



## Swift General FAQs

### How do I identify a swift? How do they differ from swallows and house martins?

Please see the RSPB's identification page for swifts [here](#).

### What is the UK population status of swifts?

The UK breeding population of swifts was estimated as 59,000 pairs in 2016. They breed in all four home countries of the UK. Swifts declined by an alarming 57% in the UK between 1995-2017. This trend appears to have been similar across most areas of the UK.

### Why are swifts in trouble?

Although the reasons for the dramatic population decline in the UK are not fully understood, it is highly likely that loss of nest sites in buildings is at least a contributing factor in some areas. Swifts are migrant birds which are nest site faithful, returning from their wintering grounds in Africa to the same spot each year to breed - usually in buildings, in gaps under roof tiles, eaves and in gable ends. As we renovate, repair, re-roof and even demolish buildings, nest sites are being destroyed or access blocked. New buildings seldom have nesting opportunities for swifts to replace those lost, unless special measures are taken to include these during construction, for example [here](#).

### Why do we need to collect data on where swifts are nesting?

If we know where swifts are nesting, this enables local planning authorities, conservation groups and individuals to target action towards the best areas to both protect existing nest sites, and to encourage the installation of new swift nest boxes/bricks in new developments. By using [Swift Mapper](#), and recording where you see screaming parties of swifts or swift nest sites, these records are then plotted on a map and can be accessed by conservation groups and individuals, local authority planners, developers and their consultant architects and ecologists to find out the locations of swift hotspots. This conservation planning tool enables the construction industry to make more informed decisions during development, to better protect and enhance swift colonies through mitigation.

### Where can I buy swift nest boxes and/or swift bricks? How do I install them?

The [RSPB shop](#) and [Swift Conservation](#) sell nest boxes and swift bricks. Information on different types of swift brick can be found on the leaflets page of Swift Conservation [here](#).

### **What should I do about a swift nest site that is under threat?**

See [here](#) for advice. If you know of a colony that's potentially under threat, let the owner or developer of the site and the local authority know about it as soon as possible. Urge them to install swift bricks/nest boxes so the colony is not lost. If it's a neighbour, gently explain these special threatened birds need people and protecting.

If work is likely to cause immediate threat to a colony in the nesting season (May-August), inform the contractor that nesting swifts are present and that they are legally protected. If you feel work is not going to stop, you can report the case to your local police Wildlife Crime Officer.

### **How do I carry out roof repairs or renovations in a 'swift-friendly' manner?**

Please do not schedule any roofing work in the nesting season (May-August). It is illegal to interfere with an active nest. Working close to a nest (e.g. erecting scaffolding) can also cause swifts to desert the nest. Please see [here](#) for more information.

### **Do you have any guidance for commenting on planning applications?**

Councils are obliged to protect and promote biodiversity in the built environment. To better understand the planning system and for advice on using it to help wildlife near you please see [here](#). For specific advice on swifts and planning please see [here](#).

### **How can I do more to help swifts?**

Please send your records of breeding swifts to [Swift Mapper](#). To do this and for more information on ways to help swifts please see [here](#).

The RSPB is the UK's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Click [here](#) to **join** today.

To make a **donation** to support the RSPB's work please click [here](#).