

Help us Help Swifts in the Southwest

April 2010



The population of the Common Swift ([Apus apus](#)) has fallen by about 30% in recent years.

The RSPB and Swift Conservation Groups believe that the destruction of nest sites has been a significant factor in this decline.

Before we can take positive steps to rectify the situation we need to know where they are so in 2009 we asked the Public to help us.

Over six thousand people reported that they either knew the exact location of Swift nests or witnessed “screaming parties” which signify nests in the vicinity.

Analysis of the Inventory found nests in:

- houses built before 1919 (51%)
- houses built between 1919 & 1944 (25%)
- Churches (5%)
- Public Buildings, Schools etc (24%)

Swifts nest in nooks and crannies in walls and roofs and return to the same site year after year.

Renovations and demolition put these at risk and 16% sites were deemed to be threatened now.

In practice Swifts will use nest boxes either retrofitted or installed in new build projects so there is a solution to the problem.

Although the response to last year’s Inventory was very gratifying there are many more sites to be located and the work will be ongoing.

This is particularly true in the South West and since the beginning of the year our work with the Region’s Ornithological Societies and RSPB Local Groups and Volunteers has started to fill in the gaps and to locate buildings where existing colonies can be saved and new ones created.

We have also been told where recently installed nest boxes were occupied last year and where boxes have been installed in New Build projects.

Government Planning Directives do recommend increasing Urban Biodiversity and specifically mention Swifts, so Local Authorities are likely to encourage the latter. Sadly there were also reports of existing colonies in jeopardy because the timber soffits, barge boards etc had been replaced with plastic and all the nest holes had been sealed..

Swift's nests are protected during the breeding season, disturbing them is unlawful and could lead to significant fines.

We hope that at other times of the year property owners can be persuaded to renovate sympathetically or install nest boxes in lieu.

This year our interactive website www.rspb.org.uk/helpswifts will be available to report sightings or there is a questionnaire in our Swift Information Leaflet available on request, this can be returned to us by freepost.

Details of the Inventory with an interactive mapping facility can be found on the National Biodiversity Network website.

Further information, leaflets etc from stephen.fitt@rspb.org.uk or 'phone 01392 432691.

