

SWIFT NESTING BRICKS

HOW WE ARE HELPING TO CONSERVE A SPECIES IN DECLINE



SWIFT BRICK: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



If you look up at the side of your home, you might notice a small hole in the brickwork. This is a specially fitted nest brick for swifts. Swifts are incredible little birds that perform amazing aerobatics at breakneck speeds but are sadly disappearing from our skies, and this leaflet explains the important role your home is playing in saving this special bird.

What is a swift brick?

A 'swift brick' is a special nestbox for these fast-flying birds which visit Britain in summer. They are carefully fitted into walls where you will barely notice them unless you look up.

Coloured to match the brickwork, the bricks are sturdy, weatherproof and will not reduce your insulation. Each brick is a totally sealed unit, apart from the entrance hole, so the swifts and their family will be safely contained within the brick. And swifts are very clean birds, so the nests won't need cleaning out, so there's nothing to do except enjoy these summer visitors, knowing you are playing a vital role in saving our swifts.

Why help swifts

Swifts spend most of their lives flying high in the air, only coming down to find a place to raise their family, usually in holes in building walls.

However, they are disappearing from our skies at a worrying rate. One of the big problems is that many holes in old buildings are destroyed during restoration work, and new buildings don't have holes. Adding swift bricks is a really simple way to help save the swift for future generations.

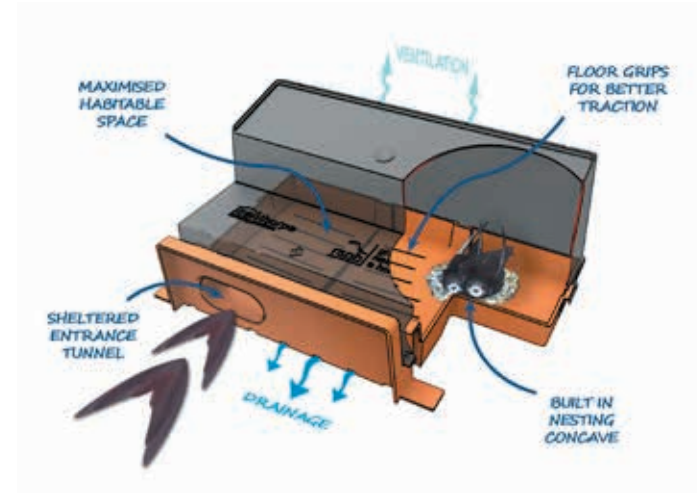
WHAT MIGHT YOU SEE?



Swifts only visit Britain for three months of the year, from early May to early August. They move so quickly that they are sometimes mistaken for swallows, or house martins. But you can recognise them by their crescent-shaped wings.

Do not worry if you do not see any swifts moving in right away. It can take swifts a few years to find new nesting bricks. However, once they have moved in, they are very loyal to their summer home and will return every year.

There is a chance that some swift bricks might be used by nesting house sparrows, but as this is another declining bird, that is not a problem.



Some fast-flying facts about swifts

Swifts are not to be confused with other birds that nest in or on buildings:

- Their diet means you will not see any mess from them
- They are incredibly quiet, and you will not hear them moving inside their swift brick
- The nest box is all they will need to live happily at your home
- Swifts feed, mate, sleep, and collect nest material on the wing, landing only to nest
- On leaving the nest, young birds remain on the wing for four years before they are mature enough to nest
- At 69mph, they have the fastest recorded level flight – the ultimate urban boy racer!
- Swifts are one of the last to arrive and first to leave of our summer migrants
- It takes them about a month to travel to and from their winter grounds in the Congo (over 4,000 miles away!)

FIVE POINT PLAN FOR SWIFTS

1. The nest boxes in your house

- Please do not block the holes. It may take a few years for swifts (or sparrows) to find their new home, so please be patient. If you must block the hole, seek professional advice to avoid committing an offence.
- You can speed up the process by using a midi-player to play swift calls during June and July, for a few hours in the mornings and evenings. For information about call systems, visit: <http://actionforswifts.blogspot.com/p/attraction-call-systems-for-swifts.html>
- When birds move into the new home, email details to: conservation-advice@rspb.org.uk

2. Record where you see swifts

- When swifts are here in summer, listen for their calls mornings and evenings and look for them flying low and fast at the roof level of buildings or entering nests around where you live.
- Wherever you travel, be it to work, to visit friends or relatives, or while on holiday, you can always record where you see swifts screaming around streets or entering nests.
- To submit records, visit <http://www.rspb.org.uk/helpswifts>

3. Encourage others to help swifts

- Encourage friends and relatives to look for opportunities to protect existing nests or provide new nests on or in their own house. See the list of websites below.
- And you can encourage more local authorities to add swift bricks to new buildings. Visit <http://www.rspb.org.uk/helpswifts> to find out more.

4. Protect swifts

- If you see building work where you know swifts nest, help protect the nests. In the breeding season (May to August for swifts), it is an offence to work where there are active nests.
- Where renovation is being carried out at a known swift nest site, speak with either the site manager or local planning authority to ask that they protect the existing nests and increase the size of the colony by adding more nests.
- Visit: <http://www.swift-conservation.org/Help%20Swifts%20Main%20Text.htm> or <http://www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/discoverandlearn/swifts/underthreat.aspx>

5. Become a swift champion

- You may like to join a local swift group; find out more by visiting: <http://www.swift-conservation.org/Local%20Swift%20Groups.htm>. Or, to get help from a local expert, find out more by visiting: http://www.swift-conservation.org/Local_Help_and_Assistance.htm
- If you find a grounded swift, then help is at hand – visit: <http://www.swift-conservation.org/SwiftFirstAid.htm>
- For more tips, visit <http://www.rspb.org.uk/helpswifts>, <http://www.swift-conservation.org> and <http://actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk/>

Photographs taken and provided by Steve Blain and John Day (RSPB).
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