

# SWIFT NESTING BRICKS

HOW WE ARE HELPING TO CONSERVE A SPECIES IN DECLINE



Supporting communities to help nature thrive

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# SWIFT BRICKS: 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.

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. Swifts are very clean birds and their nests don't require cleaning out. There's nothing to do except enjoy the company of these summer visitors.

## **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 buildings.

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

# WHAT MIGHT YOU SEE?



Swifts only visit Britain for three months of the year, from early May to early August. They are sometimes mistaken for swallows, or house martins. But you can recognise them by dark bodies and very fast flight on crescent-shaped wings and their high-pitched joyful calls

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. In fact, nesting house sparrows may attract swifts to look for their own nests.



## Some fast-flying facts about swifts

- Swifts feed, mate, sleep, and collect nest material on the wing, landing only to nest
- Their diet means you will not see any mess from them.
- 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
- 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 Africa (over 4,000 miles away!)

# FIVE POINT PLAN TO HELP 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. Please do not block the holes. Blocking a hole while a bird is nesting would be a criminal 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> or <https://www.swift-conservation.org/Shopping%21.htm>

## 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> or download the Swift Mapper app to record on the go. Scan the QR Code using your smartphone to get started or download the Swift Mapper app via the Google Play Store or Apple Store.



## 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.

- Learn and share some fantastic facts about swifts and inspire others about them, and the need to protect this fantastic species. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation--sustainability/help-swifts/amazing-swift-facts.pdf>
- 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 intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- 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 nest sites.
- Visit the link below to find out more about protecting swifts <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-and-sustainability/safeguarding-species/swiftmapper/are-your-swifts-under-threat/> to find out more about protecting swifts

## 5. Become a swift champion

- You may like to join a Swift Local Network group, there are nearly 100 of these groups across the country, dedicated to helping the conservation of this species. To find out more, visit <https://actionforswifts.blogspot.com/p/sln.html>
- If you find a grounded swift, then help is at hand – visit: <https://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.com>

Since 2014 Barratt Developments PLC and the RSPB have been working together to show how new homes and homeowners can help nature and support wildlife. This guide has been created with the support of the RSPB, the UK's largest nature conservation charity.

There are lots of easy ways to help nature in your new outdoor space and we're also working with the RSPB on an exciting project called Nature on Your Doorstep. Hosted online by the RSPB, you'll find simple hacks and easy steps to make your garden, balcony or window box blooming lovely and help nature too. Whatever your experience and whatever the space in your new home, you'll find top tips to turn your patch into a vibrant place that works for you and wildlife too.

Just visit [rspb.org.uk/natureonyourdoorstep](https://rspb.org.uk/natureonyourdoorstep)

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