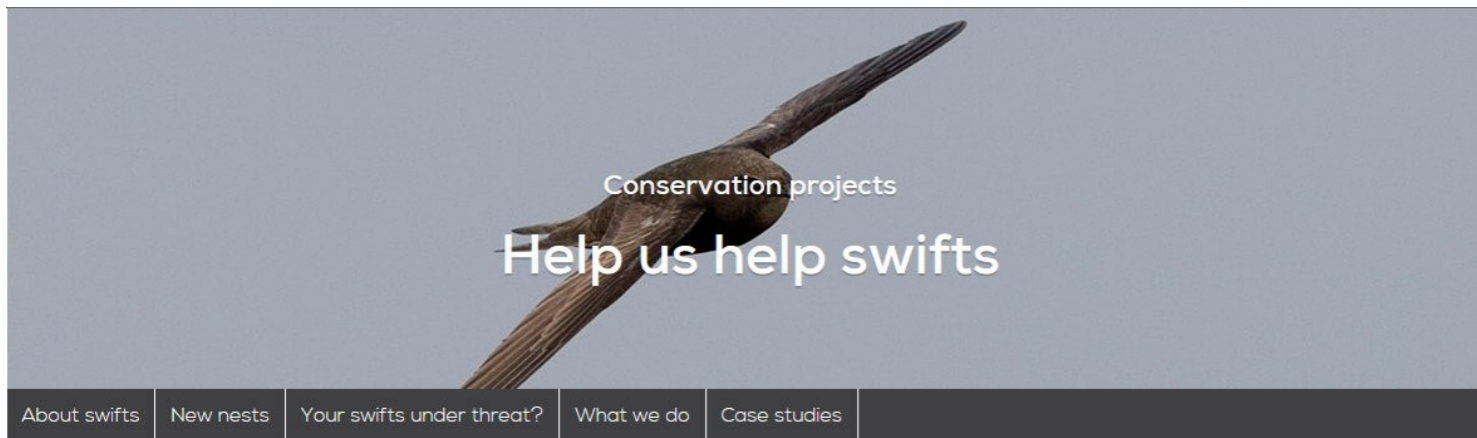


## HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE SWIFTS?

- Participate in the RSPB's Swift Survey
- The purpose of this survey is to record the locations of swift nest sites around the UK.
- This information can then be used by local authority planners, architects, ecologists and developers to find out where swift hotspots are located around the country and therefore allow the protection of nesting sites during building development.
- We hope that this conservation planning tool will play an important role in reversing the decline of this charismatic migratory bird.
- The RSPB Swift Survey was first launched in 2009, with a new and improved version released in 2016. The new survey web pages have been developed in partnership with Environmental Resources Management (ERM).
- Regularly check your local planning authority web portal for current planning applications and request integral swift bricks be incorporated into new buildings. A letter template can be found by following the link to 'Submit Sightings' from the home page of the Swift Survey.

- [www.rspb.org.uk/helpswifts](http://www.rspb.org.uk/helpswifts)



Swifts are in trouble. Their breeding numbers plummeted by 47 per cent between 1995-2014, making them an amber-listed species on the list of Birds of Conservation Concern.

Create a high home for swifts  
Set up a nestbox to give summer-visiting swifts a place to nest and breed year after year. [More...](#)



## KEY POINTS

- Protect existing nest sites
- Seek to include nest bricks into the fabric of:
  - all new buildings,
  - extensions and renovations
- Mitigate for losses due to demolition

Contact Conservation Management Advice at:

Post: The RSPB, UK Headquarters, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL

Tel: 01767 693308

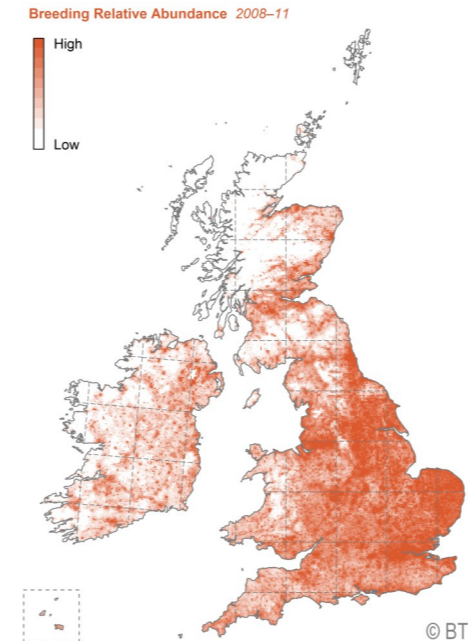
E-mail: [conservation-advice@rspb.org.uk](mailto:conservation-advice@rspb.org.uk)

[rspb.org.uk/conservationadvice](http://rspb.org.uk/conservationadvice)



## LAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

# SWIFT *Apus apus*



Breeding abundance map reproduced from Balmer et al 2013 Bird Atlas with permission from British Trust for Ornithology.



The common swift is a summer visitor, and probably the quintessential 'urban bird' inextricably linked to sharing our homes. Swifts usually nest in colonies often under the eaves of houses, commercial buildings, church spires and other historic buildings.

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) results since 1994 have indicated a steep decline across the swifts' UK range. Between 1995 and 2015 there has been a 51% decline in the population qualifying them for Amber listing as a Bird of Conservation Concern.

## CAUSES OF DECLINE

The cause of decline is not understood. However, many nest sites have been lost due to building renovation or demolition, while new buildings typically do not provide many nesting opportunities for swifts. Losses can occur at individual residential properties or at a large scale in housing regeneration programmes, demolition or conversion of old commercial premises. It is likely that a net loss in suitable nest sites is a major problem for swifts.

Research is also looking into whether a potential drop in insect food availability may be contributing to their decline.

Swifts winter in southern Africa, and the population decline could involve factors operating outside the UK. Issues relating to migration may be identified as part of either the geo-locator work being undertaken by the BTO or the RSPB's work on migrating birds.



## WHAT DO SWIFTS NEED?

### BREEDING HABITAT

Swifts are almost entirely reliant on buildings and other man-made structures in which to nest. Birds are site faithful, returning to the same nest each year for successive generations. Invariably several pairs will nest in close proximity to each other in towns and cities. Often several nests may be established in one building as little as 300mm apart. Nests are usually under the eaves of a roof behind fascia's and soffits, or beneath tiles where a hole as little as 28mm x 65mm is usually enough for them to gain access.

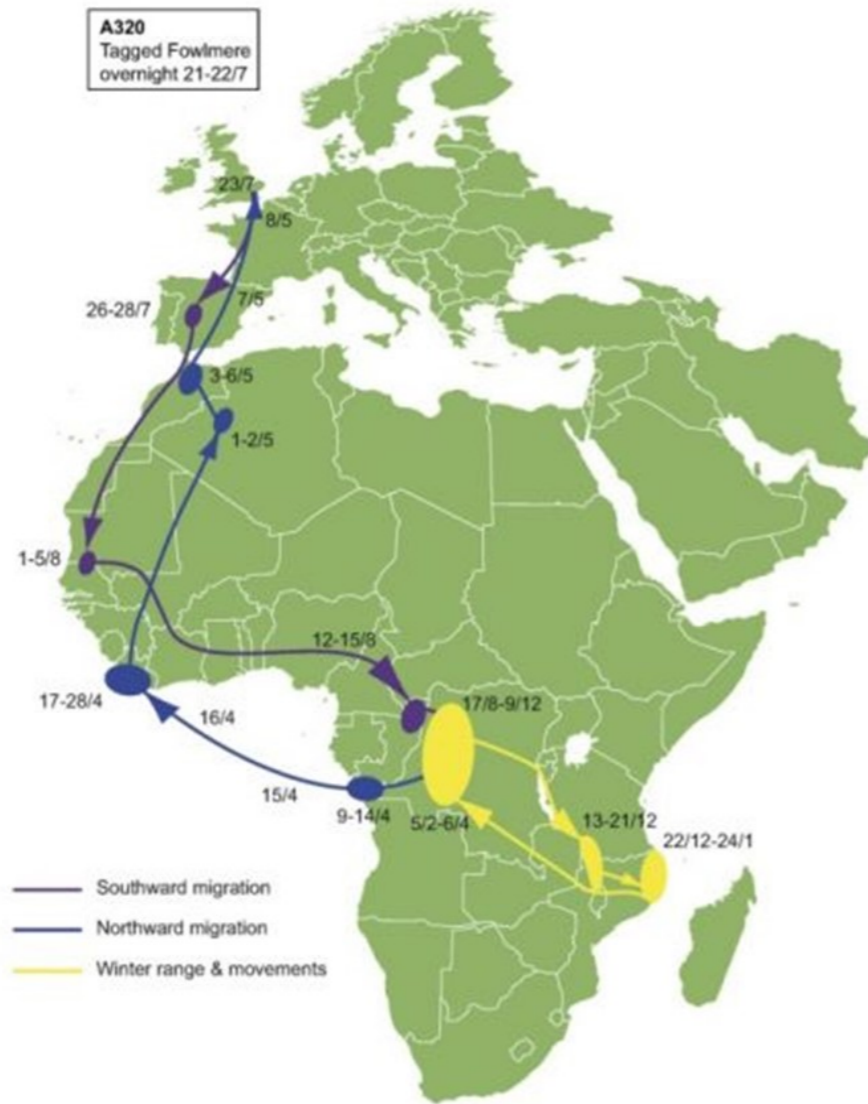
### NON-BREEDING HABITAT

Through the use of geo-locators, we now know swifts spend the winter in the tropical rainforests of the Congo, with a brief spell from mid-December to late January on the west coast of Africa in Mozambique.

### DIET

Swifts feed entirely on insects which they travel several kilometres a day to catch. Detailed studies have recorded over 300 species. When feeding young they can store on average between 300-500 insects in an elasticated throat pouch which they bring back to the nest for the young.

They drink by skimming low over water bodies with gapes open to collect water.



(c) BTO

Migration route of a satellite tagged swift

### ANNUAL LIFECYCLE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Breeding												
Migrating												
Wintering (Congo)												
Wintering (Mozambique)												

## HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE SWIFTS?

### NEST PROTECTION AND PROVISION

- It is against the law to disturb, damage or destroy nest sites while in use. Therefore you must not do any repairs near a known nest site between April and August.
- Always look to retain existing nests when undertaking repairs to roofs, fascia's and soffits. Make a suitable hole in any new material to allow the birds continued access to the original nest site and make a box in the space between joists to prevent ingress into the loft space.



- While undertaking roof repairs, it may also be possible to replace some bricks with one of the many hollow nest bricks available from various producers.
- During the development stage, incorporate integral swift nest bricks into the fabric of new houses, extensions, and commercial buildings as a priority. They are unobtrusive to the design, maintenance-free and should last the lifetime of the building. Some makes can even be provided to closely match the bricks of the development.



- Ideally provide 2-4 nest chambers per house approximately 0.5 to 1m apart. Proportionally more may be added to commercial units. Locate away from doors and windows, ideally place in gable ends just beneath fascia's or bargeboards, with at least 5m clearance above ground and in front of nests.
- This number of boxes per house suits the colonial nature of swifts, improving likelihood of occupancy and prevents undue competition. In a hypothetical development of 20 houses, we would hope that 20 bricks would be installed (a ratio of 1:1), but not necessarily one per house. For example, there may be 8 out of the 20 houses with bricks, each with 2, 3 or 4 installed.



- If all options previously described are not suitable, external nest boxes can be installed, under the eaves and out of direct sunlight. Additional boxes may be added in time, as the colony increases. Check annually for wear and replace as necessary.
- Birds may sometimes take several years to adopt a new nest. The best way to establish a colony is to use an MP3 player and SD card with recorded swift call to encourage swifts to investigate the nestboxes.
- These can be obtained from Action for Swifts <http://actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk/>