

# Swift Action Plan

Apus apus

<b>UK List of Priority Species:</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Scottish Biodiversity List:</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Birds of Conservation Concern</b>	<b>Red</b>

## Summary

Swifts are summer visitors to Britain. These birds, with their distinctive screaming calls, are a localised sight in our towns and villages. Their numbers declined by 59% in Scotland between 1995 and 2020 (BTO survey). In a UK context, it is estimated that the population has declined by 60% from the period 1995 to 2020. Loss of nesting sites is thought to be the main driver of population decline. Action to secure existing nesting spaces and provide new nesting sites is underway, as is a change in the management of urban green space, which will increase the abundance of insects, their main food source. It is possible that factors in the wintering habitat of Swifts could also be responsible for the decline in their numbers.

## Species Profile

Swifts are summer visitors to Britain, arriving in Scotland from Africa from late April to mid May and leaving in August. During this time they are notable for their wild aerobatics and shrill calls around roofs and chimneys, when they reach incredible speeds.

Swifts nest almost exclusively in buildings. They generally require an entrance hole at least 5 metres above the ground. They are known to nest in church towers, under tiled roofs, under the eaves of buildings where they gain access via gaps and cracks in stonework, bricks or concrete and holes in walls.

The nest is built from a collection of feathers and plant debris; these are collected from the air while the swift is in flight. These materials are bound together with the swift's saliva to form a shallow cup; built on the floor of a roof space or hole. Old nests once belonging to other bird species may also be used when found in spaces that suit the swift's requirements.

If disturbed or excluded from a nest site, they can find it difficult to relocate to a new nest site, at least for that season. Young pairs find new unoccupied nest sites during their initial summers as adults, and return to breed in them when they are 3-4 years old.

Males arrive at the nest site first and females a few days later. Swifts are reported to maintain the same mate year after year, although they only meet at the nest site. Swifts nest semi-colonially and nest sites are thought to be a limiting factor in Swift colonies

The eggs are laid in late May and they hatch about 3 weeks after laying. Depending on food supply fledging takes 5-8 weeks, and the young swifts have normally left the nest by the first week in August.

## **Legal Status**

Swifts are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and by the Nature Conservation Act (Scotland) 2004, in accordance with which it is an offence to recklessly injure or kill any bird or to take its eggs. It is also an offence to disturb an active nest site or to obstruct or prevent any wild bird from using its nest, such disturbance can occur through the erection of scaffolding.

## **Current Status**

Swifts are widespread all over Europe and the Middle East, breeding mainly in the urban environment. However, there is growing concern at the decline in numbers, attributed to the loss of nest sites through building repairs and modernisation, reduction in their insect food source and climate change.

The present population of Swifts in North Lanarkshire is not accurately known. They are mainly concentrated in the lower-lying areas of the region, with smaller colonies in the Motherwell/Clyde Valley area and the largest colonies in populations around Coatbridge, Airdrie and Kilsyth. Strathclyde Park is an important feeding area for local swifts.

## **Future Status**

There are ongoing and future actions in place to ensure that suitable nesting provision is made for Swifts.

## **Current Factors Affecting This Species**

- It is assumed that a loss of nest sites are leading to their decline, but factors such as climate change and loss of insect prey may also be contributing factors.
- Refurbishment, repairs and demolition of buildings used as swift nest sites. This has led to a decline in nest spaces and hence to a decline in Swift colonies.
- Most new buildings do not provide opportunities for Swifts to nest.
- A reduction in their insect prey possibly linked to pesticides, air pollution and loss of green space.

## **Current and Past Action**

- Surveys undertaken by Concern for Swifts (Scotland) in 2001 and 2002 identified Swift breeding and feeding sites. 2001 data has been added to NLC's GIS system.
- All planning applications within Swift breeding areas are recommended to include Swift breeding provision by Greenspace Development.
- Swift provision and survey requirements included in Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Guidance for developers.
- Advice and guidance on legislation provided through planning process where demolition is part of a planning application.
- Swift Mapper website and app launched by RSPB, Swift Conservation and Action for Swifts in 2020 to encourage recording of swift nest sites and swift 'scream parties' close to nests. Citizen science data can be used to identify swift breeding hotspots and protect nests.

## **Proposed Objectives, Targets and Actions**

## Objectives

1. Prioritise retention of existing swift nest sites in repairs, and building renovation.
2. Encourage provision of Swift nest bricks in planning applications for new buildings and renovations over 5m in height as a biodiversity enhancement.
3. To keep the swift breeding colony data up to date.
4. To increase awareness of swifts and their requirements.

Action	Meets objective number	Action by	Target
<b>Policy and legislation</b>			
1.1 Ensure swift nest site retention/provision is considered in all planning applications. Encourage swift nest brick provision in all new builds and redevelopments over 5m in height.	1,3	NLC	Greenspace development to advise in all relevant planning applications.
<b>Species management and protection</b>			
2.1 Review existing information on swift breeding areas, update and identify any new sites. Review swift mapper data.	1,2	NLC	Review to be carried out by 2023.
<b>Advisory</b>			
3.1 Liaise with historic building conservation sections to promote conservation of swift nest sites when considering grant aid for the repair or renovation of historic building	1,3	NLC	Arrange meeting with Historic Scotland and NLC Property and promote conservation and creation of swift breeding sites. Agreement by 2024.
<b>Future research and Monitoring</b>			
4.1 Encourage use of Swift Mapper to increase North Lanarkshire records and information.	2	NLC	Annual survey promotion to staff and public.
<b>Communication and publicity</b>			
5.1 Promote the use of swift nesting boxes as a tool for education and awareness e.g. on schools and in Country Parks.	1,3	NLC	Swift nest boxes erected in the grounds of 1 public establishment per year, along with associated talk or discussion from 2024.
5.2 Involve schools in swift surveys and projects where possible. Possible use of Swift Matter to take forward school citizen science surveys.	1,2,3	NLC	3 schools involved in swift projects by end of 2028.

***Authors:***

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