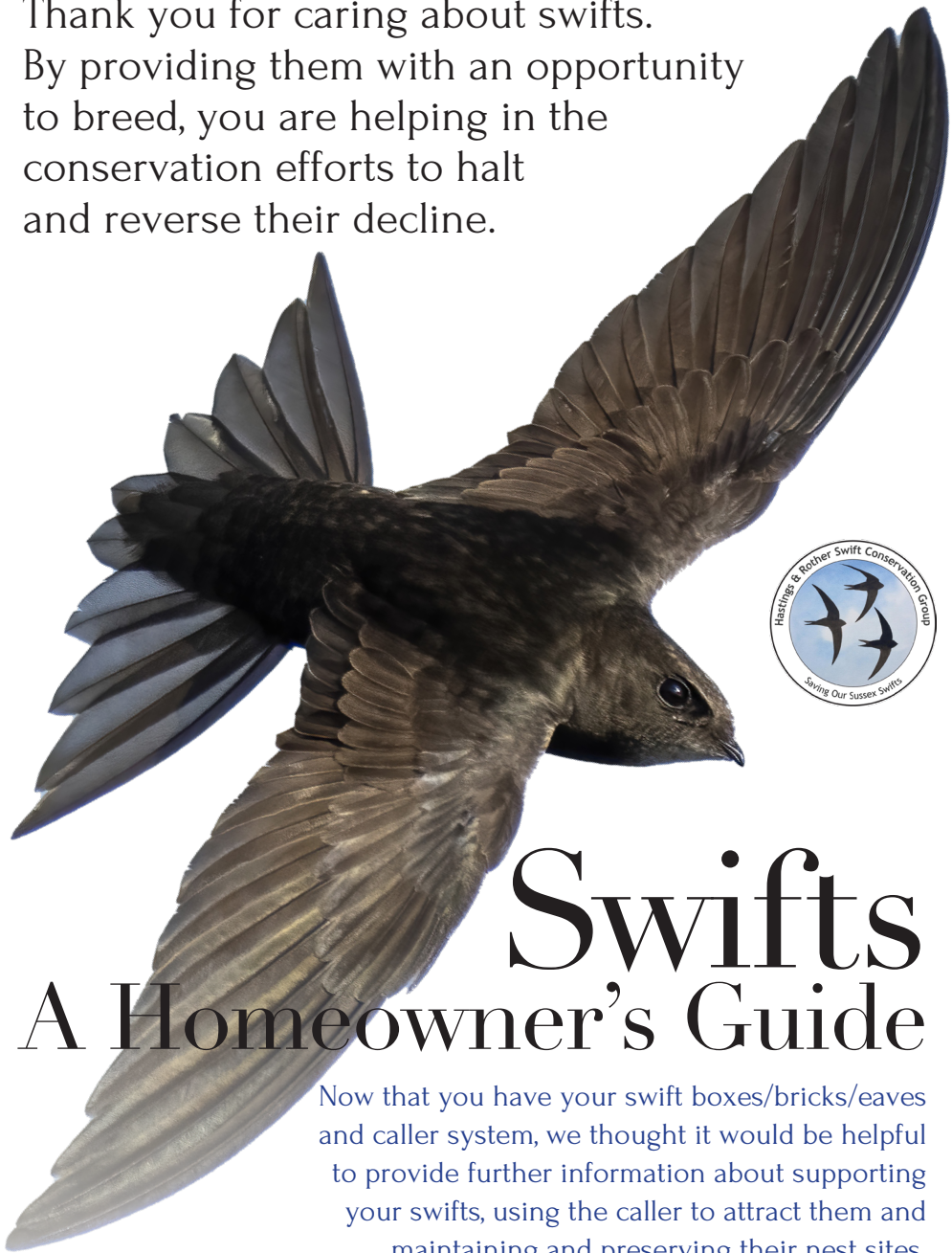


Thank you for caring about swifts.
By providing them with an opportunity
to breed, you are helping in the
conservation efforts to halt
and reverse their decline.



Swifts

A Homeowner's Guide

Now that you have your swift boxes/bricks/eaves
and caller system, we thought it would be helpful
to provide further information about supporting
your swifts, using the caller to attract them and
maintaining and preserving their nest sites.

Photographs courtesy of **Rob Booth Imagery**

With your nest sites and caller in place, you can watch for swifts circling your house and delight in their aerial displays and iconic calls. Swifts may take up your site in the first season, or it may take a few years before they settle. Although we cannot guarantee when or if birds will adopt your nesting places, we can guarantee you have provided the best opportunity.



this, then playing calls for an hour at dawn and dusk are the very minimum advised. A link to information on the caller system and

instructions for use can be found at

<https://actionforswifts.blogspot.com/p/attraction-call-systems-for-swifts.html>

Sometimes swifts can be very quiet at nest sites, especially from May until July – when established and first-time breeders are busy getting on with the task of laying eggs and raising chicks, so you may not immediately notice if you have successfully attracted a pair for a while.

The best time to look out for them is between 19:30 and dusk (which can be up to 22:00 at the height of summer), when birds that have taken up nest sites return to roost – so enjoy a glass or cup of something in the garden whilst you watch, but keep your eyes wide open, as they will fly in fast!

When to turn your caller down or off

When you notice you have birds coming to roost in your nest provision, that's a very likely sign they have decided to adopt it as their summer breeding

raised any young, will be back in June.

Last year's young will return as 1-year old juveniles in July. Swift Awareness Week occurs in July as numbers reach their peak.

After arriving, breeding/first time swifts usually take the first 2 weeks to recover from their migration, feeding up on insects and checking out food sources. Established breeders will then set about laying their eggs, but weather conditions can delay when this takes place.

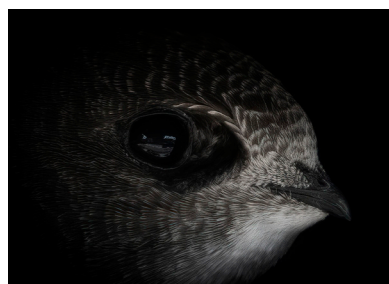
First time breeders will start to build a nest before egg laying.

home. If you see 2 different swifts enter the same nest site and staying there (and for eaves we mean the same location point), that's pretty much certain.

At this point you can turn your caller down (we suggest volume level 2-3 on our rented callers) - the aim is for a soft natural sound, just like swifts calling from a nest site. Continue these calls until you are seeing a pair of swifts returning to the same nest site regularly. Please note that when coming in to roost, there may be a few minutes between one bird then the next coming in, but there can also be 30 minutes plus between them.

If there are 2 different birds regularly returning to, and staying in the nest at least at dusk, then congratulations you have successfully welcomed

lifelong summer guests to stay with you, and given swifts a place to rear their young each year, which is all their hearts and minds



desire when they are here in the UK! You can now turn your caller off – even if only one nest site has been taken, as these birds will naturally attract others to search for nesting places on your house, and it won't be long before you have a party of swifts delightfully “screaming” in joy around your house, celebrating a place they might be able to nest at too.

The sighting of a pair of swifts regularly at your nest, particularly at dusk is the best evidence. However, if you may have missed the first few weeks of this happening and are only seeing one bird regularly return to the nest at dusk, it is possible that they are already incubating eggs.

If a bird comes in to roost and you hear swifts calling from your nest site, this is potential evidence you have a pair in the nest. Similarly, if a swift arrives and then one leaves shortly afterwards,



Photo by Pellingier Attila

Breeding/eggs

Swifts lay 1 to 3 eggs. They will determine how many to lay depending on the amount of airborne insects present and on weather conditions.

Swifts only raise 1 clutch of eggs, but as mentioned, can lay again if this first clutch fails.

Eggs take around 3 weeks to hatch, and young are typically ready to fledge around 6 weeks.

After the young have fledged the parent birds will stay on for a few days longer at the nest site to feed up and rest before starting their long journey back to Africa.

Swifts can pair up at 1 years of age, but won't be ready to breed until 3 or 4 years old, but will start to look for nest sites before they are ready to breed.

Once paired they are paired for life.

this could be an egg brooding changeover and the relieved parent going out for refreshments before bedtime. We cannot be sure however in these scenarios. You may want to keep your caller on low and continue watching at roost time, or return to watching after 2 weeks have passed as by then the chicks should have hatched (or be near to hatching). You will then start to see 2 swifts returning to roost at dusk.

If at the end of the July, you haven't managed to attract swifts to your nest site this year, don't worry,

Swift migration/seasons

The swift season is generally from mid-April to August, although swifts can still be using their nest into September, and in exceptional circumstances October if they were late to breed, or if they made a second attempt after the failure of the first laid clutch of eggs.

There are variations each year on when birds arrive, but established breeders who have raised chicks in your nest site before, should be back in May at the latest, and first-time breeders who have found your nest site (or quietly prospected it) but not



there is always next year, when new birds looking to breed will be on the search for a nesting place. You can now turn the caller off, and wait until next year to switch it back on.

It may also comfort you to know that young swifts, not yet at breeding age, will still search for a nest, and may quietly prospect a site without entering the cavity, but remember the location when they are ready to breed.

Is maintenance required?

If you have swift bricks or open eaves, no maintenance is required whatsoever, you have a lifelong nest site ready and waiting. The only exception is if you have, or put in any climbing plants near your nests, in which case these will need to be kept in check so there is at least one metre clearance below, or to the side of the nest site, as plants can aid predator species to access the nests. Also keep them in check to ensure they do not restrict the flight path to or from the nest.

If you have a swift box purchased through our group, they have been treated on the outside with both anti-fungal, and a 10-year wood preserving cream both of which have been confirmed as safe to animals. You may get some surface spores, this is quite usual, and does not pose as a risk to the box.

After 10 years, these boxes will need to be retreated, and may eventually need to be replaced if they have deteriorated. Replacing a box needs to be carefully managed as the box needs to be fitted in the same location and the entrance hole must be in the same place, as swifts learn their access route into the box.

Swift nests should never be removed from the nest site. Swifts are nest faithful and return to the same nest each year, they will reuse and spruce up their existing nest, which will be made from airborne material and fluffy feathers. If a nest has been removed it will delay their breeding, not something they will relish after a long flight back from Africa for that very purpose.

Other birds such as sparrows (also red listed) may use the nest site. Sparrows and swifts have been living alongside each other as far back as buildings were built, and a sparrow may nest in a site that swifts have already taken. With luck the sparrows will have fledged at least one brood before the swifts have returned. Sometimes there is conflict between these species, this is a natural issue that they have been dealing with for many years; the swifts will reclaim their nest. You do not need to remove the sparrow nest, or nests from any other species that use the box.

Where swifts are breeding for the first time, a sparrow nest will give them a bit of advantage as they will have some nesting material already to build their nest upon, and will add to it for their own design.

If the sparrows have built on an existing swift nest the swifts are likely to flatten this down and spruce it up. The only potential issue is if you can see string hanging out of a box that a sparrow has used, as that can become a hazard to birds as it can get lopped around their legs and feet. The string may need removing once birds (sparrows/swifts/others) have finished nesting in the box.

We advise that you only maintain boxes, or remove string from nests yourself if you are confident in using and climbing a ladder, preferably using a ladder stand-off, and are fit enough to do so. If a box needs retreating or there is string that needs removing and you do not feel able to do this yourself, please contact us. For replacing a box, please contact us for advice or replacement.

Swift nests should never be removed from the nest site!

Caring for your swifts when renovation work is required

When the swifts are in the UK using their nests, they still need our support and respect to help them breed successfully. Active nests for any birds must not be disturbed, or disrupted, and birds must be able to freely access their nest to brood their eggs and raise their young.

From time to time, you may need to carry out some work on your house or building where the nest sites are, either at the eaves or roof, or near the nest site entrance. **This must be done outside of the swift breeding season if swifts are nesting with you** – but be absolutely sure swifts are not present before work commences (or that it is outside the breeding season for any other bird using the nest site).

Swifts (and other birds) are protected by law under the **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981** when they are actively building or using



their nest and raising their young, and it is illegal to intentionally harm wild birds, or damage, or destroy nests when being built or in active use.

Birds can be caused harm, and sustain injury or death by preventing access, or causing an obstruction to nests, or young. This is especially important for swifts as when they are obstructed from, or unable to gain access to a nest, they may repeatedly fly at the site or the obstruction to try

and gain access. They can damage their feathers and wings in doing so, and even worse cause them a fatality. Obstructions to nests will likely result in young birds not being sufficiently fed, and can also cause parents to abandon their nests and young, both of which can result in harm and the death of the young chicks.

Renovation works can be done further to the side of where the active nests sites are as long as the swifts can access their nest and will not be deterred from entering them; will not be disturbed or disrupted, and their nest sites and nests are not touched or damaged. Additionally, in the case of open eaves, the roof immediately above nests must not be touched as this will expose the nest, making it unusable or causing it to be abandoned, and exposing eggs or chicks if present, causing their demise.

The use of scaffolding for any work undertaken nearby a site must be carefully considered and must not obstruct swifts from entering or leaving their nests.

Please remember that swifts are unique birds and do not perch, they fly directly into and from the nest and need a 4-metre drop/rise from their nest site, so unless you have a 3-storey building, any scaffold boards/scaffolding directly under the nest site is likely to impede their access into and out of their nest site. In a 3-storey building scaffolding to the first floor of the building only may be okay.

As work at active nests sites, or immediately surrounding them must only ever be undertaken outside of the breeding season, you and your contractors will be legally required to delay works until then if works will cause harm or disturbance to the birds and their nests.

If you are having to consider any work near the nest site during the breeding season, we will always be happy to advise you on this, and to discuss with you and your scaffolders a system that will enable the swifts to continue to breed successfully and without disturbance, and that allows work to be completed where possible.

We would also advise that you show this section and the section on swift migration/seasons to your scaffolders, as they are legally required to observe the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 too.

If you move home

Please let any new owners of your home know if swifts are using your nest provisions, where their nest sites are and that they are nest faithful. Engage them in the unique and wonderful lives of swifts

so they can enjoy them too, and pass on this guide so they can continue to protect them.

We hope you enjoy watching swifts and the excitement they bring when they find your nest sites and decide to nest there. Becoming swift hosts is an honour and you will get to delight in their calls and aerial displays around your house. We wish you the best of luck.

Hastings & Rother Swift Conservation Group



Useful links/further information

<https://e-voice.org.uk/hastingsandrotherswifts/>

hastingsandrotherswifts@gmail.com

<https://www.facebook.com/share/g/19XR9EwVMU/>

https://x.com/HastingsSwifts?t=2sr8DDM7b5t54kaShz_E7w&s=09

<https://bsky.app/profile/hastingsswifts.bsky.social>