

Monmouthshire Local
Nature Partnership



Partneriaeth Natur
Lleol Sir Fynwy

Look Up!

You can help keep our
Swifts in our summer skies



Swifts declined by
75% since
1995 in Wales

Telling them apart

A quick identification guide

House Martin

The most prominent feature is a bright, clean white rump that contrasts heavily with the blue-black back and tail, which is highly visible in flight.



Sand Martin

Grey-brown upperparts (no white rump), white underparts, and a distinct, dark brown band across the breast.



Swallow

The most distinctive feature is a long, deeply forked tail with thin "streamers".



Common Swift

Are larger than these other species & not related to the others. Have a distinctive scythe/boomerang shape.



Step-by-Step Migration

BTO Geolocator Project

North
Atlantic
Ocean



Key

- Southward migration
- Northward migration
- Winter range & movements

Redrawn with permission of British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) / go to www.bto.org for updates.



Give our Swifts a home: How you can help

Common Swift facts

Swifts have shared our buildings for centuries.

Masters of the air

Swifts only land to breed; they eat, mate, and even sleep on the wing, living for a long time, up to 20 years. They can reach speeds of almost 70mph.

Homes in the heights

They nest in tiny holes, cracks, and gaps and under roof tiles, in our buildings, preferring dark, enclosed spaces.

An epic lifetime journey

In one lifetime, a single Swift covers a distance equivalent to flying to the moon and back more than eight times.

Unwavering loyalty

A pair will return to the same nest site for life. They are so devoted that they may injure themselves attempting to return to a nest that has been blocked up.



Raising the next generation

Swifts typically lay 2-3 eggs, with chicks fledging by late July or early August. If food is scarce, chicks can enter a state of "torpor" to survive until the adults return.

Hardworking parents

To feed their chicks, adults can fly over 500 miles a day, catching up to 1,000 flying insects in a special food pouch.

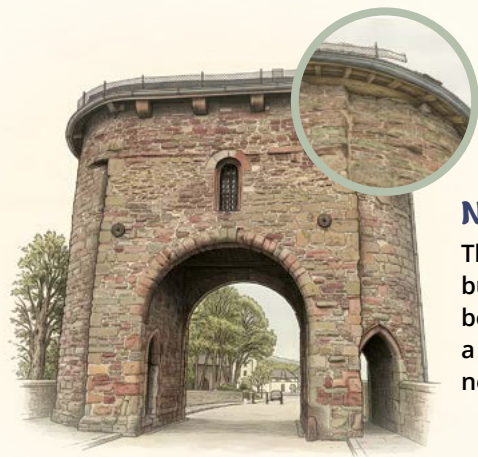
Training for takeoff

Before they leave the nest, chicks perform "press-ups" inside the box to build the strength needed for their first flight.



Where do Swifts nest?

Swifts are “**site faithful**,” meaning they return to the exact same spot year after year. Here are the three most common ways they make a home in Monmouthshire:



Need to preserve natural crevices

There are sites found in older stone buildings, but also modern buildings can be used. Swifts only need a gap the size of a matchbox to squeeze into a dark, safe nesting space.

External Swift boxes

A fantastic “**retro-fit**” option for existing homes. These wooden or eco-plastic boxes are mounted high up under the eaves, on a North facing wall ideally.



Mitigate by installing Swift boxes or integrated Swift bricks

The gold standard for new builds or extensions. These are hollow bricks built directly into the wall during construction. They are permanent, maintenance-free, and provide excellent insulation for the birds.



Expert tips for installing Swift boxes

Near an existing Swift colony

Swifts like adjacent areas to colony, where Swifts scream past, or at a minimum, Swifts flying high overhead in the sky.

Location

Ideally install 2-3 boxes, avoiding exposed, windy, wet, cold or hot locations. Do not put directly above windows or doors.

Create a small landing strip

You can also make a nest cup with feathers & position inside the box, furthest from the hole, as a starter nest.

Install a Swift caller to boost success

This replicates what happens in natural nests, where a Swift calls from inside the nest to attract a mate. A timer is useful to set the caller.

Optimal calling times: Dawn and dusk

Play Swift calls for 2-3 hours at dawn (6-9am) and at dusk (6-9pm), May to August. Once Swifts have left, block the entrance holes (e.g. with sponges) to prevent other birds occupying the box. Install Starling & Sparrow boxes too, if you have time.

Safe from attack

Protect from predators perching, such as Squirrels, Crows and Magpies, and leave around 5 metres of clear airspace around the box. Distance box from trees, ladders, telegraph poles, cables and climbing plants.

Health & Safety

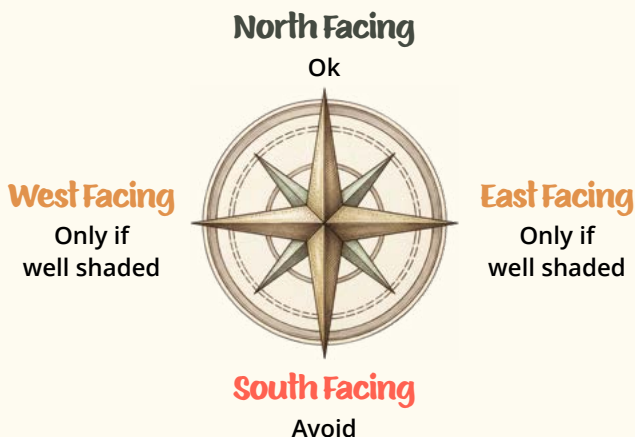
Please follow all tool & equipment safety guidance when installing or checking a swift box, & follow any manufacturers' instructions. Avoid any disturbance to existing swift colonies or bat roosts.



Ideal location near existing Swift colony

Ideal sites for Swift nest places - under eaves, on or in gables, on or in high walls

Height above ground should be a minimum of ideally 5 metres or above (but Swifts have nested lower)



Children's corner

1 On which 'Birds of Conservation Concern' list are Swifts included?

- A** Green list (no concern) ☐
- B** Amber list (some issues) ☐
- C** Red list (high concern) ☐

2 What shape do Swifts look like in the sky?

- A** Boomerang ☐
- B** Arrow ☐
- C** Frisbee ☐

3 At what speed can Swifts fly up to?

- A** 30 mph ☐
- B** 50 mph ☐
- C** 70 mph ☐

4 Why do the chicks do 'Press-ups' in the nest?

- A** To be the strongest & be fed first ☐
- B** To prepare their wings for long & non-stop flying ☐
- C** To stretch after being enclosed in the nest ☐

5 How far do most Swifts fly in a lifetime?

- A** Halfway to the moon & back ☐
- B** 1 trip to the moon and back ☐
- C** 8 trips to the moon & back ☐

6 How often do Swifts land outside of nesting?

- A** Many times ☐
- B** Never ☐
- C** A few times ☐

Answers: C, A, C, B, C, C



Swift wordsearch

Can you find these 10 words?

ACROBAT
HELP
SWIFT

AFRICA
HOLES
UNITED KINGDOM

BUILDING
PRESSUPS

DECLINE
SEVENTY

H	L	U	I	S	H	W	W	U	T	P	I	C	J	U
H	I	V	I	O	W	Q	Z	V	A	A	L	L	L	N
S	P	W	L	U	G	I	M	R	B	F	U	E	Y	I
U	Y	E	S	K	Y	T	F	W	O	R	Q	A	H	T
Y	S	A	U	G	U	S	T	T	R	I	M	A	D	E
V	Y	T	N	E	V	E	S	D	C	C	M	E	E	D
C	N	P	Q	X	Q	U	D	T	A	A	C	F	O	K
K	H	Y	L	B	O	D	Y	W	K	L	J	T	E	I
G	N	I	D	L	I	U	B	E	I	S	F	Q	W	N
U	B	E	B	U	X	X	C	N	V	S	G	B	E	G
V	F	I	T	G	E	T	E	B	Y	O	G	I	K	D
C	Y	Y	U	I	T	Z	S	U	Y	R	R	T	I	O
T	Q	P	R	E	S	S	U	P	S	P	L	R	Y	M
T	T	K	R	F	G	Q	A	M	X	Q	F	F	L	B
I	V	R	C	S	V	W	X	F	H	Z	E	G	B	K



How you can help



Save nest sites

Please do not fill in tiny holes, cracks & gaps in buildings- they are 'front doors' for Swifts. Avoid blocking Swift nests with scaffolding from May to August.



Install a Swift box

Put up a box on a North facing wall ideally near to an existing Swift colony. Use a caller and timer, playing at dawn and dusk, May-August.



Count Swifts

Submit sightings to Swiftmapper. Only record breeding Swifts in natural nest sites or Swift boxes, and screaming groups of Swifts seen at roof height.



Boost their food

A pond or pollinator-friendly garden provides the insects they need to feed their chicks.



Grounded Swifts

(Wear protective gloves, eye protection & mask, & wash hands afterwards)

Swifts need specialist care, place the Swift in a ventilated box on a towel. ASAP contact Swift & Swallow SOS on Facebook, or a vet. **DO NOT** try to throw or release the Swift from a height, or feed the bird.

Please get in touch if you have any questions

Email us: Localnature@monmouthshire.gov.uk

General Swift information:

- www.facebook.com/groups/swiftsos
- www.swift-conservation.org
- www.swiftmapper.org.uk

Monmouth Swift Groups:

- Abergavenny Swifts
- Swifts of Usk
- Monmouth Swifts
- Chepstow Swifts

MCC Swift Website:

