness, provide advice and support the good work of its branches throughout Ireland. Great work has been done, but there is more to do to maintain populations and increase Swift breeding numbers nationally.

We hope that these guidelines, produced with the support of local authorities across the country, will help to empower more people to take action for Swifts in their own communities.



Caption for photo goes here, to describe what is going on in the photo



Swift nest boxes at St. Rynaghs National School, Banagher, Co. Offaly

## Factors affecting Swifts

What happens?	The result	How we can help?
<p><b>Refurbishment of buildings</b></p> <p>Accidental removal of access to nest sites.</p> <p>Scaffolding or hoarding can prevent adult Swifts from getting to their eggs or chicks.</p>	<p>Loss of breeding sites - partial or whole loss of colony.</p> <p>Eggs chill, chicks starve</p>	<p>Map nest entrances before works commence and retain nest entrance gaps.</p> <p>Make sure works is carried out outside the Swift breeding season on sites known to be important for Swifts.</p>
<p><b>Demolition of buildings</b></p> <p>Total loss of breeding colonies.</p>	<p>Loss of breeding site affecting entire colony present</p>	<p>Erect new nest boxes close-by. Integrate nest sites into new building development.</p>
<p><b>Modern building developments</b></p> <p>Have little or no access for Swifts.</p>	<p>Swifts unable to find suitable nesting opportunities.</p>	<p>Integrate Swift nest cavities into fabric of building or fix nest boxes externally.</p>
<p><b>Climate Change</b></p> <p>Leads to higher/lower average temperatures and more frequent severe weather events.</p>	<p>Birds can be adversely affected on migration and find it increasingly difficult to find insect prey during severe weather events.</p>	<p>We can all take action at local level to reduce the impacts of climate change, and to ensure decision-makers are aware of our concerns.</p>
<p><b>Loss of Feeding Sites</b></p> <p>Overuse of pesticides, habitat loss and climatic factors have all led to declines in insect abundance.</p>	<p>Less food available means lower fledging success.</p>	<p>Follow the advice of and conduct actions contained in the <a href="#">All-Ireland Pollinator Plan</a>.</p>

Swifts hunt at about 40km per hour and drink by gliding over smooth water taking sips as they go.

Swifts are migratory birds and spend their winters in Sub-Saharan Africa, where they follow the rains, taking advantage of the increases in insect after the rain.

## Taking action for Swifts

We can all do something to help Swifts, whether it's in our own homes, in our communities or by advocating for change at a national level.

### What can I do?

- First **find your Swifts**.
- If you are lucky enough to have nesting Swifts at your home, make sure to **maintain nest sites within your property**. Leave them undisturbed.
- When repairing or replacing fascia, soffit or guttering remember to **leave access holes** accessible to Swifts.
- **Carry out maintenance** to that part of the house outside of Swift nesting season (May – September).
- **Avoid restricting access** to birds coming to and leaving the nest – Swifts drop from the entrance point and need a clear flight path to and from nests, so over-hanging ivy, trees and other barriers can reduce their ability to access their nests.
- **Erect specialised Swift nest boxes** or bricks to attract nesting Swifts and provide additional nest sites.
- If you have identified Swifts nesting at your home, **let the Biodiversity Data Centre or your local BirdWatch Ireland Branch know**.
- **Cats can catch and kill Swifts**. Remove any items that might allow cats to climb close to nest sites.
- If you find a grounded Swift at your property, follow the instructions given on the **'Finding Grounded and Injured Swifts'** section of this document.



Cats can catch and kill Swifts - remove any items that might allow cats to climb



## What can my community do?

- **Organise a nesting Swift survey** in your local area to find Swift nest sites.
- If you are lucky enough to have nesting Swifts in your community, make sure to **maintain Swift nest sites**.
- **Identify buildings** suitable for nesting Swifts that may be at risk from dilapidation or development.
- **Organise a Swift Awareness Event** in your local community or school. This will fit well with the Biodiversity flag of the Green-Schools programme and can also contribute to biodiversity actions under your local Tidy Towns plan.
- **Plan and undertake a Swift nest box project**, erecting nest boxes at suitable locations on buildings in your community. Two storey houses, businesses, schools and other public buildings can be perfect for Swifts.
- **Encourage building owners to protect Swifts** by inviting them to your Swift Awareness Event and helping them to find out what Swifts need.
- Work with groups such as local BirdWatch Ireland Branches, Mens' Sheds and Tidy Towns to **develop projects to help Swifts**.
- **Document your work and report on your efforts** for Swifts in your Tidy Towns Submissions – these efforts could lead to increased points in the “Wildlife, Habitats & Natural Amenities” category.
- **Report to BirdWatch Ireland** if a building with a known Swift colony is up for renovation or development. These interventions can be vital to the survival of local Swift breeding populations.
- **Make submissions to the local authority** through the County Development Plan process to have provisions for Swifts made in new building developments such as schools, libraries or businesses.
- **Ask local businesses to help** by putting Swift information leaflets on display, running staff fundraisers to support Swift conservation locally or by sponsoring Swift events in the area.
- **Suggest ways for local schools to help**, for example woodwork classes could build Swift nest boxes for the school and community, art classes could make Swift sculptures, paintings or a Swift mobile to hang from the classroom ceiling.



Swifts exploring nest boxes



Swift Watch at Killeshandra, Co. Cavan.

## What action can public bodies take?

- **Make provision for nesting Swifts** in all new public buildings and retro-fit Swift nest boxes on suitable public buildings.
- **Encourage local Swift conservation projects** through funding and other supports.
- **Swift conservation and the provision of nest sites** could be included in County Development Plans, City and County Heritage Plans and Biodiversity Action Plans. Invite Swift expert groups to speak to planning and engineering staff.
- **Planners can recommend mitigation for the loss of Swift nest sites** and make provisions for Swifts (and other relevant wildlife e.g. bats) in relevant planning applications e.g. schools, commercial buildings, public buildings or any large development.
- **Public bodies can provide training** for relevant who work with or maintain public/local authority owned buildings.

Swifts' wings are long and narrow and are highly adapted for rapid flight. This means they do everything at speed!

## Actions: Architects, Developers and Building Professionals

- **Make provision for nesting Swifts** when designing new and redeveloping existing buildings.
- **Add extra Swift nesting places to buildings** that already have established Swift nesting colonies. Swift bricks and boxes can be used in these cases.
- **Invite Swift expert groups to your offices** to discuss the topic of Swifts and integrating provisions for Swifts and biodiversity into building designs.
- **Encourage clients to make provisions for Swifts** in their buildings.
- Large scale projects such as developing a commercial campus should **include both provision for nesting Swifts, but also wider ecological considerations carried out during the landscaping phase**. For example, aquatic habitats have benefits in managing surface water runoff but provide excellent feeding habitat for Swifts and other insect loving species.
- **Promote your company as ambassadors for Swifts and wildlife**, celebrate your work and successes.

Each “bolus” (ball of food) brought to the nestlings weighs just over a gram, and contains 300-1000 individual insects and spiders.

## Advice – Maintaining Existing Sites

### Introduction

While nest boxes are very positive, often the best way to help Swifts is by protecting the sites they already use. Repairs and renovations to buildings can lead to the loss of Swift nest sites. New fascia, soffit and roof repairs/re-roofing work often removes the access that nesting Swifts previously had. With awareness, care and planning, these impacts can be avoided.

It's important to note that any interference with occupied nests, eggs and chicks is an offence under both Irish and EU legislation. Most work carried out on a site with a known Swift colony during the nesting season will be in breach of these legal requirements.

### Retaining nest sites

Nest Site Location	Solution
<b>Inside Eaves</b> - in "open" eaves, under the bottom row of tiles, above the gutter, just inside the roof-space.	Leaving the eaves open - is the simplest and best solution or cut slots in the soffit or facing boards to match the old entrances.
<b>In Holes</b> - in holes in walls e.g. where pipes have been removed.	If they will not cause a problem, just leave old holes or fit a Swift Brick to provide an alternative nest place. The Swift Brick must be placed precisely where the old nest and its entrance were to be accepted.
<b>Behind Flashings</b> - on brick ends or in holes under loose/missing flashings on chimneys and skylights.	Offset or lengthen flashings and ridge or end tiles to let the Swifts back in without affecting weather-proofing.
<b>Inside Gables</b> - behind barge boards and gables, on the brick ends.	Either leave well alone or else fit simple wooden nest places behind the bargeboards.
<b>Under Tiles</b> - under loose or displaced tiles, on the roof timbers or felt.	Reinstate the tiles keeping the old gaps where the Swifts gained entry exactly where they were; you can do this easily by inserting wedges of cement and pieces of tile beneath the new tiles, to lift them by 30mm to provide access for the Swifts.
<b>Missing Pointing</b> - in gaps between stones or bricks where the pointing has washed out.	Leave the access to where the Swifts are nesting un-pointed.

Follow these guidelines when planning work where Swifts are nesting:

1. First find out whether your site is used by nesting Swifts.
2. Never re-roof or replace fascia and soffits of a building used by nesting Swifts during the breeding season of May to September.
3. Leave existing Swift nest places undisturbed by any works.
4. Preserve the Swifts' access holes or make new ones to match the old exactly.
5. Do not block access with scaffold/hoarding and do not net or wrap areas where Swifts are nesting.

## Advice – Installing Swift Nest Boxes

The easiest and best way to provide suitable and permanent Swift nest sites is to install specially designed Swift nest boxes. They are available commercially or can be made to approved designs. The type chosen will depend on your building, budget or ability to build your own. Nest boxes can be installed to provide more nest sites at an established nesting colony or create a new nesting site.

### Nest box types

Type	Description	Nest cavities	Pros	Cons
<b>Wooden</b>	Wooden box, commercially available, designs vary.	Single nest cavity	Inexpensive and light weight.	Less durable than concrete, limited lifespan, supplied as single cavity nest boxes.
<b>Concrete</b>	Moulded from concrete compound, commercially available in a range of shapes and sizes.	One to three nest cavities	Durable, extended lifespan, available in a range of size, shapes, colours.	Expensive, heavy.
<b>DIY</b>	Bespoke built boxes, proven designs advised.	Flexible	Cheap, bespoke built.	Limited lifespan (when built from wood), design issues can affecting nesting success.

Swifts are birds of the sky, rarely landing – they feed, drink, mate and even sleep "on the wing". They may fly without stopping for 7 months or more.

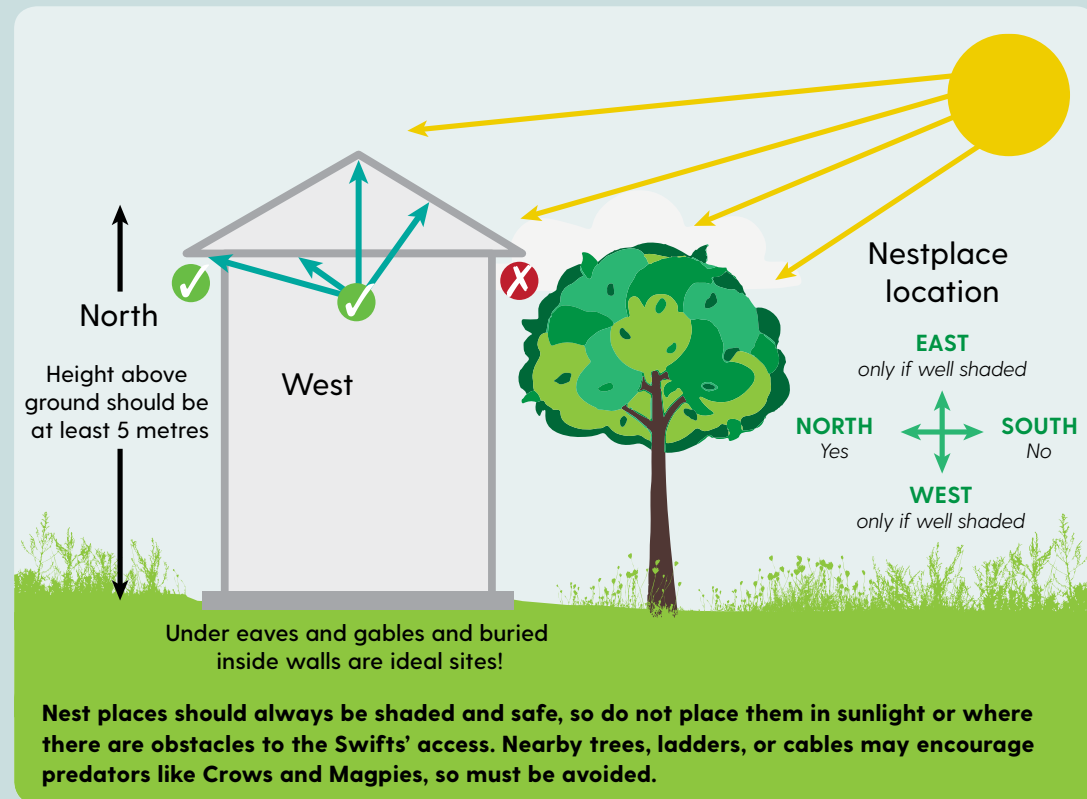
Adult Swifts can survive two to three days without feeding, chicks can survive five or more. This allows them to survive during periods of bad weather, when they can't feed.



Swifts in flight high above the rooftops.

## Choosing the site

Place the nest box or brick on a side of the building that gets some shade during the day. If possible install it under an overhang or under the eaves, to give it protection from weather and heat. It should be sited at least five metres above ground, with clear adjacent airspace so the Swifts can access it in high-speed direct flight (they usually fly straight in to avoid the risk of predation). Make sure that predators (cats, crows, magpies, squirrels, and rats) do not have easy access to the nest (e.g. by climbing up creepers or flying in from nearby trees).

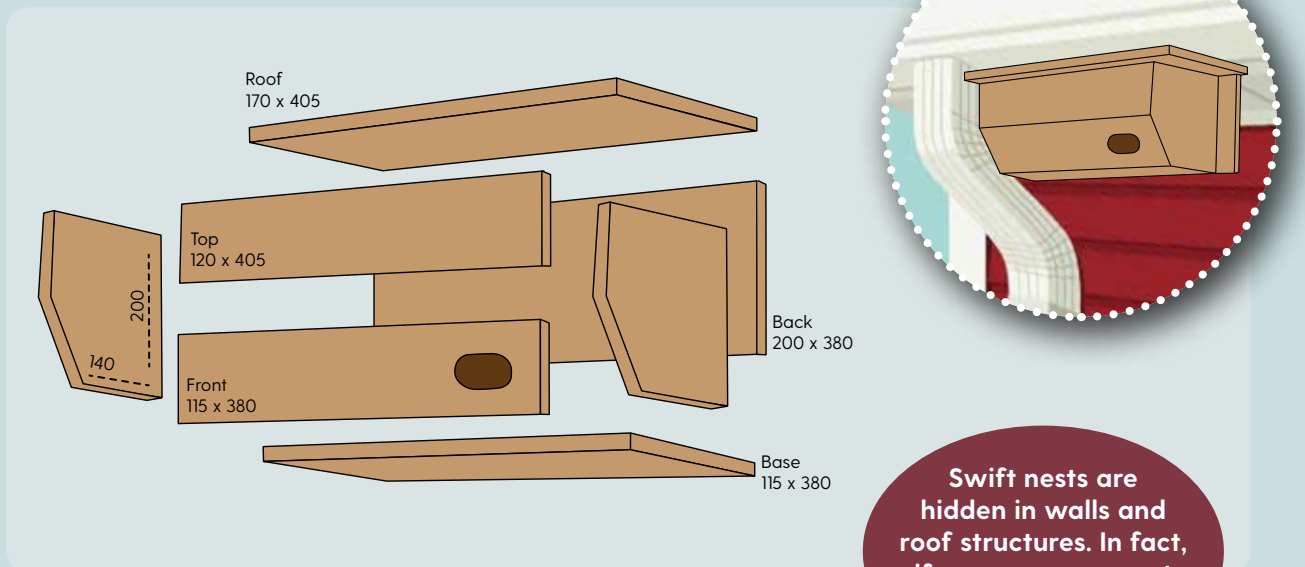


## Fitting nest boxes

- Use strong, corrosion-resistant fixings appropriate to the wall material.
- Before fixing or servicing your Swift nest box, make sure your working conditions are safe, or employ a suitably qualified person if needed.

## DIY Swift nest box design

The "Zeist" Swift box design is of Dutch origin and has been used widely in Europe to create new nest sites for Swifts. The template below gives the full specifications required. Boxes will last longer and are less likely to overheat when installed under a deep eave/soffit out of direct exposure to the weather.



### TIP

Swifts are colonial birds who prefer the company of other Swifts. With this in mind always try to install a nest box with multiple nest cavities or attach several single-cavity nest boxes to a building.

### TIP

It is necessary to install a Swift Caller System at newly formed sites to attract Swifts and encourage them to take up residence at a new site.



## Advice – Installing In-Built Swift Bricks/Boxes

### What is a Swift brick?

Swift nest bricks are hollow concrete bricks designed to allow access by Swifts and manufactured to modern building regulation standards. They can be integrated into the walls of buildings during the construction phase.

Swift bricks provide safe, permanent low-cost nesting sites for Swifts for the lifetime of the building. They are best installed into new-builds or during extensions and renovation works. Unlike externally fitted boxes they blend into the fabric of the building and for this reason are often the preferred choice for architects.

### Why use Swift bricks?

- They are as close as it gets to a “natural” nest site.
- The brick is available to nesting Swifts for the life of the building. Once occupied it could be used by a single pair for many years.
- Integrating Swift bricks into your design and build provides new and long-lasting Swift nest sites.

### Choosing bricks

Swift bricks are available commercially and come in various sizes, shapes and colours, so it should be easy to find a brick that fits your building design. Manufacturers will supply technical information for individual brick types which will aid at the design phase.

### Positioning bricks

- ✓ **Do:** Place bricks any aspect N, S, E or W – bricks tend not to overheat the way that externally fitted boxes can.
- ✓ **Do:** Place bricks at least five metres above ground – boxes can never be too high so if in doubt go high as possible.
- ✓ **Do:** Face brick entrances onto an open aspect e.g. no overhanging vegetation, trees, walls or obstacles so that birds can fly directly in and out unimpeded.
- ✓ **Do:** Place bricks side by side in rows.
- ✓ **Do:** Keep out of reach of pets or other potential predators.
- ✗ **Don't:** Place bricks above windows.
- ✗ **Don't:** Place bricks over ledges or other obstructions – Swifts drop before taking flight and can collide with obstacles below nest entrance
- ✗ **Don't:** Stack bricks one above the other.

### Fitting the brick

Swift bricks are designed to fit alongside standard building materials and can be fitted by any experienced tradesperson.

### How many bricks should be used?

Swifts nest in colonies so any number between two and twenty is advisable. Bricks are relatively cheap, so cost shouldn't affect the decision. Taking the size of the building into account, you might install four bricks in a single house or twenty bricks in a large school or commercial building.

### Using boxes instead of bricks

Standard Swift boxes can be built in successfully, this can be done by using a section of window lintel or steel positioned over the box and supported on either side by the block work.

Adult Swifts can survive two to three days without feeding, chicks can survive five or more. This allows them to survive during periods of bad weather, when they can't feed.

### The call

Swift researchers recommend playing recordings of the Swifts “duetting call to attract nesting Swifts. Recordings of other types of Swift calls can be found online but will may not be as effective. The correct call is available from Swift Conservation Ireland here: [Swiftconservationireland@gmail.com](mailto:Swiftconservationireland@gmail.com)

**NB – To broadcast Swift calls, a licence is required from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). Your local NPWS Ranger can help assist you with this or you can contact one of the expert Swift groups for assistance. More information on this is here: <https://www.npws.ie/licences>**

### Tips

- Volume should be set at a ‘normal’ noise level – playing too loud will distort the sound.
- It's a good idea to mount the speaker as close as possible to the nest entrance hole.
- Swifts look for nest sites at two specific time periods: in May and June (to nest that year) and in June and July (to nest the following year).
- Set your timer to play the call at recommended times:
- From dawn for 3-6 hours.
- In the evening from 6.00pm to dark.
- Swifts will only look for nest sites in fine weather so playing the calls in cold wet weather is ineffective.

## Advice – Installing Caller Systems

### Introduction

Swifts look for nest sites at locations with established colonies. To increase the chance of attracting nesting Swifts to a new nest location, a recording of a Swift call should be played. Swift calls can be broadcast from a small speaker placed as close as possible to the nest box or brick. New nest box sites where no lures are played are less likely to be found by prospecting Swifts. Playing the calls greatly increases the chances of attracting Swifts but doesn't guarantee it!

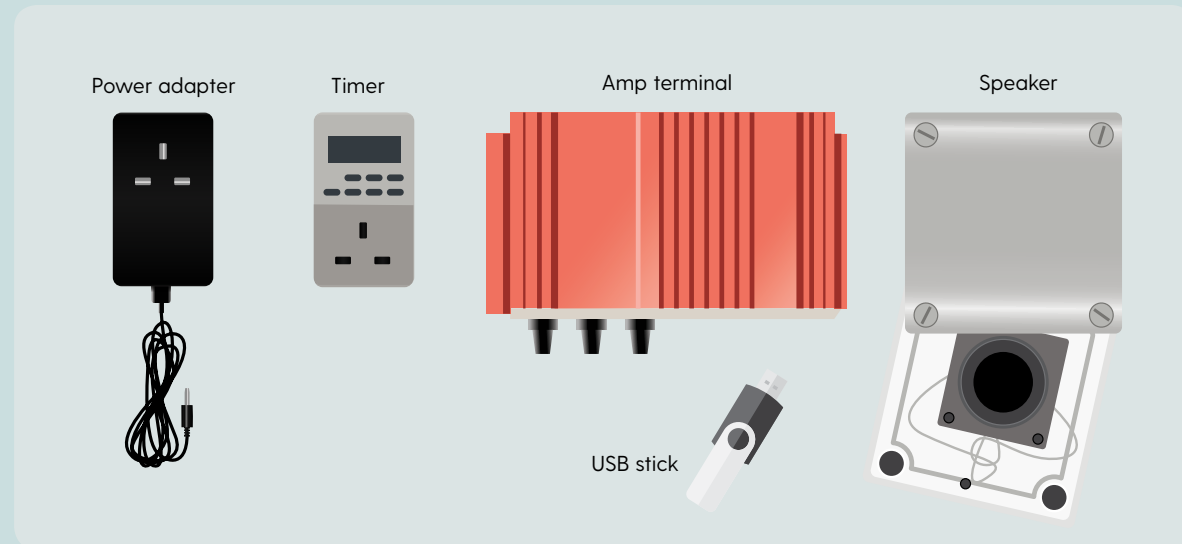


Nenagh Tidy Towns Committee members in front of Nenagh Castle

Swifts are birds of the sky, rarely landing – they feed, drink, mate and even sleep “on the wing”. They may fly without stopping for 7 months or more.

## Technical Advice

A Swift caller system needs a couple of key electronic components to work correctly. The most commonly used and easily installed system is described below.



### You will need:

- A small external speaker or a speaker in a waterproof box.
- A 12v electronic amplifier.
- A electronic lamp timer or similar.
  - » Speaker wire (as much as needed to reach speaker from amplifier inside).
  - » A USB or SD card with the Swift Call preloaded.

All of these items are available to purchase separately. Alternatively, Genesis Nest Boxes supply the entire caller system and recommended call: [genesishnestboxes@gmail.com](mailto:genesishnestboxes@gmail.com)

### Assembly:

1. Fix the speaker waterproof housing to a surface as close to the nest box entrance as possible.
2. Feed the speaker wire into the housing and connect to the speaker using the wire connection.
3. Feed the speaker wire back into the building by whatever means suitable (through a drilled hole, under a roof tile, in the window).
4. Connect the wire into the back of the amp in the terminals provided.
5. Plug the male end of the power adapter into the amp and the socket end into the timer and then power supply.
6. Insert your USB/SD card containing the pre-loaded Swift Call.
7. Turn on your amp, set the volume and adjust your timer to the recommendations.

## Advice - Creating Swift Nest Places in Soffits & Eaves

### Introduction

You can make alterations to your property to create potential Swift nest sites or to make more nest sites available. Swifts need an entrance hole to access an inner cavity which can be created in the fascia or soffit for example.

### Specifications

The nest **entrance size is important** in that it will be suitable for Swifts to enter but help restrict other species from entering. The entrance hole should be cut to 29.5mm high x 60mm wide.

Many commercially available boxes and bricks are supplied with entrances of 30mm x 65mm which may allow other species such as Starlings and House Sparrows to enter.



Swifts need an entrance hole to access an inner cavity which can be created in the fascia or soffit.

The entrance can be made **facing outwards** or facing the ground as Swifts can enter from either direction.

Boxed eaves, whether old or new, **timber metal or plastic**, may all be converted easily for use by Swifts. Simply drill an entrance hole to the specifications above to provide a potential nest site.

Refer to Advice – 'Installing Nest Boxes' – choosing the site when selecting the location on a building to make/cut nest entrances. **Swifts compete for nest sites**, and can get into aggressive encounters if they feel another bird is trying to steal a nest place so make sure to spread nest entrances out a number of feet apart.

Existing open eaves are best left alone as they **allow Swifts access to the roof-plate** which is a common site for nests.



Potential locations for nest entrances in a standard fascia and soffit.

A Swift flies high above the rooftops.

Swift nests are hidden in walls and roof structures. In fact, if you can see a nest it's unlikely to belong to a Swift!

## Advice - Finding Grounded and Injured Swifts

Swifts sometimes find themselves “grounded”: adult birds can find it difficult to become airborne again and may require assistance.

Swift	What to do
<b>Grounded</b>	To help a grounded Swift find an open area, place the bird on the palm of your hand raised to shoulder height, face into the breeze and allow the bird to take off in its own time. If the bird is hesitant to fly, you can gently move your hand up and down a little to allow the bird to feel the air beneath its wings. If the bird is still reluctant or falls to the ground on attempting to take off it may be injured and require rehabilitation.
<b>Injured</b>	If a Swift is clearly injured, you should place the bird in a small cardboard box with ventilation holes and get in contact with a wildlife rehabilitator or Swift expert immediately. Details of Irish wildlife rehabilitators can be found here: <a href="http://www.irishwildlifematters.ie/animals/contacts.html">http://www.irishwildlifematters.ie/animals/contacts.html</a>
<b>Young</b>	Nestlings can fall from nest sites prior to fledging which will result in death unless they are rescued. In the majority of cases it is not possible to return them to the nest, so it is vital they are brought to a person or organisation specialising in wildlife rehabilitation. To ensure the Swift safely gets to the wildlife rescue, place the bird in a small cardboard box with ventilation holes. The bird should remain calm when kept in a quiet and dark situation. Because Swifts have a specialist diet they can be very difficult to care for, we always recommend you contact an experienced wildlife rehabilitator or Swift expert.

## Tips on Surveying Swifts

- Most Swifts **arrive in Ireland in early May** and they may stay until late-August. The main nesting activity takes place in June and July, so these are the best months to survey.
- Swifts are **most active in the morning and evening**. Surveying from 8.00am to 11.00am and 7.00pm to 10.00pm is best.
- Survey during **dry calm weather**. Wet and windy weather is unsuitable.
- Swifts **flying at roof level** and **loud “screaming” birds** are the best indication that there is an occupied nest site nearby.
- Swifts flying **at a high level**, well above the buildings, may not be local and for the purposes of counting local colonies, should be ignored.
- **Take notes** on the peak number of birds observed as well as precise details **of birds entering and leaving nest site locations**.
- **Young birds will fly close to nest entrances** and bang against the structure, these are known as “bangers” and should not be mistaken with birds returning to an occupied nest site.
- Swift sightings and nest locations **records should be reported to the National Biodiversity Data Centre**: <http://www.biodiversityireland.ie/>

## Case Studies

### Castlebar Swimming Pool

Location	Project Coordinator(s)	Building Type
Castlebar, Co. Mayo	Swift Conservation Ireland	Public
Nest Types	Swifts Occupying	Project Partners
Integrated – Triple Cavity Schwegler “17A” Swift Nest Boxes x 8 (four in NE facing wall and four in NW facing wall)	Seven (Several observations of Swifts entering and leaving seven of the nest boxes during the 2018 season with confirmed breeding expected in 2019)	Mayo County Council, PJ McLaughlin & Sons (main contractor)
Caller System Used	No. of Nest Sites Created	Year Initiated
Yes – under licence	24	Winter 2017

### Project Summary

Swift Conservation Ireland (SCI) identified the potential for increasing available Swift nesting sites in Castlebar Co. Mayo when the building work had just commenced. In consultation with Mayo County Council, Swift Conservation Ireland met with the county architect and Heritage Officer to request the provision of eight Triple Cavity Nest Boxes to be integrated into the building at the build stage. In addition, the electrical contractor fitted an attraction calls system with two speakers (one speaker located at near each set of nest boxes) to help Swifts locate the nest boxes. This work mirrors a partnership project between SCI and Mayo County Council in 2014 during the rebuild of Westport Town Hall. Four triple cavity Schwegler 17A nest boxes were built in to a NE facing wall. By the summer of 2018 all the nest boxes at the Town Hall were fully occupied.

### St. James’s Hospital

Location	Project Coordinator(s)	Building Type
James’s Street, Dublin 8	Dublin Swift Conservation Group, The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board	–
Nest Types	Swifts Occupying	Project Partners
Externally Fitted/Integrated (second phase of works)	–	Swift Conservation Ireland
Caller System Used	No. of Nest Sites Created	Year Initiated
Not currently - plan to retrofit solar power caller system	18 (phase 1), 24 (planned – phase 2)	2015

### Project Summary

St. James’s Hospital is one of the few existing Swift nesting locations in Dublin 8. Swifts have been known to nest on the St. James’s Hospital campus for many years. The Dublin Swift Conservation Group (DSCG) have been extremely active in raising awareness and campaigning for the protection of existing Swift colonies within the campus and for the creation of new potential nest sites. As a result of their actions and submissions made through the planning process the DSCG has influenced management at the hospital to carryout mitigation measures to protect existing nest sites (including the erection of six triple cavity nest boxes) whilst also gaining a commitment to provide 24 integrated nest sites at the new National Paediatric Hospital Campus.



### Crescent Arts Centre

Location	Project Advisors	Building Type
University Road, Belfast, BT7 1N Co Antrim.	NI Swift Group	-
Nest Types	Swifts Occupying	Project Partners
Integrated - 200 potential nest sites maintained, and 25lb stock Swift Nesting Bricks added to new build.	Yes - 30 to 40 breeding pairs	Crescent Arts Centre and Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)
Caller System Used	No. of Nest Sites Created and Maintained	Year Initiated
No - because of existing large colony of Swifts.	25	2007-2011

#### Project Summary

A major- almost £10million project sought to completely refurbish re-roof, modernise and extend the building. The Northern Ireland Swift Group, working with all the organisations involved sought to conserve and enhance the existing large Swift breeding colony which had existed in the roof of the building of more than 100 years. This was achieved, and the project was awarded a Biosphere Urban Wildlife Award for Excellence in 2010.

### Mullingar Courthouse

Location	Project Coordinator(s)	Project Architects:
Mullingar, Co. Westmeath	National Parks Wildlife Service/Bluett & O'Donoghue Architects	Bluett & O'Donoghue Architects
Nest Types	Swifts Occupying	Project Partners
Externally fitted - Double Cavity Schwegler Swift Nest Boxes x 6	Swifts observed actively prospecting during the summer of 2018	Irish Court Service, BirdWatch Ireland (BWI) Westmeath Branch, BAM Construction (main contractor)
Caller System Used	No. of Nest Sites Created	Year Initiated
Yes - under licence	12	2018

#### Project Summary

Seven active Swift nests were identified at Mullingar Court House during the 2015 Mullingar Swift Survey carried out by the BWI Westmeath Branch. In 2016 the building was to undergo significant restoration and development work which would result in the loss of the existing Swift nests. The BWI local branch and local NPWS Ranger persuaded the architects and contractors to install Swift nest boxes to mitigate for the loss of the existing nest sites. Over a two-year period, the partners worked closely to ensure the boxes and caller system were correctly installed to suit the needs of nesting Swifts and to protect the appearance and integrity of this heritage building. Six additional nest sites and a caller system were installed in local authority owned buildings nearby to provide Swift nest sites during the construction works to off-set the impact made on locally nesting Swifts.

### Dermot Doran's House

Location	Project Coordinator(s)	Building Type
Johnstown Bridge, Co. Kildare	Dermot Doran	-
Nest Types	Swifts Occupying	Project Partners
Integrated and externally fitted	Yes - four pairs to date (August 2018)	-
Caller System Used	No. of Nest Sites Created	Year Initiated
Yes - under licence	16	2014

#### Project Summary

In June 2014 Dermot installed three Zeist type externally fitted nest boxes to an east facing wall of his home in North Kildare. Anecdotally Dermot had never observed Swifts near the house. Three more nest boxes were installed to a north facing wall the following March (2015). During June 2016 Swifts were observed over the house and by July a pair had taken up residence in one of the east facing boxes. In January 2017 Dermot with help from BirdWatch Ireland Kildare Branch members installed one triple and one double cavity nest boxes integrated into the wall of his home. That summer the original pair returned and successfully fledged two young whilst another pair took up residence in a north facing box. Dermot installed five new Zeist boxes in 2018 and the two established pairs returned to successfully rear young, two new pairs also took up residence in the north facing boxes.

### St. Rynagh's National School Banagher

Location	Project Coordinator(s)	Project Advisors
Main Street, Banagher, Co. Offaly	Banagher Tidy Towns	Birdwatch Ireland and National Parks & Wildlife Service
Nest Types	Swifts Occupying	Project Partners
Externally fitted - Schwegler Triple Cavity x 2	Yes (a Swift observed entering a nest box in 2018 but it is unlikely they are breeding there yet)	The Heritage Council, St. Rynagh's NS
Caller System Used	No. of Nest Sites Created and Maintained	Year Initiated
Yes - under licence	Six	2015

#### Project Summary

A community conservation project carried out by the local Tidy Towns group for the National Tidy Towns competition category "Wildlife, Habitats & Natural Amenities". The project aims are to conserve Swifts and raise awareness of their conservation significance with local school children. The school children have been taught how to identify a Swifts and they have contributed Swift artwork that has been incorporated into promotional posters that the Tidy Towns use to raise awareness of the project locally. This is a new nest site for Swifts and it is hoped that creating new nest sites will mitigate against potential nest site losses due to future building renovations nearby. An interpretive panel on Swift ecology, conservation and local projects was also installed on the street outside the school.

## Useful Links

### General Swift Information

BirdWatch Ireland: <https://www.birdwatchireland.ie/OurWork/ResearchSurveys/SwiftConservationProject/tabid/1389/Default.aspx>

### British Trust for Ornithology:

<https://blx1.bto.org/birdfacts/results/bob7950.htm>

### Birdlife International:

<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/common-Swift-apus-apus>

### Information on setting up Swift nesting sites & caller systems:

Swift Conservation Ireland: <http://www.Swiftconservation.ie/>

Northern Ireland Swift Group: <http://www.saveourSwifts.co.uk/>

Swift Conservation UK: <https://www.Swift-conservation.org/>

### Live (seasonal) Swift cams

GMIT Swift Nest Cameras (active May to September each year):

<http://www.Swiftconservation.ie/gmit-Swiftcams/>

### Rehabilitating Swifts

Wildlife Rescue Useful Contacts: <http://irishwildlifematters.ie/animals/contacts.html>

### Recording Swift sightings/nest sites

National Biodiversity Data Centre: <http://www.biodiversityireland.ie/>

### Helpful videos

Confusion Species: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klya9oEK57M>

BirdWatch Ireland - Irelands Special Swifts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5YzYJcJWfM>

Maiden Tower Azerbaijan: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=5&v=yLm0c3sDA9g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=yLm0c3sDA9g)

### Reporting wildlife crime

National Parks and Wildlife Service: <https://www.npws.ie/>

Swift nests are hidden in walls and roof structures. In fact, if you can see a nest it's unlikely to belong to a Swift!

## Swift Groups

A number of key voluntary organisations have been working exclusively on Swift Conservation in Ireland for almost 20 years.

<b>Name</b>	Northern Ireland Swift Group
<b>Founded</b>	2000
<b>Activities undertaken</b>	NI Swift Group act as an advisory body advising individuals, organisations, grant aiding bodies, businesses, local and central government and many others on how to save existing Swift nest sites or create new nest sites in new buildings.
<b>Email</b>	enquiries@saveourSwifts.co.uk
<b>Web</b>	<a href="http://www.saveourSwifts.co.uk">www.saveourSwifts.co.uk</a>



<b>Name</b>	Swift Conservation Ireland
<b>Founded</b>	2013
<b>Activities undertaken</b>	Swift Conservation Ireland (SCI) has coordinated and advised on over 60 projects to date. The primary purpose of SCI is to bring together people interested in helping Swifts and to provide guidance and assistance in best practice when setting up nest box projects. In addition, they carry out education, survey training and advocacy work promoting Swift conservation across the country. From May to August each year, SCI broadcasts a 24 hour live-stream from inside their Swift nest boxes at GMIT Mayo Campus in Castlebar, the activities of the Swifts are enjoyed by a large audience each year. Lastly the SCI website provides information and guidance on all aspects of Swift conservation.
<b>Email</b>	Swiftconservationireland@gmail.com
<b>Web</b>	<a href="http://Swiftconservation.ie">Swiftconservation.ie</a>



<b>Name</b>	Dublin Swift Conservation Group
<b>Founded</b>	2013
<b>Activities undertaken</b>	Dublin Swift Conservation Groups core work is in delivering Swift conservation educational programmes to schools and community groups throughout Dublin. A large part of their work is involved in the installation of Swift nest boxes at schools and public housing schemes as well as to public building developments. Members of the group give advice on handling grounded and injured Swifts to members of the public. DSCG also conduct Swift nesting surveys and lead guided walks to observe Swifts and view Swift nest colonies.
<b>Email</b>	helendixieburke@gmail.com



## About BirdWatch Ireland

**BirdWatch Ireland** is the largest independent conservation organisation in Ireland. Established in 1968, we currently have over 15,000 members and supporters and a local network of over 30 branches nationwide.

The primary objective of **BirdWatch Ireland** is the protection of wild birds and their habitats in Ireland. To fulfil this objective, we:

- Carry out extensive research and survey work.
- Operate applied conservation projects and manage a network of reserves nationwide.
- Prepare and advocate policies.
- Recruit, retain and service a growing membership base.
- Promote the importance of wild birds and biodiversity through field education, dedicated media and to the national media.
- Build on existing partnerships with NGOs, with Government departments, the European Commission and farming organisations, and to establish new partnerships with other sectors.

### Membership:

Niall to add a sentence or two.





**BirdWatch Ireland**

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