



## Lewes Swift Supporters Annual Report for 2024

Based upon contributions from members of the LSS Committee and surveyors: -

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And the additional surveyors:-

Mary Hempshall, Nick Jarvis, Susie O'Hare, Wendy Muriel, Larissa Conradt

And 59 Swift Watch reports from our members via social media

### Summary

This report summarises the key achievements of Lewes Swift Supporters, (LSS), during the sixth year of operation, since our relaunch in May 2019. It reports the results of the systematic survey that were primarily used to estimate the current number of Swifts nesting in Lewes, and to try to detect changes over these years.

- A total number of 84 active Swift nest entrance holes were recorded from a total number of 2,463 reported Swift sightings.
- The 2024 total appears to be similar to the total nest numbers reported in 2023, (83), and 2022, (79).
- This suggests no detectable decline over these three years, unlike the continued decline seen in the rest of Sussex and the UK in general.

Rigorous comparison of this total number of 'nests' with earlier years is constrained by differences in the survey areas and the methodology used in 2019-2022, and by a lack of systematic survey results prior to 2019. However, for the six Swift colonies where we do have results from 2000, the average number of nesting pairs was down in total by 47% on the numbers reported in 2000, from 54 to 29 pairs. This decline is apparently less than the reported UK national decline of 68% between 2000 and 2023<sup>1</sup>, and 81% decline in Sussex over this same period<sup>1</sup>.

Two potential new Swift survey designs were evaluated but found not to give sufficient advantages over the current systematic survey design to warrant further application in Lewes. Lewes residents participated extensively in their contributions to the LSS survey via our website<sup>2</sup> and social media, (e.g., 59 contributions, mainly via our Facebook group). Supporters were also kept informed of LSS activities via four LSS Newsletters<sup>3</sup>, and through social media interactions. Other activities have including four Swift walks in July, and a well-attended AGM in September 2024. LSS have continued to advise on, or implement, the installation of 174 new Swift boxes since 2020, including 26 new boxes this year.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/breeding-bird-survey/latest-results/population-trend-graphs-4729/10/2024>

<sup>2</sup> <https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesswiftsupporters/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesswiftsupporters/newsletters/>

## 1. Brief introduction to LSS

The Lewes Swift Supporters, (LSS), is an organisation of volunteers that was formed in 2015 with support from Sussex Ornithological Society, (SOS), and Sussex Wildlife Trust, (SWT). It was relaunched in May 2019, with three aims and objectives. Having successfully been awarded Swift-friendly town status by Lewes Town Council in September 2024, we have added a fourth objective, (1.4 below in bold).

- 1.1 To increase the number of Swifts nesting in Lewes and the surrounding area through providing and encouraging more swift nesting.
- 1.2 To increase people's awareness and knowledge of Swifts through education and engagement.
- 1.3 To provide opportunities for local people to get actively involved in, appreciate and be educated about their local Swifts.
- 1.4 To encourage and support the residents of Lewes to take actions for nature recovery which will benefit the insects and invertebrates on which Swifts depend for their food and keep Lewes as a Swift-friendly town.**

## 2. Annual Swift Survey - Methods

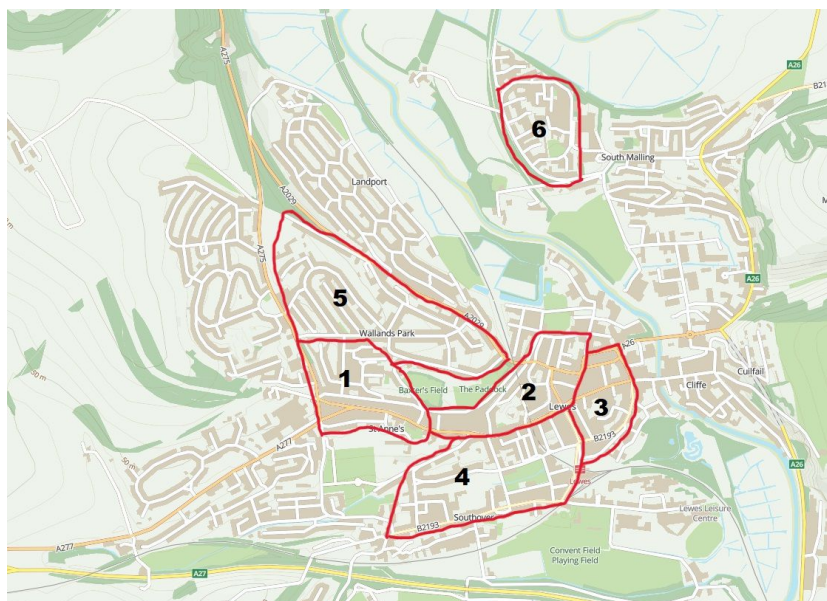
In order to pursue our first objective, LSS has conducted a survey of the Swift population in Lewes in 2024, as it did in the five previous years. The results of these earlier years' surveys were reported in previous LSS Annual Reports<sup>1</sup>. The most robust and useful indicator is the number of entrance holes in buildings seen to be used repeatedly by Swifts, generally and loosely referred to here as the number of 'nests'.

### 2.1 Methods employed

The survey methods employed in 2024 used sightings from both systematic and casual surveys, used to detect changes in the estimated total number of nests, were the same as those applied in 2022 and 2023 (Methods described in detail in Appendices listed in Section 6).

### 2.2. Systematic Survey

The six areas in Lewes covered by the systematic survey of Swifts were the same as those used in 2022 and 2023 (Fig 1), which focused on areas where breeding had previously been detected.



**Figure 1.** Design of systematic survey of Swifts organised into six areas of Lewes used in 2024, which is the same as that used in 2023, and 2022 with two areas renumbered.

<sup>1</sup> <https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesswiftpartners/lss-annual-reports/>

Implementation of the new survey design was enabled by the welcome addition of one new surveyor. All surveyors were allocated to an area and asked to survey that area at least twice a month during the three-month period from May to July, while the Swifts are in Lewes. The timing of each survey was still for a period between approximately 7.30pm and 9.30pm or dusk. The general survey design, surveyor instructions, (Appendix A), and reporting forms, (Appendix B), used by each surveyor, were all the same as those used in 2023 and 2022. The instructions contain a description of the types of Swift activity that were to be reported, (e.g., low-flying party or banging), and those to be excluded, (i.e., high-flying Swifts above twice house height, as these are not necessarily local birds).

### 2.3. Casual sightings

Casual sightings of Swifts were made across the whole of Lewes, including extra visits to the areas covered by the systematic survey and other areas. These reports were partially made by the surveyors, using LSS Reporting forms. A substantial number of 59 casual reports were also made by other Supporters and the general public, as part of the Lewes Swift Watch project, through Facebook, our LSS webpage, Twitter/X, and email. LSS are very grateful to all of those people who submitted sightings, and all the reports with sufficient detail have been included in the main database (Appendix C).

### 2.4. Methodologies for two alternative surveying designs applied this year

These methods will be discussed in Section 3.3, (3.3.1 Timed surveys at selected swift colonies, and 3.3.2 Parallel traverses surveying flying swifts, or RSPB design).

## 3. Annual Swift Survey – Results

All of the Swift sightings reported to the LSS Recorder have now been entered into the national and international database BirdTrack<sup>1</sup>, which is hosted by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO).

Address	Number of Nests*					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
St Anne's Church, High Street	8	19	12	6	8	16
98 Western Road	5	8	6	9	7	5
The Maltings, Castle Precincts	1	4	8	8	11	8
Flea Market, Market Street			7	7	10	7
St. Swithun's Terrace, (rear of 80b High Street)	2	3	5	4	5	8
Marchand Son, 30-31 Station Street	2	3	5	8	8	7
6 St Martin's Lane	2	3	3	6	5	5
22 King Henry's Road	2	3	3	1	3	2
Swift House, Market Lane	1	2	4	1	1	1
28 Valence Road	3	2	4	3	2	2
169 Old Malling Way		2		1		
Pigeon House, (next to 51 Potters Lane)			2	2		2
52 Southover High St. (Anne of Cleves House)	2	1	2	1	1	
58 Southover High Street			1	2	2	2
59 Southover High Street		1	1	1	2	2
Westfield House, Western Road			1	1	1	1
77 High Street			1	1		
144 High Street	2	1	1	1	1	1
2b Gallows Bank, Abinger Place	1	1	1	3	2	1
32 Grange Road	1	1	1	1		1
24 De Montfort Road	1	1	1	1	1	1
5 De Montfort Road		1	1	1	1	1
27 De Montfort Road						1
47 The Avenue			1	2	1	1
49 The Avenue				1		

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack>

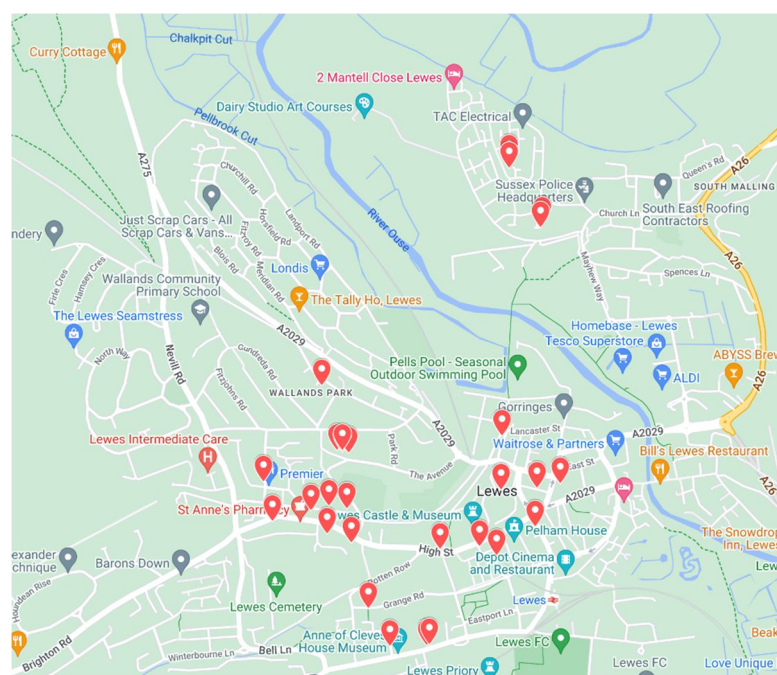
Address	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
51 The Avenue	1	1			1	1
53 The Avenue						1
57 The Avenue			1	1	1	1
59 The Avenue		1	1	1	1	
1 Bridgewick Close		1				
4 Bridgewick Close		1				
6 Bridgewick Close		1	1		2	1
7 Bridgewick Close		1	1			
8 Bridgewick Close		2	1	1	1	1
12 Lambert Place				1		
76 Prince Edwards Rd				1		
51 Potters Lane				2	2	2
102 Weston Road					1	
Montessori Nursery, De Montfort Road					1	
Old Malling Way (flats)					1	
Mealla Close						2
<b>Total number of 'nests'</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Total number of buildings with nests</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Average number of nests per building</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>
<b>Total number of Swift sighting reports submitted to LSS</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>1843</b>	<b>2038</b>	<b>2031</b>	<b>2454</b>	<b>2463</b>

**Table 1. (above)** Buildings in Lewes where the specified number of active nest hole entrances, or 'nests'\*, were found in the 2024 Swift survey, with the 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 results for comparison. The apparent increase in total numbers of nests and buildings detected 2019-2022 is not evidence of an increase in Swift population, as discussed below. (\* it was not possible to ascertain whether successful breeding took place at these locations).

### 3.1. Key findings of systematic survey

A total number of 2,463 sighting of Swifts and their active nest entrances, made both in the systematic and casual observations, and reported to LSS in 2024 (Appendix C, sheet 1), is slightly up from 2,454 in 2023. A total of 84 active Swift nest hole entrances was reported in 28 buildings, (summarised in Table, 1, with details and photos of key sites in Appendix C, sheets 2-4).

The distribution of breeding Swifts, especially the larger colonies, is concentrated in the older buildings, generally in the more central areas of Lewes, (Fig 2).



**Figure 2.** Distribution within Lewes of the 28 locations (📍) that were estimated to have the 84 active Swift 'nests' in 2024.

### 3.2. Detection of temporal trends in Swift population in Lewes

Comparisons between the total numbers of 84 nests reported in 2024 compared to the 83 in 2023, and also to 79 in 2022, suggest no significant change in the number of nests found over this period. However, these figures can't be used to infer constant breeding success, (or therefore total Swift population), as we are not able to detect whether or not there are fledglings within the nests in most buildings in Lewes.

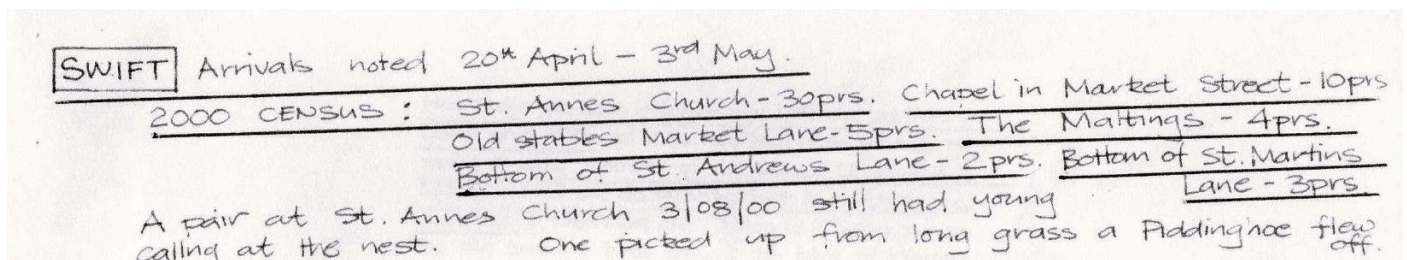
Reliable comparisons against annual nest numbers over the initial period to 2019 to 2021 is also problematic. Comparing the 84 nests found in 2024 against the 34, 64 and 76 found in that initial period, (see Table 1), cannot be used as reliable evidence of a doubling in the Swift population due to two changes in the survey methodology across those early years. Firstly, the number of surveyed areas changed between these years, either with areas added, (two in 2020, and a further four added in 2021), or removed, (three in 2022). A 'new' colony was discovered at the Flea Market in 2021 which had 7 nests in 2024, but it was detected only as the result of setting up a new survey area in 2021, (Area 3 on Fig 1). It is possible that this colony existed in 2019 and 2020 but remained undetected. The second change was in the variable and generally increasing number of reported sightings.

The total number of sighting reports for all years, (Table 1, final row), has generally increased from 150 in 2019 to 1,843 in 2020, 2,038 in 2021 and 2,463 in 2024. A consequence of these changes has undoubtedly led to an increase in the number of sites identified, especially from 2019 to 2022, and probably the number of nests detected at some of these sites. The extra information gained from the increased survey effort, (e.g. 2019 – 2022), has made a very valuable contribution to our understanding of these Swift colonies, that was largely confirmed in 2023 and 2024. However, it has had the unintended consequence of making the detection of changes in population size less reliable, especially over the first 3 years of these surveys. The results of the systematic surveys made over the first three years, (2019 to 2021), were not sufficiently comparable to draw any reliable conclusions about any possible changes in the size of the Swift population in Lewes over this period.

The application of a consistent survey methodology over the same area for the whole breeding season, was therefore implemented in 2022 – 2024. These three results appear to show a reasonably constant number of nests detected over this period, (mean of 82 nests), within the inevitable random fluctuations. However, a much longer period, (e.g., in excess of ten years) will be required to clarify the longer-term trend in the Swift population of Lewes.

### 3.3. Longer term comparison of Swift population in Lewes.

Comparison of the 2024 results against a survey that was recorded prior to 2019 are also problematic. This is because the few earlier surveys did not aim to survey the whole of Lewes, but only focussed on a small number of colonies. However, a comparison for a limited number of locations can be attempted. One focussed and a non-systematic survey of Swifts in Lewes that was made for 2000, and reported in 2004 by Mike Helps<sup>1</sup>.



SWIFT Arrivals noted 20<sup>th</sup> April - 3<sup>rd</sup> May.

2000 CENSUS: St. Annes Church - 30prs. Chapel in Market Street - 10prs.  
Old stables Market Lane - 5prs. The Martings - 4prs.  
Bottom of St. Andrews Lane - 2prs. Bottom of St. Martins Lane - 3prs.

A pair at St. Annes Church 3/08/00 still had young calling at the nest. One picked up from long grass a Piddinghoe flew off.

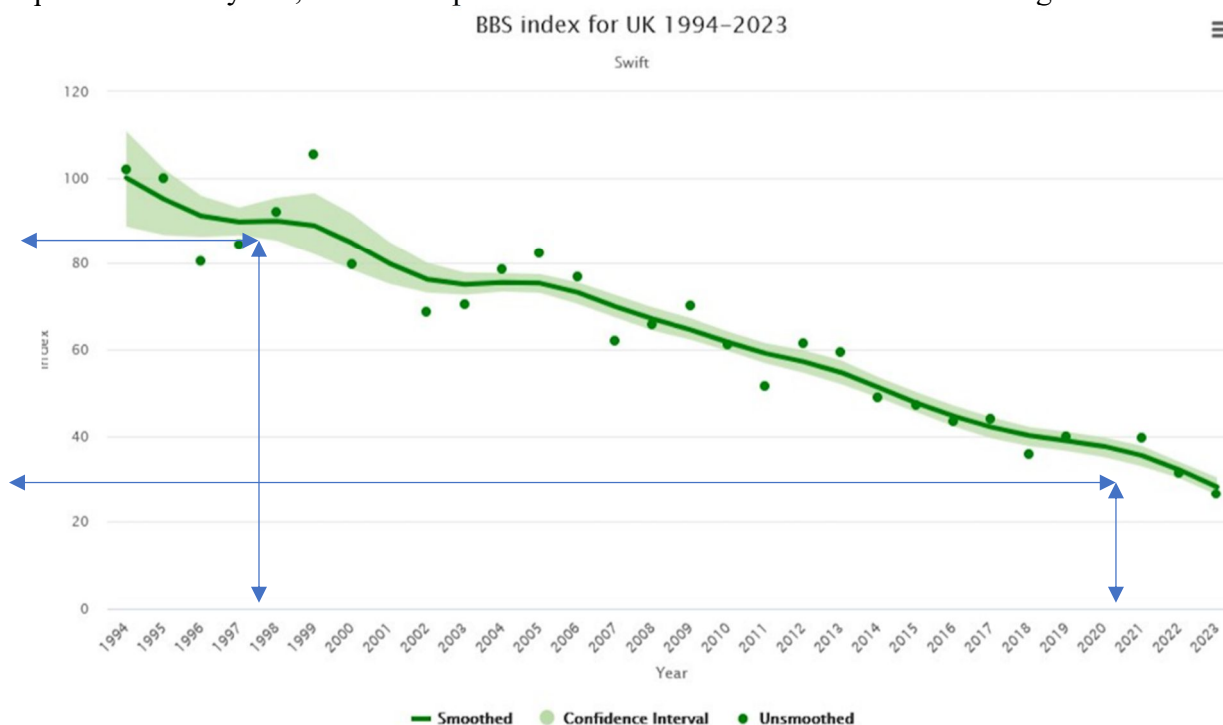
**Figure 3.** Extract from the publication by Mike Helps in 2004<sup>1</sup> showing the handwritten results of his survey of the arrivals of Swifts at key sites in Lewes from 20<sup>th</sup> April to 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2000, used as the source for the comparison in Table 2.

<sup>1</sup> Mike Helps (2004) 'Lewes Landscapes and Bird' (Private Publication, copies in Lewes Library)

'Nests' found in years:	2000	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Swift colony location							
St Anne's Church	30	8	19	12	6	8	16
Old Stable in Market Lane	5	1	2	4	1	1	1
The Maltings	4	1	4	8	8	11	8
Bottom of St Martin's Lane	3	2	3	3	6	5	5
Chapel (Flea Market) in Market Street	10	0	0	7	7	10	7
Bottom of St Andrew's Lane	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>37</b>
% Decline since 2000		-78	-48	-37	-48	-35	-31

**Table 2.** Comparison of number of Swift nests at six colonies reported in the six LSS surveys (2019-2024) against those reported for the year 2000 by Helps (2004)<sup>1</sup>. ('0' indicates not detected)

Helps reported the number of pairs of Swifts nesting in six of the colonies that existed in Lewes in the year 2000, (Figure 3 and Table 2). Interestingly, the discovery by LSS in 2021 of the colony in the Flea Market, was partially enabled by Help's report of 10 pairs nesting in the then Chapel in Market Street in 2000. The comparison, (Table 2), shows that seven of the ten colonies reported by Helps still exist in 2024, but the one at the bottom of St Andrew's Lane has apparently not survived. The original total of 54 nests in these six colonies has declined to 37 nests in 2024, suggesting a 31% reduction (Table 2). This compares with an apparent decline of 78% at these same colonies found in 2019, and between 48% and 35% decline in 2020 to 2023. The average of all six of these estimates of decline is 47%, (equal to a loss of 25 pairs), and this gives a very approximate but more robust indication of the scale of the general decline in the breeding population in Lewes. The UK national picture of the Swift population is of a 68% decline between 2000 and 2023<sup>1</sup> (Fig 3), and a 73% decline from 1994 to 2023. The more local situation in Sussex is of an approximately 81% decline from 2000 to 2023, and 94% decline from 1994 – 2023, (Fig 4). The 47% decline estimated in Lewes by LSS, therefore appears less severe than in Sussex generally and the UK. However, this conclusion must be viewed as very tentative, as all of the LSS survey values suffer from the limitations that were discussed above, about differences in the effectiveness and comparability of the survey techniques across the years, and how representative this small number of colonies might be.

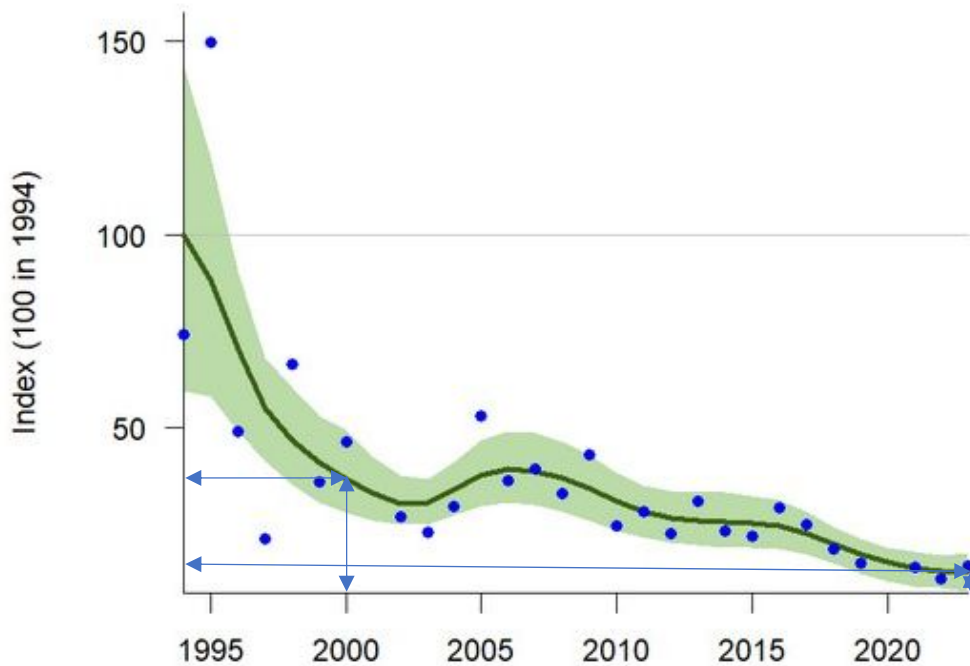


**Figure 3.** National UK fall in **Swift** population<sup>1</sup>, model showing 68% decline between 2000 and 2023 (Index 85 to 27)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/breeding-bird-survey/latest-results/population-trend-graphs> (accessed 29/10/2024)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/breeding-bird-survey/latest-results/population-trend-graphs> (accessed 29/10/2024)

## BBS index for Sussex 1994–2023 Swift



**Figure 4.** BBS Survey results for *Swifts* in Sussex<sup>1</sup> from which the model shows an 81% decline 2000 to 2023 (Index 35 to 6.5), which is probably even larger than the average estimate decline in Lewes of around 47% in 2000 to 2024.

### 3.4. Alternative Swift Survey Strategies

The limitation of the current systematic survey strategy to reliably detect temporal change in the Swift population of Lewes has led to the evaluation of two potential alternative or additional strategies this year.

#### 3.4.1 Fixed Time surveys at selected Swift colonies

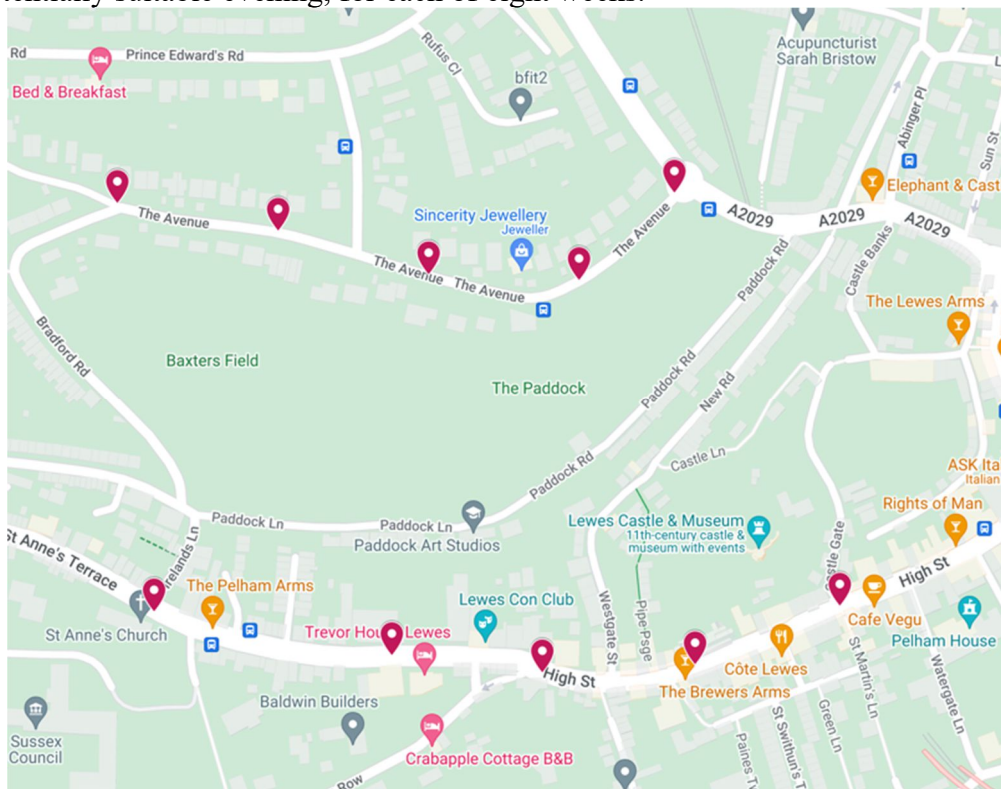
One alternative Swift survey design trialled was a fixed-time survey. This general design was suggested to LSS by Peter Hughes, (Survey’s officer of SOS), during his invited visit to the LSS-AGM in 2023. The aim was to improve the detection of temporal trends in the Swift population of Lewes, in a time-efficient way. A fixed observation time of two hours was applied to each of three Swift colonies, (St Anne’s Church, The Maltings and The Flea Market), on two suitable evenings, one in June and one in July. The results of these counts, (Table 3), show very variable numbers of Swift sightings reported, even at the same colony in the two different months, varying by over a factor of two for one colony, (i.e. 110 and 51 at the Flea Market, Table 3, column 8). Part of the cause will be the very variable nature of Swift activity at any one colony from day to day, even when the weather conditions seem superficially similar. Another potential factor explaining the variability could be the number of observations reported in the two-hour survey period, (e.g. 42 and 16 at the Flea Market, column 7). The survey design does not specify how often to make such a report, and this decision can be subjective when Swifts are almost continually flying around the colony. Considering comparisons between different colonies, (Table 3, column 8) appears to show that there were more reported Swift sightings at St Anne’s Church, (average 190), than at the Flea Market, (average 80). Understandably the number of nests that have either Swift entries or exits in that 2 hour period, (i.e. up to 5 at St Anne’s, 4 at Flea Market, 5 at Maltings, column 10), does not correspond consistently to the total number of ‘nests’ detected in the three month systematic survey of these sites, (i.e. 16 at St Anne’s, 7 at Flea Market, 8 at Maltings from Table 1, column 7.). The number of entries and exits recorded, (Table 3, column 11), also varies substantially between the two months at any one colony, (by nearly a factor of 2), and is not apparently related to any of the other variables. Overall, therefore, the counts arising from these fixed time surveys, given their high variability, seem unlikely to give reliable metrics from the estimation of temporal change in the Swift population at any of the colonies.

Colony location	Month	Date	Surveyor	Start time	Finish time	No. of observations	No. of swifts sighted	No. of bangers	No. of nests with entry/exit	No. of entry/exits
St Anne's Church	June	17/06/2024	AJ + NJ	19:15	21:25	25	200	5	3	17
St Anne's Church	July	11/07/2024	AJ + NJ	19:30	21:45	22	181	0	5	9
Flea Market	June	20/06/2024	MR	19:45	21:45	42	110	0	1	8
Flea Market	July	19/07/2024	KM	19:30	21:35	16	51	0	4	5
Maltings	June	18/06/2024	KM	19:45	21:20	45	77	5	4	26
Maltings	July	17/07/2024	KM	19:34	21:30	32	128	3	5	14

**Table 3.** Summary results of Fixed Time (2hr) Surveys of three swift colonies in Lewes ('No.' is abbreviation of 'Number').

### 3.4.2 Parallel traverses surveying of flying Swifts (RSPB design)

The second alternative Swift survey designs trialled this year was developed by Banbury and Peach, (2017)<sup>1</sup> from RSPB, but never applied previously to our knowledge. It uses the same general principle as the design used throughout the UK for the BTOs Breeding Birds Survey (BBS)<sup>2</sup>. The BBS design selects a 1km square within which two parallel traverses are walked in an approximately constant time, in order to give good comparability of counts of all bird species between years, and also between squares. The 'RSPB' design for Swifts applied in Lewes required the surveyor to walk along two roughly parallel traverses, both 400 m long, made up of four 100m sections. These two traverse lines were placed in the central area of the town, (Fig. 5), that is already known for its Swift activity, (the area around the word 'Lewes' in Fig. 2). The surveyors counted the flying Swifts they observed, also noting whether their height was above or below 50m, and whether the Swifts were screaming. This approximately 30-minute walk was repeated once a week, on a potentially suitable evening, for each of eight weeks.



**Figure 5.** Map of central Lewes showing the way-markers, 100m apart (📍 symbol) on two roughly parallel 400m traverses used for implementation of the flying Swift survey (based upon Banbury and Peach, 2017<sup>1</sup>, from RSPB)

<sup>1</sup> J. Banbury and W. Peach (2017) RSPB Swift Survey 2017 – Field Instructions for Line Transects. RSPB Centre for Conservation Science, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/breeding-bird-survey>



The results of the implementation of this survey design (Table 4) shows great variability in the total number of flying Swifts recorded, which vary from zero to 32 birds over the total of eight segments in the two traverses.

Survey Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Survey Date	15/05/2024	23/05/2024	30/05/2024	05/06/2024	12/06/2024	19/06/2024	27/06/2024	04/07/2024
Start time	20:06	20:00	20:17	20:08	20:08	20:09	20:07	20:16
Finish time	20:30	20:25	20:37	20:38	20:30	20:32	20:33	20:37
Temp (°C)	17	15	14	15	14	17	17	17
Wind	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	2
Cloud (Eighths)	2	2	7	6	2	1	1	7
Section Number	Count*	Count*	Count*	Count*	Count*	Count*	Count*	Count*
1	0	15	11	17	0	4	0	0
2	0	12	1	3	1	0	0	0
3	0	0	1***	0	0	0	0	0
4	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0
5	0	2**	0	5	0	5	0	0
6	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0
7	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
8	0	3	0	0	0	4	0	0
<b>Total swifts recorded</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

**Table 4.** Results of the Parallel traverses surveying of flying Swifts (\* height < 50m unless otherwise stated, \*\* 1 screaming, 1 > 50m, \*\*\* > 50m)

One possible application of the results of this survey is that, if the same design were repeated in subsequent years, then the average number of Swifts recorded, (e.g. 12 this year), may be compared between years to detect temporal change. The problem with this approach is the very large amount of uncertainty in this average value. The selection of which days to survey, as being ‘potentially suitable’, (e.g. not raining or windy), still obviously leaves many unknown factors unaccounted for. For example, the surveyors found that recorded Swift numbers varied enormously, (i.e. 0 to 32 birds), even when the external factors, such as the weather, seemed to be similar. To show the effects of this variability, if just one of the eight days had been very active, (count 32), rather than inactive, (count 0), then the mean would have been 16, (i.e. 33% higher). The judgement of the LSS Committee is that the results from this survey do not suggest that the findings are robust enough to justify the continued use of this design in Lewes.

### 3.5 Swallows and House Martins in Sussex and Lewes

Other UK visitors which also gather insects on the wing, in a similar way to Swifts, are Swallows and House Martins. The BBS Survey data for these two birds in Sussex, (discussed in more detail in last year’s LSS Annual report for 2023), also showed steep declines over the period 2000 - 2022. For Swallows, the decline in population in Sussex over that period was estimated to be 36%, but an even greater decline of 72% for House Martins.

LSS therefore decided in 2022 to start recording the locations of the nests of Swallows and House Martins in Lewes, from that year. Verbal reports have been received by LSS members of historic colonies of house martin nests in several areas of Lewes. However, very few current House Martin nests were reported in 2024, but these included St. John’s Terrace, (Fig 6a), Garden Street and Corporation Villas. Consequently, LSS funded the installation of artificial House Martin cups in St. John’s Terrace, Garden Street and in Dorset Road, (Fig 6b), because until recently House Martins had built their own nests here and LSS wished to encourage them to return. Two of the new cups in St John’s Terrace were visited by House Martins this year.



**Figure 6.** (a) Natural House Martin cup in St. John's Terrace and (b) an artificial cup which LSS installed in Dorset Road

One natural House Martin nest was also found under the north end gables of a building in a relatively recent housing development, outside our normal survey areas, off Kingston Road near the former Spring Barn Farm. However, this was a decrease from the two such nests reported from there in 2023. In this same development, two Swallow nests were also found in out-buildings in 2024, and thankfully this number has been maintained since 2023. Casual reporting by LSS members and the public, (but not a systematic survey), will be continued to try to establish whether there are any more House Martin or Swallow nests in the LTC area.

### 3.6 Review of the survey designs used in 2024

The decision to keep the systematic survey design areas used in 2022 constant for 2023 and 2024 has been beneficial in enabling improved comparability between observations across these years. In addition, the LSS has implemented two other possible options for further improving the reliability in detecting any temporal trends in the Swift population of Lewes (Section 3.3). Following the realisation of the limitations of the two new possible survey options, it was decided by the LSS Committee that the continuation of the current systematic survey is the more reliable option to help decide whether Swift numbers in Lewes are stable, increasing or decreasing, in order to meet LSS's first objective: 'To increase the number of Swifts nesting in Lewes.'

#### 3.6.1 Role of Casual Survey.

It is probable that undiscovered Swift nests do still exist in Lewes, for example at the rear of buildings, where systematic surveyors cannot detect them. It is therefore important to continue with the Swift Watch where Supporters and members of the public can report sightings that may reveal these previously undetected nests, as happened in 2021 at 77 High Street and at 76 Prince Edwards Road in 2022. It is helpful, therefore, in addition to the fixed survey design option, to retain and encourage casual survey reports, (e.g. via Swift Watch), to establish whether previously unknown breeding sites are present.

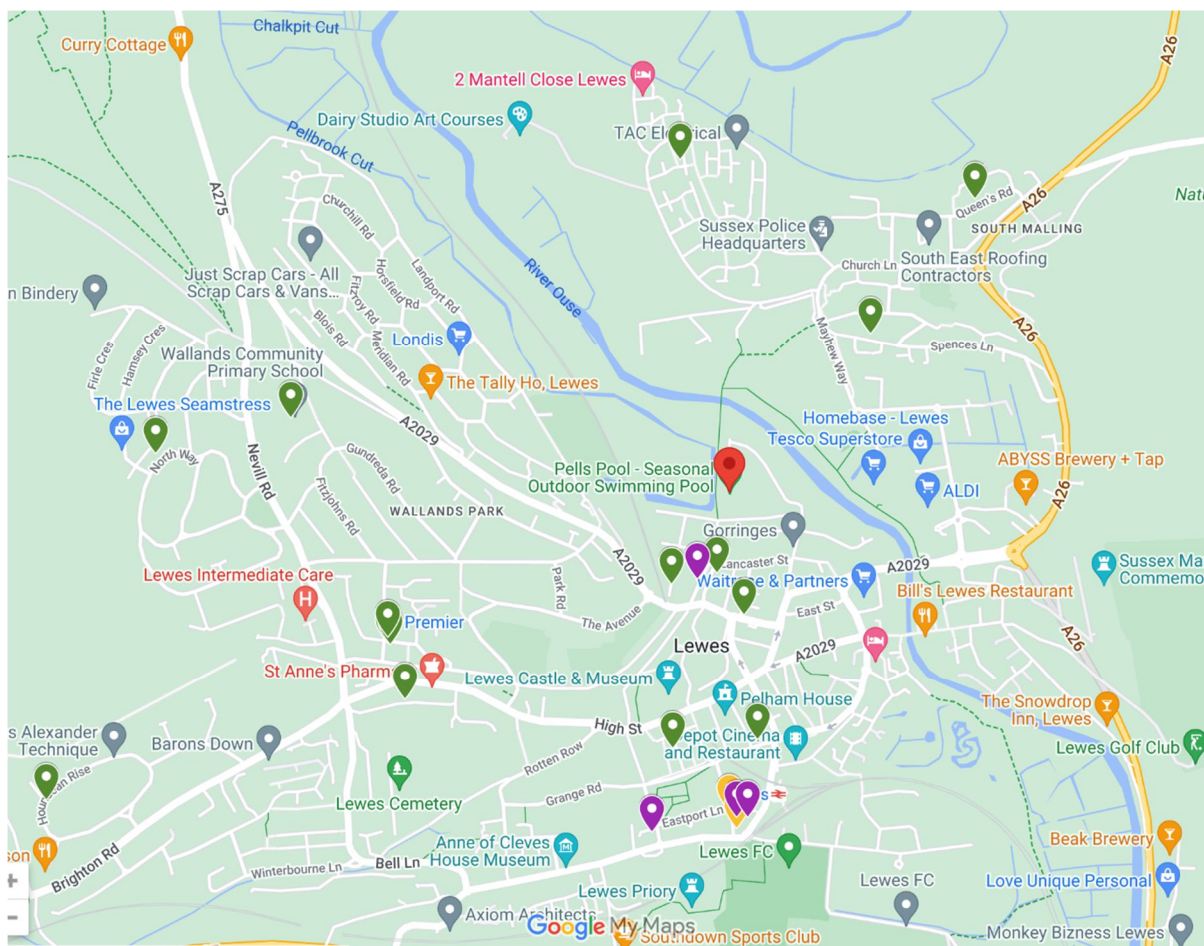
## 4. Other LSS activities in 2024

LSS conducted a number of other activities in support of our objectives.

### 4.1 Site visits.

Members of LSS made 45 visits to sites where occupiers or developers requested advice on the feasibility and optimal location for installing Swift accommodation. In most cases these visits resulted in installation of Swift boxes on existing buildings and informing planning to locate Swift bricks within new buildings or extensions.

## 4.2 Swift boxes and Swift bricks



**Figure 5.** Map of Lewes showing (as dark green markers ) the locations of 26 new swift boxes installed in 2024.

Twenty-six new Swift boxes with 30 breeding spaces were installed in Lewes in 2024, (Fig. 5), mainly with advice from LSS, (Appendix D). LSS has installed 175 boxes installed since 2020, of which 68 were LSS funded. The LSS Committee identified sites in Malling, such as Bridgewick Close, Harvard Close and Lambert Place, as the most promising sites for new Swift boxes initially in 2022 and again in 2024, after considering a short list of six such potential areas<sup>1</sup>. However, full implementation of this objective has been problematic because of access and the height of the buildings that offered potential sites for boxes. Our records of the council-owned properties in Malling that have existing Swift nests have been shared with Lewes District Council officers who are keen to safeguard the sites during any renovations.

This year four pairs of Swifts nested in four different Swift boxes in Lewes, as opposed to the more traditional location within buildings, usually entering under the eaves. Experience in other towns suggests that it often takes several years from the installation of a Swift box or brick for it to be used for breeding by Swifts. However, there was one nest box that was installed in 2022 that was occupied by Swifts after only one month. Swift-callers are played at many of the Swift boxes in Lewes, in order to draw the attention of prospecting Swifts to these locations and thereby increase the rate at which the boxes are likely to be occupied.

For House Martins, LSS have funded and installed a total of 10 artificial nest cups in 2024.

LSS wish to thank and acknowledge Dave Boddington, Swift Champion for SOS, for his excellent work on helping our team to install many of the Swift boxes and House Martin cups in Lewes this year.

<sup>1</sup> Six potential locations for the new swift-box project in 2022 [Number of Nests in 2024]: High Street & St Martin's Lane [13], The Maltings [8], Flea Market [7], Southover High Street & Potter's Lane [7], The Avenue [4], Malling, (Bridgewick Close, Harvard Close, Lambert Place) [4]

### 4.3 Interaction with Supporters and General Public

Wider interaction between LSS, supporters and the general public was enabled by organisation of activities such as:

- Regular updates to the LSS website<sup>1</sup>, that was set up in 2021
- 13th March: Swift Q and A at Depot with LSS following the screening of the “White Diamond” film about White-tipped Swifts in Guyana.
- 24th April to 4th May: Two weeks of a “Celebrating Swifts” exhibition at Lewes Climate Hub including a talk by Edward Mayer of Swift Conservation on “Swifts and Urban Biodiversity”
- 10th June: Presentation about Lewes Swift Supporters to Sussex Local Nature Recovery seminar
- 11th June: Presentation about Swifts and how to help them at Wallands School assembly
- 25th July: Meeting with the Mayor of Lewes to discuss LSS “Swift-friendly Town” proposal
- 29th June to 10th July: Four Swift walks during Swift Awareness week, 40 participants
- 29th July: Interview by ITV Meridian News
- 31st August: LSS stall at Societies Fair
- 3rd September 2024: LSS AGM held in person at the Linklater Pavilion, including a talk by Paul Stevens on “Swifts, Swallows, and Martins”
- 19th September: Lewes Town Council formally approved the designation of Lewes as a Swift-friendly town
- 1st November: Presentation to the House of Friendship on Swifts and Trees
- 17th November: LSS stall and activities at STEM Festival at Town Hall
- LSS membership expanded to 335 people who have now given their contact details and asked to receive LSS communications, (e.g., newsletters, reports, news of walks, talks, and events)
- Published and disseminated four editions of LSS Newsletter in April, May, June and July 2024<sup>2</sup>.
- Updated LSS social media outlets:
  - o Facebook group, “*Lewes Swift Supporters*”, currently with 351 followers
  - o X/Twitter, @LewesSwifts, with 1072 followers
  - o New Instagram account, @lewesswifts, with 66 followers
  - o New Blue Sky account, @lewesswifts.bsky.social, 71 followers
- Numerous posts of LSS information on Facebook and Twitter, including 54 reports of Swift sightings from our Facebook group members within the Lewes Swift Watch project.
- Sales of second batch of LSS badges to raise funds to buy and install more nest boxes.
- LSS information postcards distributed at events as listed above and during Swift surveys.

### 4.4. Interactions with external bodies

LSS has been maintaining active links with Lewes Town Council, (LTC), Lewes and Eastbourne District Council, (L&EDC), and the South Downs National Park, (SDNP), in order to embed advice on providing Swift accommodation into the consideration of suitable planning applications. The leaflet written by LSS<sup>3</sup>, and adopted by LTC and submitted to L&EDC and SDNP, continues to be used. LSS has also contributed recommendations for the inclusion of Swift accommodation on individual planning applications, (e.g. for the Phoenix Development).

In September 2024 Lewes Town Council gave formal approval to our proposal to declare Lewes to be a Swift-friendly town. We contacted all of the external bodies that we interact with and asked for their help in spreading the word about Swifts and encouraging residents to take actions to increase the biodiversity on which Swifts and other animals depend. This support was readily offered by Lewes Town Council, Lewes Urban Arboretum, Friends of Lewes, Wildflower Lewes, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Love our Ouse, Lewes Climate Hub, Baxter’s Field, the Railway Land Wildlife Trust, Priory School, Wallands School, South Downs National Park Trust, Ouse Valley Climate Action, Western Road School, Lewes District Council,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesswiftsupporters/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesswiftsupporters/newsletters/>

<sup>3</sup> LSS leaflet for LTC: Consideration of Swift Accommodation when Considering a Planning Application. Available from LSS by emailing [lewesswifts@gmail.com](mailto:lewesswifts@gmail.com)

Swift Conservation, RSPB, Chalk Cliff Trust, Sussex Ornithological Society, Moore Law, and the People's Park for Nature.

See more details on our webpage: <https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesswiftsupporters/lewes-a-swift-friendly-town/>

Funding for the purchase and installation of multiple Swift boxes at strategically important locations, was secured through kind donations made by Supporters, businesses, and members of the public, badge sales and people who chose Lewes Swift Supporters as their “good cause” in Lewes Local Lottery. A successful grant application to the Chalk Hill Trust will fund more Swift boxes in 2025 and sponsor our “Swift-friendly Town – Nature Recovery” season at Lewes Climate Hub, (23<sup>rd</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2025).

## 5. Recommendations for future work

The experience and findings from the operation of LSS in 2024 are being used to plan improvements for 2025. These included:

- Retain the current systematic Swift survey design unchanged for 2025
- Continue the casual recording of the locations of the nests of Swallows and House Martins in Lewes, (LTC area), and fund artificial House Martin cups on or near buildings where recent nests have been recorded.
- Review the number and training of any new surveyors required to cover the systematic survey areas.
- Continue to fund the purchase and installation of Swift boxes near existing colonies in Lewes.
- Continue to promote Lewes as a Swift-friendly Town and encourage and support the planting of wildflowers and trees, and the installation of ponds, to help to reverse the dramatic decline in populations of the insects and invertebrates on which Swifts depend for their food, (in collaboration with other local community organisations).

## 6. Conclusions

In 2024 Lewes Swift Supporters successfully conducted the sixth systematic survey of the Swift population of Lewes. From a total of 2463 reported, LSS has estimated that there are 84 active ‘nests’, (i.e., hole entrances recorded as being used repeatedly by Swifts). The roughly constant number of nests detected in 2022, 2023 and 2024, (79, 83 and 84 respectively), suggests no significant decline in the Swift population of Lewes over this period. However, the apparent increase of 20 on the 64 nests located in the 2020 survey is not considered to be conclusive evidence of an increase in the size of the Swift population but is probably due to changes in the survey methodology since 2020. Comparison with a limited survey of six Swift colonies recorded in 2000, suggests an average of around a 47 % decrease in Swifts nesting in Lewes since that time, which appears numerally to be somewhat less than the estimated decline of 68% in the UK (and 81% in Sussex) over a similar period.

## 6. Appendices

Copies of this report, and the LSS Annual Reports for 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023, are available on the LSS Website<sup>1</sup>. The following appendices are available by request from the LSS Secretary. Please contact via [lewesswifts@gmail.com](mailto:lewesswifts@gmail.com)

- A. Survey Instructions for LSS Surveyors 2024  
Lewes Swift Survey 2024– methodology (Annual Report).pdf
- B. Survey Reporting Forms for LSS Surveyors 2024
  - a. Lewes Swift Survey 2024- recording form (Annual Report).pdf
  - b. Lewes Nest Activity Log 2024 (Annual Report).pdf
- C. List of all swift sightings reported in 2024  
LSS Survey 2024-locked +pictures (Annual Report).xlsx
- D. New Swift Boxes  
New Lewes Swift Boxes\_2024 (Annual Report).xlsx

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<sup>1</sup> <https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesswiftsupporters/lss-annual-reports/>