



The Supporter

Newsletter for Lewes Swift Supporters

July 2024

Dear Lewes Swift Supporters,

Welcome to the July edition of the newsletter from Lewes Swift Supporters!

We are coming towards the end of a season which has been made difficult for both Swifts and Swift surveyors by the very changeable weather! Thank you to everyone who has persevered and sent us their valuable sightings.

Lewes Swift Supporters AGM

Our Annual General Meeting will once again be held in the upstairs rooms of the Linklater Pavilion on **Tuesday 3rd September, from 7.30 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.** Light refreshments will be provided.

We hope that you can join us. This is a chance for you to ask us questions and tell us about what you have seen during Swift season.

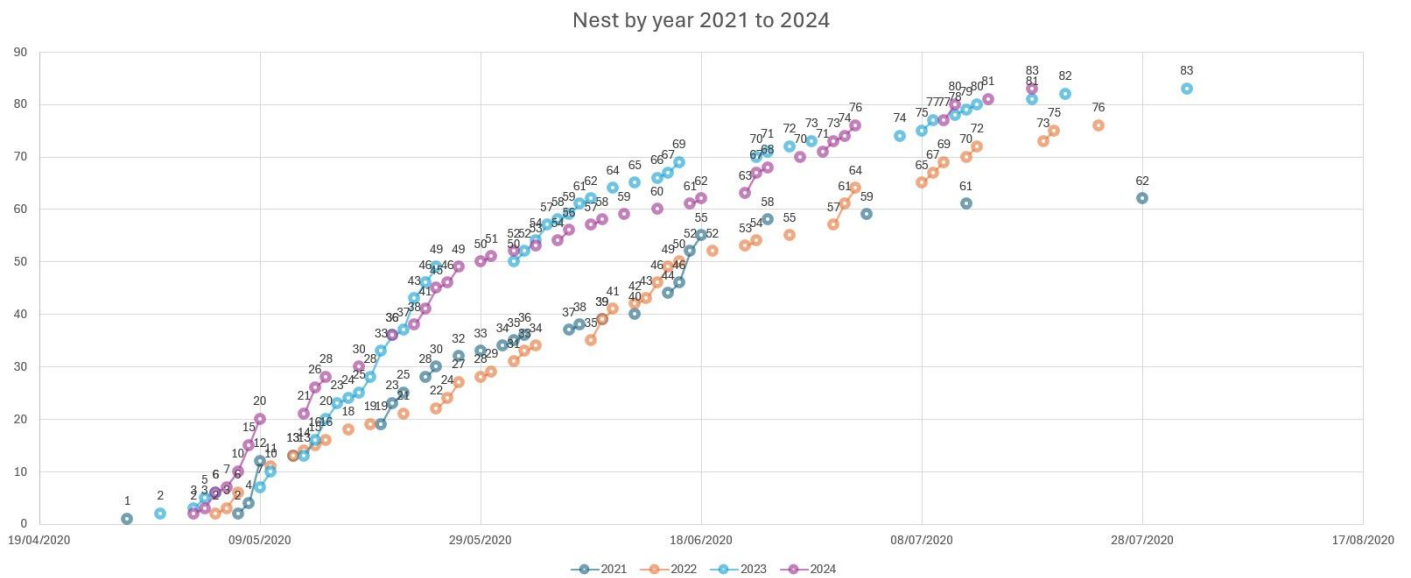
Our guest speaker this year will be Paul Stevens, Hirundine Champion for Sussex Ornithological Society, who will be talking to us about House Martins. As you will know from our June newsletter, we have been installing artificial House Martin cups on some of the buildings where they used to nest until recently. Like Swifts, they are also on the red list of birds of conservation concern. Like Swifts, they suffer from the lack of insects, and it is thought that the dry spring and summer weather make it difficult for them to find the mud they need to build their nests. In addition, their natural nest cups do not always adhere well to modern plastic fascia and soffits.

Swift nests are not usually visible to us because they are hidden under the eaves or in other gaps and spaces. You can actually see House Martin nests, so please let us know of any which you have seen in Lewes! So far this year we have seen them in St. John's Terrace, Garden Street and Corporation Villas.



Natural House Martin cup in St. John's Terrace and an artificial cup which we installed in Dorset Road

Nest activity so far in 2024 – updated graph from Kevin



As you may see from Kevin’s graph, above, at the time of writing our surveys and reports from Swift Watchers have confirmed that Swifts have returned to 83 nest spaces in Lewes. This matches the total number of nest entrances recorded in 2023 but, as you may see in the table below, they are not all in exactly the same places.

Recorded in 2024	Recorded in 2023
Upper Western Road – 5 nests	7
St. Anne’s Church – 15 nests	8
Valence Road – 2 nests	2
St. Swithun’s Terrace, (rear of 80b High Street) – 8 nests	5
The Maltings – 8 nests	11
De Montfort Road - 3 nests, (two in boxes)	2 (one in a box)
Market Lane - one nest	1
Westfield House, Western Road – one nest	1
Grange Road – one nest	0
Abinger Place – one nest	2
St. Martin’s Lane – 5 nests	5
Station Street – 7 nests	8
Bridgewick Close – 2 nests	3
Southover High Street – 4 nests, (2 in a double box)	5
Potter’s Lane – 2 nests	2
The Avenue – 4 nests	4
Flea Market – 7 nests	10
King Henry’s Road – 2 nests	3
144 High Street – one nest	1
Mealla Close – 2 nests	0
102 Western Road - 0	1
Montessori Nursery - 0	1
Old Malling Way flats - 0	1

We know that some of the more recent nest entrances observed may have been prospecting two-year-old Swifts who are claiming a site where they may nest for the first time next year. This is only speculation though, because for all we know they could have been in and out regularly at times when we do not normally survey! Other nests may have been abandoned because of the cold spells and resulting lack of insects – or other reasons. For example, in the nest space in King Henry’s Road which hosts the nest cam, we saw that both eggs were ejected, and the parents Swifts left the nest and did not try there again.

However, other nests have been visited regularly throughout the season and there is a very good chance that this will result in healthy chicks fledging very soon. We first saw a Swift entering nest 1 at 98 Western Road on 6th May, after hearing the Swifts in the nest on the three evenings before this. Since then, we have recorded 55 entrances and exits at the nest between 6th May and 21st July. We imagine that in this nest the chicks may be busy preparing for their first flight by exercising their wings through doing “press-ups” on their wing tips.

RSPB quote 19.5 days as the average incubation time for the Swift eggs, followed by an average 42.5 days in the nest afterwards before they are ready to fledge and fly off to Africa for the first time. This average of 62 days from egg-laying to fledging is likely to be longer this year because of the poor weather and lack of the “aerial plankton” which the Swifts need to feed themselves and their chicks. The parents may have been obliged to temporarily abandon their brood to hunt elsewhere.

The Swift eggs can survive levels of chilling which would kill the embryos of any other bird and Swift chicks can survive without feeding for up to 48 hours by reducing their metabolism and going into torpor. Apparently, once the chicks are 14 days old they need feeding ten times a day with a bolus of food which contains about 1,000 insects!

In 2022, we had some Swifts returning to their nests until 5th September and we wonder whether this will happen this year too. Interestingly, on the RSPB website it now records “Swift season” as being from April to September.



Swift returning with a bolus of food, by Robert Booth

Swift Walks 2024

During Swift Awareness Week, 29th June to 6th July, we led three Swift Walks around some of the colonies in Lewes. Thirty-eight people joined us for the walks and the weather was perfect on the first one but a bit cooler and more windy on the second two! Nevertheless, we saw entries and exits on all three of the evenings. Some lovely people joined us to find out more about where our Swifts are nesting - and Kevin, Nick and Audrey very much enjoyed leading the events.

After our first Swift walk, poet Ruth Lawrence was inspired to write a beautiful poem about the Swifts which we have shared with members. If you would like to see it again it is published on our website:

[Swift Diary 2024 - Lewes Swift Supporters \(e-voice.org.uk\)](https://www.e-voice.org.uk/swift-diary-2024-lewes-swift-supporters)



Market Lane



The Maltings



Rear of 80b High Street

The Lewes Nature Mosaic Project is a partnership between Lewes Swifts Supporters, the Railway Land Wildlife Trust, Wildflower Lewes, Lewes Urban Arboretum and Common Cause which aims to map and expand the green spaces and corridors for wildlife in Lewes. As part of our commitment to this partnership, on Wednesday 10th July we led a Swift Walk for some members of the Railway Land Wellbeing in Nature Group. The weather was fine again and we saw entries and exits at the colonies in The Maltings, St. Swithun's Lane, St. Anne's Church and at 98 Western Road. One of the entries we all saw at The Maltings was a new eighth nest!



Wellbeing in Nature Swift Walk

Photographer Andrew Lloyd joined us on our last Swift Walk and shared this wonderful photograph of a Swift entering one of the nests at 98 Western Road!



Using thermal imaging to investigate Swift nesting sites

On Sunday 14th July we met with Izzy Kennedy and Terry Hallahan from the Sussex Barn Owl Support Group for a trial of their thermal imaging camera at some of our nest sites. They have found the camera useful in their work to confirm occupancy of Owl boxes – apparently it saves them a lot of climbing up on ladders!

We found that although the camera didn't show a thermal image through the stone of St. Anne's Church or through a Woodcrete nest box it did give a very clear image when used on a wooden box. However, the “glow” shown by a nesting bird would not be enough to record an active Swift nest on its own - since we all know that some Swift boxes are being used by Sparrows!

While we were at St. Anne's Church, to our amazement, we saw an entry to a new 13th nest at 7.25 a.m.



St. Anne's Church



De Montfort Road



98 Western Road



Swift nesting under the eaves



Swift in a Peak nest box

Thinking of installing a nest box?

If you live in Lewes and are thinking of installing a Swift nest box or an artificial House Martin cup, this is how we might support you – if your building proves to be suitable and there is access for a long ladder.

- Funding a Swift box and the installation when someone lives next to an existing Swift colony.
- If you do not live next to an existing colony, we still offer support and advice on installing a Swift nest box. We visit the homeowner to find out if the building and location are suitable and help to decide on the best place for a box. At current prices, this would cost you £48 for a single box and £25 for the installation. See: <https://www.peakboxes.co.uk/shop>
- A free House Martin cup and installation for anyone who lives in a suitable location in an existing colony so that we might encourage expansion of the existing colony.

Just get in touch with us if you are thinking of installing a Swift Box or an artificial House Martin cup:
lewesswifts@gmail.com

If your home is not suitable for a Swift box or House Martin cup, remember that there are other things you may do to help our Swifts to thrive: [How can we help Swifts? - Lewes Swift Supporters \(e-voice.org.uk\)](http://www.lewesswifts.org.uk)

LDC Lottery

Thank you to all the kind residents who have made donations to Lewes Swift Supporters. If you would like to make a donation, please contact us on lewesswifts@gmail.com

You may also support LSS by choosing us as your “good cause” in the LDC Local Lottery: [Support Lewes Swift Supporters when you play Lewes District Local Lottery - Lewes District Local Lottery \(leweslocallottery.co.uk\)](http://www.leweslocallottery.co.uk)

With best wishes from the LSS Committee:

Mike Ramsey, Chairperson and Surveyor

Kevin Murphy, Recorder and Surveyor

Sharon Hall, Treasurer

Crispin Holloway, Founder Member

Emma Allen, Surveyor

Audrey Jarvis, Secretary, Surveyor and Website Manager



Swifts above 98 Western Road

