



Lewes Swift Supporters Annual Report for 2025

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

Mike Ramsey (Chair and Surveyor)

Audrey Jarvis (Secretary, Communications Officer, and Surveyor)

Kevin Murphy (Recorder and Surveyor)

Sharon Hall (Treasurer)

Crispin Holloway (Founder Member of LSS)

And the additional surveyors:-

Nick Jarvis, Susie O'Hare, Wendy Muriel, Larissa Conradt, George Lee, Loïck

Tyson, Emily Kramers, Natasha Stonestreet, Gillian Broad, Juliet Strang, James

Williams, Russo James, Ruth Lawrence

And 99 Swift reports by our members via social media

Summary

This report summarises the key achievements of Lewes Swift Supporters (LSS) during the seventh 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. The total number of 107 active Swift nest entrance holes were recorded, from a total number of 3076 reported Swift sightings (up 25% from 2463 in 2024). This estimated total number of 'nests' appears to be a substantial increase on the total reported in 2024 (84) 2023 (83) and 2022 (79), which suggests an increase of 27% over this last year, unlike the continued decline since 2000 seen in the rest of the UK in general (- 67%)¹. There was also an apparent increase in the Swift numbers for Sussex in the BBS survey in 2024¹, but that has yet to be substantiated for 2025. Rigorous comparison of these total numbers of 'nests' in Lewes with earlier years is constrained by differences in the number of survey visits and reported sightings between years, 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 28% (from 54 to 39 pairs), and 44% on average, on the numbers reported in 2000. This decline is again apparently less than the reported UK national decline of 67% for this same period. Lewes residents participated extensively in their contributions to the LSS survey via our website² and social media (e.g. 99 contributions, mainly via our Facebook group). Supporters were also kept informed of LSS activities via four LSS Newsletters³, and through social media interactions. Other activities included four Swift walks in July, and a well-attended AGM in October 2025. LSS have continued to advise on, or implement, the installation of 203 new

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

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

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

Swift boxes since 2020, including 25 new boxes this year. LSS have funded 77 of these boxes and 11 of the 18 artificial House Martin cups installed.

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 the following aims and objectives:

- 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.

When Lewes Town Council formally agreed the status of "Swift-Friendly Town" for Lewes in September 2024, we added a fourth objective:

- 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 2025, as it did in the six previous years. The results of these earlier years' surveys were reported in previous LSS Annual Reports⁴. 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 2025 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, 2023 and 2024 (Methods described in detail in Appendices listed in Section 7).

2.2. Systematic Survey

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

⁴ <https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesSwiftsupporters/lss-annual-reports/>



Figure 1. Design of systematic survey of Swifts organised into six areas of Lewes used in 2025, which has been used every year since 2022.

Implementation of this survey design was enabled by the welcome addition of 8 new surveyors. Each surveyor was allocated to an area and asked to survey that area at least twice a month when possible, for the three-month period from May to July, while the Swifts are in Lewes. The timing of each survey was 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 since 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 to other areas. These reports were partially made by the surveyors, using LSS Reporting forms. A substantial number of further 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, X-Twitter, verbal report, and email. LSS are very grateful to all of those people who submitted sightings, and all of their reports that have sufficient detail have been included in the main database (Appendix C).

3. Annual Swift Survey - Results

All of the Swift sightings were reported to the LSS Recorder and have now been entered into the national and international database BirdTrack⁵, which is hosted by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO).

⁵ <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack>

Address	Number of Nests*						2025
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	
					3		
St Anne's Church, High Street	8	19	12	6	8	16	22
98 Western Road	5	8	6	9	7	5	5
23 Western Road							1
The Maltings, Castle Precincts	1	4	8	8	11	8	9
Brack Mound House							1
Flea Market, Market Street			7	7	10	7	3
80b High Street (rear in St. Swithun's Terrace)	2	3	5	4	5	8	13
Marchand Son, 30-31 Station Street	2	3	5	8	8	7	5
6 St Martin's Lane	2	3	3	6	5	5	3
22 King Henry's Road	2	3	3	1	3	2	3
Swift House, Market Lane	1	2	4	1	1	1	2
28 Valence Road	3	2	4	3	2	2	2
65 Valance Road							2
169 Old Mallng Way		2		1			1
Pigeon House, (next to 51 Potters Lane)			2	2		2	1
52 Southover High St. (Anne of Cleves House)	2	1	2	1	1		1
58 Southover High Street			1	2	2	2	2
59 Southover High Street		1	1	1	2	2	2
Westfield House, Western Road			1	1	1	1	1
77 High Street			1	1			
144 High Street	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
18 St John's Terrace							1
22/23 St John's Terrace							1
2b Gallows Bank, Abinger Place	1	1	1	3	2	1	5
32 Grange Road	1	1	1	1		1	1
24 De Montfort Road	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
5 De Montfort Road		1	1	1	1	1	1
27 De Montfort Road						1	1
29 De Montfort Road							1
31 De Montfort Road							1
47 The Avenue			1	2	1	1	1
49 The Avenue				1			
51 The Avenue	1	1			1	1	2
53 The Avenue						1	
57 The Avenue			1	1	1	1	
59 The Avenue		1	1	1	1		2
1 Bridgewick Close		1					
4 Bridgewick Close		1					
6 Bridgewick Close		1	1		2	1	1
7 Bridgewick Close		1	1				1
8 Bridgewick Close		2	1	1	1	1	1
12 Lambert Place				1			
76 Prince Edwards Rd				1			
51 Potters Lane				2	2		1
102 Western Road					1		
Rotten Row House, Rotten Row							2
Montessori Nursery, De Montfort Road					1		
Old Mallng Way (flats)					1		
1 Mealla Close						1	
4 Mealla Close						3	3
Total number of 'nests'	34	64	76	79	83	84	107
Total number of buildings with nests	15	24	27	30	28	28	38
Average number of nests per building	2.3	2.7	2.8	2.6	3.0	3.0	2.8
Total number of Swift sighting reports submitted to LSS	150	1843	2038	2031	245	2463	3076
					4		

Table 1. Buildings in Lewes where the specified number of active nest hole entrances, or 'nests', were found in the 2025 Swift survey, with the results for 2019 to 2024 for comparison. The apparent

increase in total numbers of nests and buildings detected from 2024-2025 is not necessarily definitive evidence of an increase in Swift population, as discussed below. Eight new buildings reported for the first time to have 10 Swift nests are shown in **bold**. Four further new buildings for 2025 (with 5 nests) that were reported as not having nests in 2024, but have previously, are shown in ***bold italic***.

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

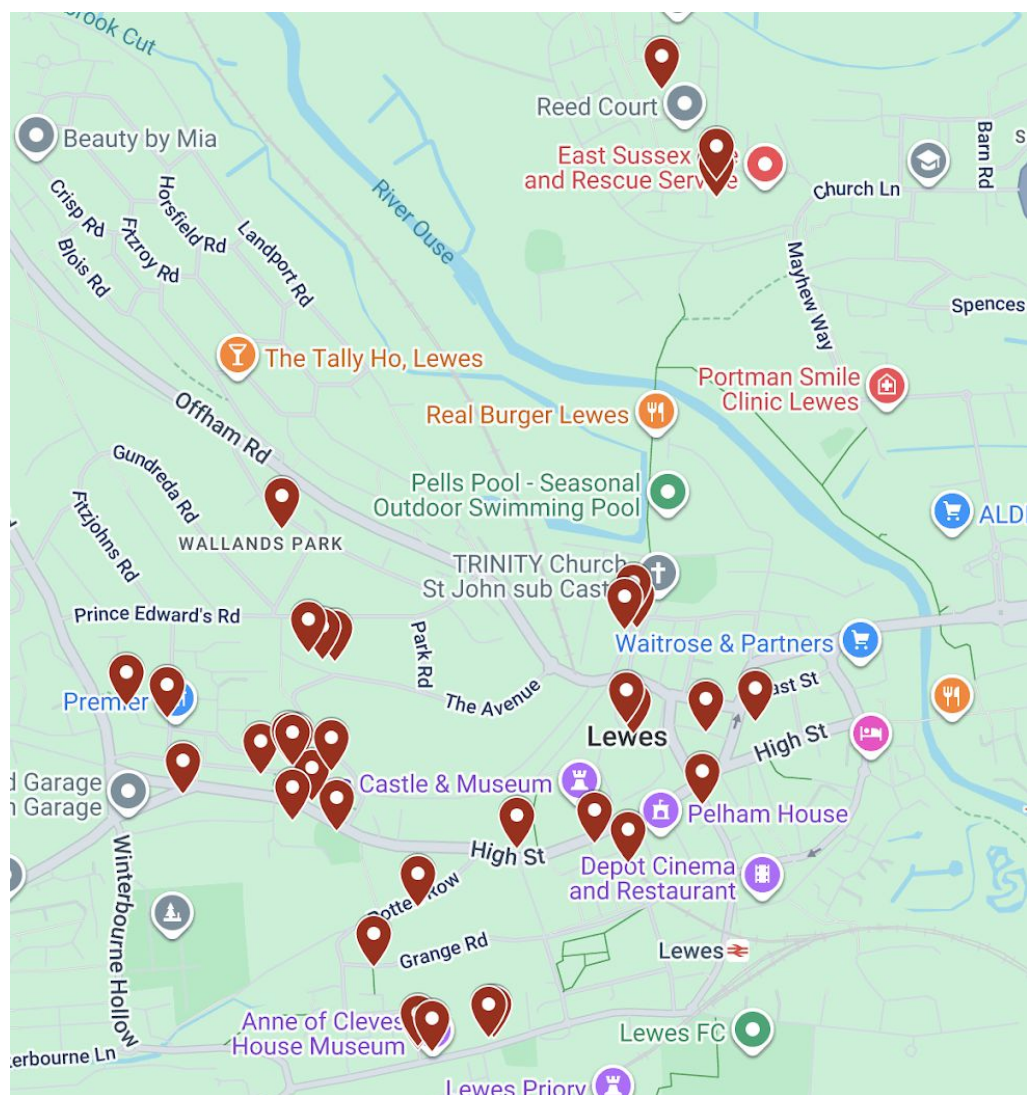


Figure 2. Distribution within Lewes of the 38 locations (📍) that were estimated to have the 107 active Swift ‘nests’ in 2025.

3.1. Key findings of systematic surveys

A total number of 3076 sightings of Swifts and their active nest entrances were made in both the systematic and casual observations, and reported to LSS in 2025 (Appendix C, sheet 1). This was a 25% increase on the 2463 sightings reported in 2024 (summarised in Table 1, with details and photos of key sites in Appendix C, sheets 2-4).

A total of 107 active Swift nest hole entrances was reported, up by 23 nests (or 27%) from the 84 in 2024. Three of the main swift colonies are shown in Figures 3, 4, 5 & 6. The number of buildings in which Swifts were found nesting increased by 10 (36%) from 28 in 2024 to 38 in 2025. Of these, 8 buildings were never previously reported to contain nests (bold font in Table 1) and had 10 new nests in total. Additionally, there are 4 buildings that did not have

reported nests in 2024 but did have a total of 5 nests this year (bold italic font in Table 1). Of the extra 23 (107-84) ‘nests’ reported overall in 2025 over 2024, 15 (68%) of these are from newly identified buildings. It is interesting to compare these with the changes that have been reported for the 12 existing locations where Swifts have been reported to be nesting continuously in all of the 7 survey years (Table 2).

Address	Number of Nests*							Average	2025	
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025		- 2024	2025-Av
St Anne’s Church, High Street	8	19	12	6	8	16	22	13.0	6	9.0
98 Western Road	5	8	6	9	7	5	5	6.4	0	-1.4
The Maltings, Castle Precincts	1	4	8	8	11	8	9	7.0	1	2.0
80b High Street (rear in St. Swithun’s Terrace)	2	3	5	4	5	8	13	5.7	5	7.3
Marchand Son, 30-31 Station Street	2	3	5	8	8	7	5	5.4	-2	-0.4
6 St Martin’s Lane	2	3	3	6	5	5	3	3.9	-2	-0.9
22 King Henry’s Road	2	3	3	1	3	2	3	2.4	1	0.6
Swift House, Market Lane	1	2	4	1	1	1	2	1.7	1	0.3
28 Valence Road	3	2	4	3	2	2	2	2.6	0	-0.6
144 High Street	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.1	0	-0.1
2b Gallows Bank, Abinger Place	1	1	1	3	2	1	5	2.0	4	3.0
24 De Montfort Road	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.0	0	0.0
Total number of ‘nests’	30	50	53	51	54	57	71		6 up 6 down or same	6 above Av 6 below or same as Av

Table 2. Trends in the 12 continuously occupied sites, showing only half of the sites (i.e. 6) had increased numbers of ‘nests’ in 2025 compared against both 2024 (column 10), and also against the average number of nests at that site since 2019 (column 11). Conversely, half of the site had fewer or unchanged number of nests since 2024. The overall increase at these sites since 2024 (14, = 71-57) apparently accounts for 64% of the overall increase (23, = 107-84)

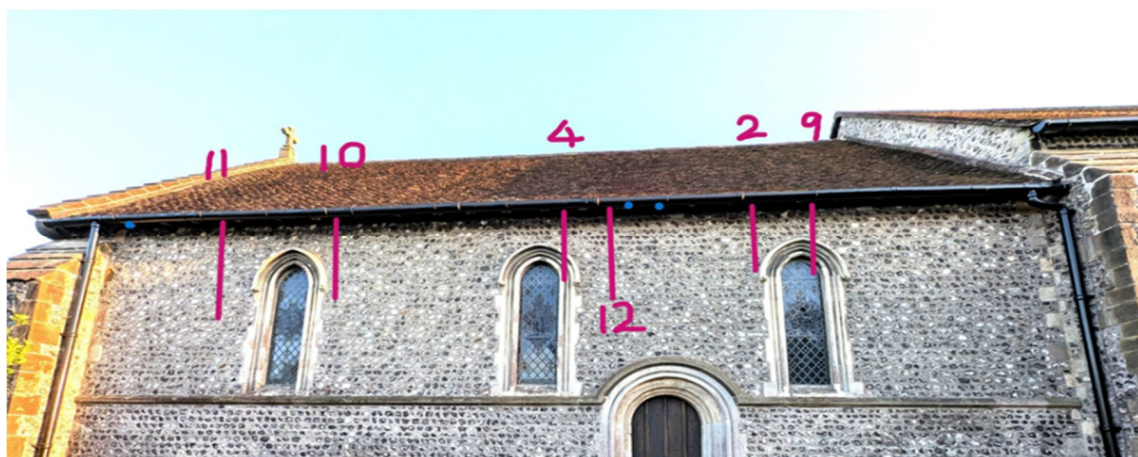


Figure 3. East front of St. Anne’s Church, with numbered nest entrances



Figure 4. West front of St. Anne's Church



Figure 5. The Maltings



Figure 6. Station Street

3.2. Detection of Temporal trends in Swift population in Lewes

Comparisons between the total numbers of 107 nests reported in 2025 compared to the 84 in 2024 would appear to suggest a substantial increase of 27% in the number of nests found over this one year. However, these figures are potentially affected by other factors that have also changed over that same period, such as (1) the number of reported sightings rose by 25% from 2463 in 2024, to 3076 in 2025, (2) the number of buildings where Swift nests have been reported increased 36% from 28 to 38. It is not known whether these 10 totally 'new' buildings previously did not have nests, or whether they had nests (e.g. 10 this year) that were just not detected. In the latter case at least some the apparent increase in total nest numbers (i.e. 23) would not be due to more actual nests.

A variable and evolving survey methodology that was applied to the surveys for the early years 2019-2021, made inter-year comparisons unreliable (as discussed in previous Annual Reports). A consistent survey methodology was therefore applied over the same area for the whole breeding season in the years 2022 – 2025. The three results for 2022-2024 appear to show a reasonably constant number of nests detected over this period (mean of 82 nests), within the inevitable random fluctuations. The sudden increase in 2025 to 107 apparent nests is therefore unusual. A much longer period of annual surveying (e.g., in excess of ten years) will be required to reliably clarify the longer-term trend in the Swift population of Lewes and thereby see whether the result for 2025 was a statistical outlier, or the sign of a sustained increase in the Swift population.

3.3 Longer term comparison of Swift population in Lewes

One possible alternative to waiting for the current survey strategy to be applied for over ten years (e.g. 2022-2032), is to compare current observations against historic records. However, such a comparison for the 2025 results is problematic. This is partially because the few earlier surveys did not aim to cover the whole of Lewes but only focussed on a small number of colonies. A comparison for a limited number of locations can be attempted based upon the non-systematic survey of Swifts in Lewes that was made by Mike Helps for 2000 (20th April to 3rd May) and reported in 2004⁶.

'Nests' found in years:	2000	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Average
<i>Swift colony location</i>									
St Anne's Church	30	8	19	12	6	8	16	22	13
Old Stable in Market Lane	5	1	2	4	1	1	1	2	2
The Maltings	4	1	4	8	8	11	8	9	7
Bottom of St Martin's Lane	3	2	3	3	6	5	5	3	4
Chapel (Flea Market) in Market Street	10	0	0	7	7	10	7	3	5
Bottom of St Andrew's Lane	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	54	12	28	34	28	35	37	39	30
% Decline since 2000		-78	-48	-37	-48	-35	-31	-28	-44

Table 3. Comparison of number of Swift nests at six colonies reported (but not necessarily occupied) in all seven LSS surveys (2019-2025) against those reported for the year 2000 by Helps (2004)¹, showing a 44% decline on average, although only 28% decline in 2025. ('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 (Table 3). The comparison with this year shows that five of these six colonies reported by Helps still exist in 2025, 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 39 nests in 2025, suggesting a 28% reduction (Table 3). This compares with an apparent decline of 78% at these same colonies found in 2019, and between 48% and 31% decline in 2020 to 2024. The average of all seven of these estimates of decline is 44% (equal to a loss of 24 pairs) and this gives a very approximate but more robust indication of the scale of the general decline in the breeding population in Lewes.

In the last year (2024 to 2025) the total number of detected nests in these 6 Swift colonies has increased by 5 % (37 to 39), compared with the estimated increase for the town overall of 27% (84 to 107). The maximum increase of 38% (16 to 22) is in the colony at St Anne's Church.

⁶ Mike Helps (2004) 'Lewes Landscapes and Bird' (Private Publication, copies in Lewes Library)

3.4 Lewes Swifts within a wider context

The UK national picture of the Swift population is of a 67% decline between 2000 and 2024 (smoothed model in Fig. 7).

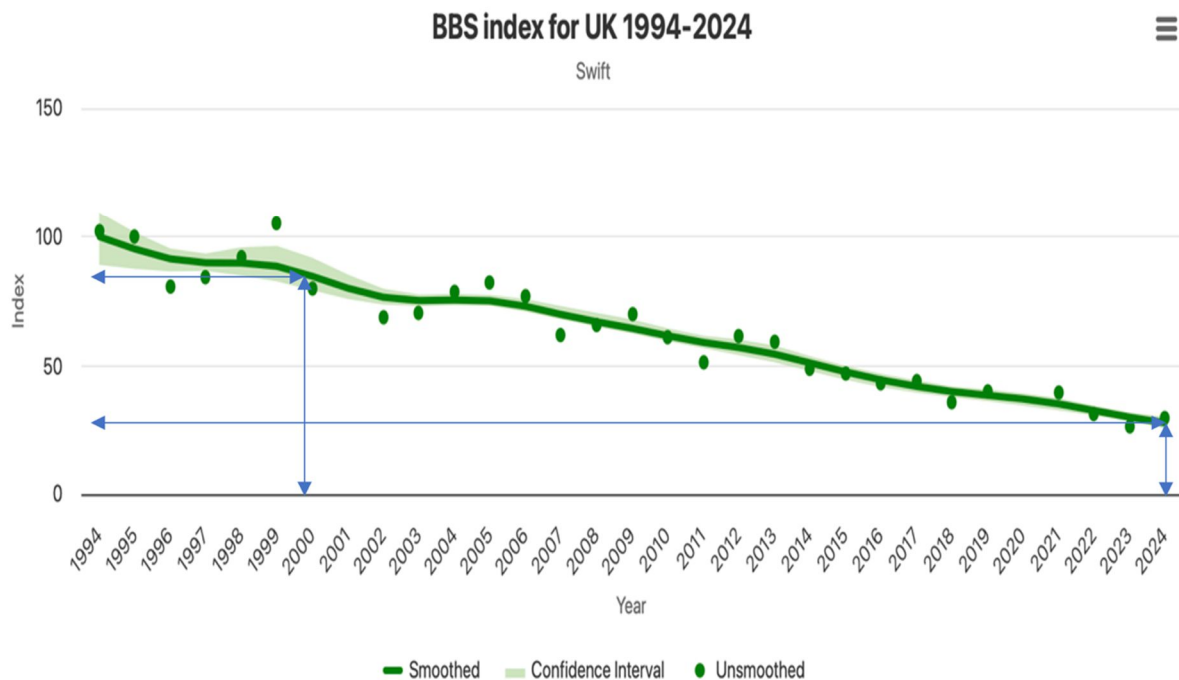


Figure 7. National **UK** fall in **Swift** population, smoothed model (green line) shows a 67% steady decline between 2000 and 2024 (Index 83 to 27.0)⁷

The more local situation for Swifts in Sussex shows a more complex picture (Fig. 8). From 2000 to 2023 the BBS survey showed an almost unremitting substantial decline. However, in 2024 there was a dramatic four-fold increase in the reported Swift count from that in 2023, which gave an overall 19% increase for the period 2000-2024. This unusual change in the BBS Swift count for 2024, if sustained, would be positive for Swift conservation, but only if it is substantiated by the count for 2025.

The 28% decline since 2000 estimated in Lewes by LSS, therefore appears much less severe than in 67% decline in the UK generally, or the 62% decline in Sussex up to 2023. There might be the possibility that the uncharacteristically high count reported by BBS for 2024 in Sussex may have contributed to similarly uncharacteristically high count reported by LSS for Lewes in 2025. However, this idea can only be tested when the results of a longer-term run are available (including BBS for 2025 and LSS for 2026).

⁷ <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/breeding-bird-survey/latest-results/population-trend-graphs> (accessed 2/11/2025)

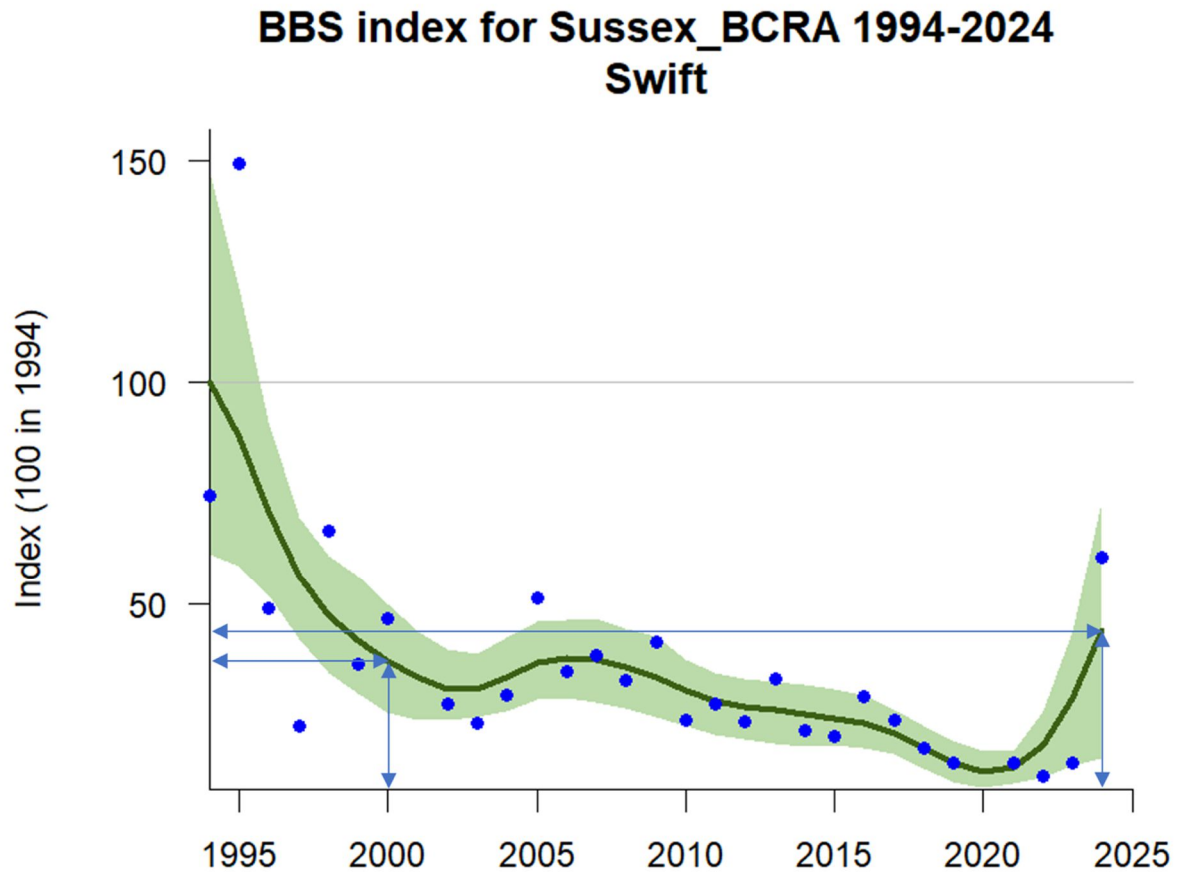


Figure 8. BBS Survey results for **Swifts** in **Sussex**⁸ from which the fitted smoothed model shows a sudden dramatic increase in 2024 that gives an apparent rise of around 19% from 2000 to 2024 (Index 37 to 44). It is not yet clear whether the recent very large (~4-fold) increase in the observed (not modelled) count (~14 in 2023 to ~ 62 in 2024) will be confirmed and maintained in future years.

3.5 Swallows and House Martins in Sussex and Lewes

The other UK visitors that 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 also showed steep declines over the period 2000 - 2024. For Swallows (Fig. 9), the decline in population in Sussex over that period was estimated to be 40%, but an even greater decline for House Martins of 83% (Fig. 10).

⁸ Helen Crabtree, Coordinator for BBS in Sussex, *personal communication*.

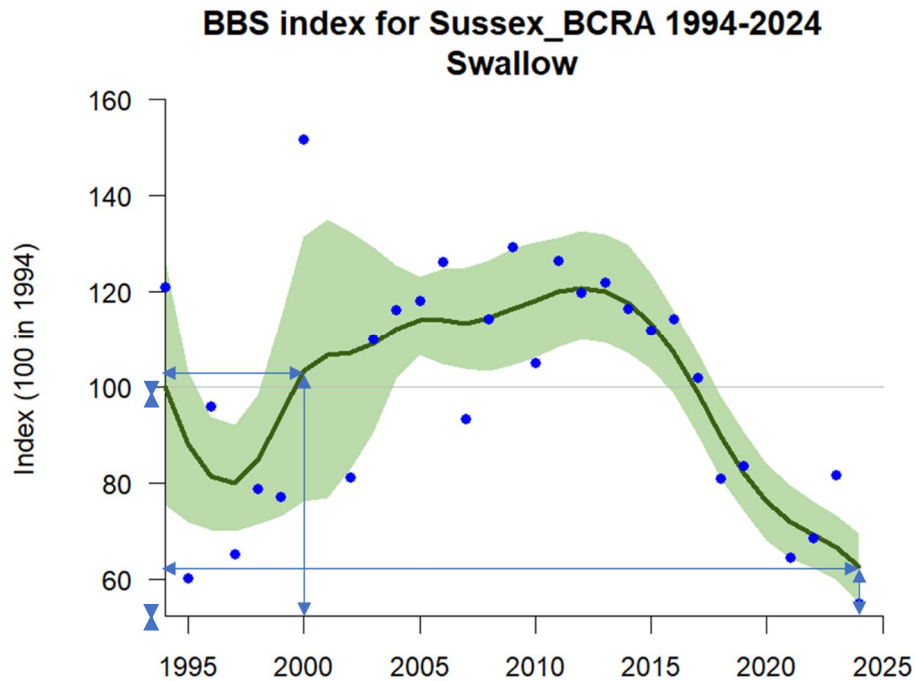


Figure 9. BBS Survey results for **Swallows** in **Sussex**⁹ from which the fitted smoothed model shows reasonably stable numbers from 1994 to 2015, but then a steep decline to 2024. The decline in the modelled population falls around **40%** from 2000 to 2024 (Index 103 to 62)

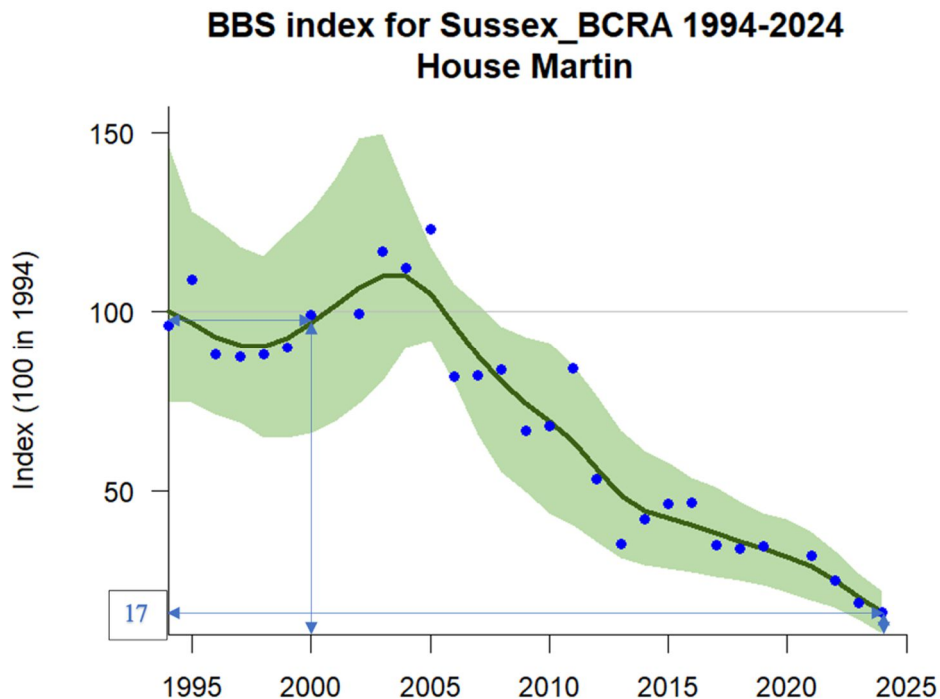


Figure 10 BBS Survey results for **House Martins** in **Sussex**⁹ from which the fitted smoothed model shows reasonably stable numbers from 1994 to 2005, but then a very steep decline to 2024. The decline in the modelled population falls by around **83%** from 2000 to 2024 (Index 98 to 17)

⁹ Helen Crabtree, Coordinator for BBS in Sussex, *personal communication*.

In the light of these general declines, LSS decided in 2022 to start recording sightings and the locations of the nests of both House Martins and Swallows in Lewes.

The small number of House Martin nests found in the wider area administered by Lewes Town Council (LTC) in 2025 are concentrated in three smaller areas (Fig. 11). One area is near St John's Sub Castro Church, with two nests in St John's Terrace and one in Toronto Terrace. The second area is near Lewes Station, with 2 nests in Garden Street. The third area is near the Cockshut stream in the quite new housing development on the site of the previous Spring Barn Farm, where there were two House Martin nests. This area also contained the one and only Swallow nest reported for 2025, which is unfortunately down from the two Swallow nests reported at this site in both 2023 and 2024.

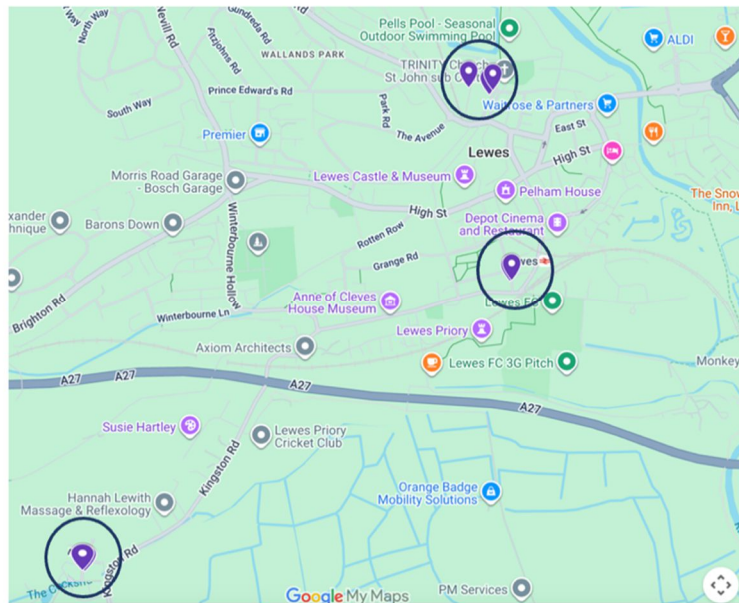


Figure 11. Locations of the 7 House Martin nests found in the wider LTC area 2025 in three general areas, from north to south, 3 nests near St John’s Sub Castro Church, 2 in Garden Street near the Station, and 2 in Spring Barn Farm development off Kingston Road (also with a Swallow nest).

Some of the House Martin nests are natural ones built by the birds themselves (Fig. 12a), but three of the nests were in artificial cups (Fig. 12b, installed by LSS, see Section 4.2)



Figure 12 (a) Natural House Martin cup in St. John's Terrace and an (b) artificial cup which LSS installed in Cleve Terrace

4. Other LSS activities in 2025

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

4.1 Site visits.

Members of LSS made 60 visits to sites where occupiers or developers requested advice on the feasibility and optimal location for installing Swift accommodation. This included fitting Swift boxes to existing buildings and planning to locate Swift bricks within new buildings or extensions.

4.2 Swift boxes and Swift bricks

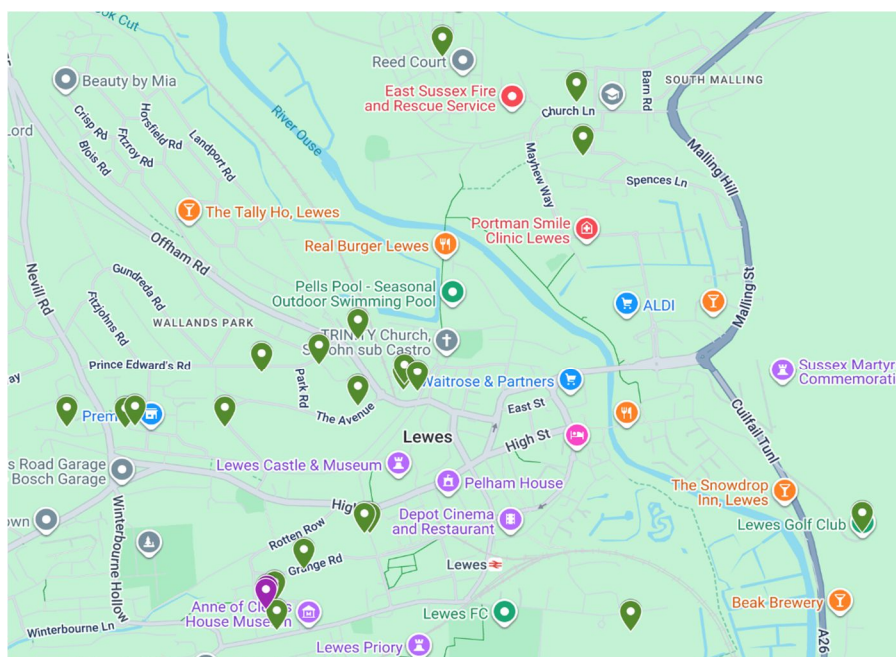



Figure 13. Map of Lewes showing (as dark green markers ) the locations of 24 new Swift boxes installed in 2025.

Twenty-six new Swift boxes (with 37 breeding spaces) were installed in Lewes in 2025 (Fig. 13), mainly with advice from LSS (Appendix D, as part of the 203 boxes installed since 2020, of which 77 were LSS funded). The LSS Committee identified sites in Malling, (Bridgewick Close, Harvard Close and Lambert Place), as the most promising focus for new Swift boxes initially in 2022 and again in 2024, after considering a short list of 6 such potential areas¹⁰. 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 Swift nests have been shared with Lewes District Council officers who are keen to safeguard the sites during any renovations.

In 2025, 12 pairs of Swifts (i.e. 11%) nested in Swift boxes in Lewes, as opposed to the more traditional locations 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

¹⁰ Six potential locations for the new Swift-box project in 2022 [Number of Nests in 2025]: High Street & St Martin's Lane [16], The Maltings [9], Flea Market [3], Southover High Street & Potter's Lane [6], The Avenue [5], Malling, (Bridgewick Close, Harvard Close, Lambert Place) [6]

for it to be used for breeding by Swifts. 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. One nest box installed in Valence Road in 2021 with a caller was occupied by Swifts for the first time this year (Fig. 14), and the residents actually saw the chicks fledge.



Figure 14. Swift flying into the nest box in Valence Road

For House Martins, LSS have installed two more artificial nest cups in 2025. Paul Stevens, (Conservation Officer for House Martins UK and SOS Hirundine Champion), suggests that Swifts nest in boxes more readily where there are already House Martin nests nearby. This was certainly the case in St. John's Terrace, where we installed several House Martin cups in 2024. In 2025, one Swift nest was recorded under the eaves and another in a nest box for the first time.

LSS wish to thank and acknowledge Dave Boddington for his excellent work on the installation of many of the Swift boxes and House Martin cups in Lewes this year.

4.3 Interaction with Supporters, the General Public, and external bodies

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

Communication:-

- With Supporters (392 registered LSS members) & Public, via:-
 - Social media - Facebook group with 399 members, X-Twitter, with 1,037 followers, Instagram 634 followers, BlueSky 127 followers
 - Newsletters in April, May, June, and July 2025 (copies on LSS Website)
 - 2024 Annual Report in December 2024 (copy on LSS Website)
- With External Bodies, such as:-
 - LTC/SDNP – comment/advise on planning applications – to include Swift accommodation as condition (LSS/LTC leaflet)
 - Developers. e.g. North Street – advice on numbers and locations of Swift bricks to include in new buildings

- Friends of Lewes – comments on consultations on developments or renovations where provision of Swift accommodation would be appropriate.
- *Participation in Public Events / Liaison with External Bodies*
- Swift parade (Fig. 15) and six-week “Swift-Friendly Town for Nature Recovery” season at Lewes Climate Hub, with expert speakers funded through our successful grant application to Chalk Cliff Trust.
- Articles in Sussex Express, The Lewesian, Lewes News, Lewes Climate Hub newsletter and website, and Sussex Bylines
- Four Swift walks in June and July
- LSS Stalls at Societies Fair, Southover School Fair, Nevill Eco-Homes and Gardens, Lewes Stem Festival
- Talk to Nevill W.I.
- Partnership meetings with Lewes Nature Mosaic, and Lewes Climate Hub
- 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 a successful grant application.



Figure 15. Gathering outside Lewes Climate Hub after our parade to welcome back the Swifts on 26th April

4.4. Lewes as a Swift-friendly town

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, Wildflower Lewes, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Love our Ouse, Lewes Climate Hub, Baxter’s Field, Railway Land Wildlife Trust, Priory School, Wallands School, South Downs National Park Trust, Ouse Valley Climate Action, Western Road School, Lewes District Council, Swift Conservation, RSPB, Chalk Cliff Trust, Sussex Ornithological Society, People’s Park for Nature, and Moore Law.

<https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesSwiftsupporters/lewes-a-Swift-friendly-town/>

5. Recommendations for future work

The experience and findings from the operation of LSS in 2025 are being used to plan improvements for 2026. These included:

- Retain the current systematic Swift survey design unchanged for 2026
- 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.
- Implement a further project to install multiple Swift boxes around an existing colony in Lewes (e.g. continue to approach residents and businesses owning properties in areas where Swifts are already nesting to offer to purchase and install one or more Swift boxes).
- 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 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 2025 Lewes Swift Supporters successfully conducted the seventh systematic survey of the Swift population of Lewes. From a total of 3076 reports, LSS has estimated that there are 107 active ‘nests’ (i.e., hole entrances recorded as being used repeatedly by Swifts). This is apparently a substantial increase of 27% (84 to 107 nests) on the reasonably stable number of nests detected in the three previous years (2022 [79], 2023 [83] and 2024 [84]) which suggests that at least there is no significant decline in the Swift population of Lewes over this period up to 2025. However, this apparent 27% increase is not considered to be conclusive evidence of an increase in the size of the Swift population but may be partially due to a 25% increase in the number of reports submitted since 2024. Comparison with a limited survey of six Swift colonies recorded in 2000, suggests an average of around a 44 % decrease in Swifts nesting in Lewes since that time, but only a 28% decline for 2000 to 2025 in isolation. These estimated declines in the Swift population appear substantially less than the estimated decline of 67% for the UK over this same similar period. The Swift population in Sussex (according to BTO’s Breeding Bird Survey, BBS) also declined substantially (> 60%) from 2000 to 2023 but had a very unusual four-fold increase in their survey count for 2024 revised this change to a 19% increase in their smoothed model. Only a longer period of repeated surveys, for both LSS in Lewes and BBS in Sussex, will show the underlying trend and reveal whether the LSS result for 2025, and the BBS for 2024, are either one-off statistical outliers or evidence of real recovery in the Swift population locally.

7. Appendices

Copies of this report, and the previous LSS Annual Reports for 2019 to 2024, are available on the LSS Website¹¹. The following appendices are available by request from the LSS Secretary, contacted via lewesswifts@gmail.com

- A. Survey Instructions for LSS Surveyors 2025
Lewes Swift Survey 2025– methodology (Annual Report).pdf
- B. Survey Reporting Forms for LSS Surveyors 2025
 - a. Lewes Swift Survey 2025- recording form (Annual Report).pdf
 - b. Lewes Nest Activity Log 2025 (Annual Report).pdf
- C. List of all Swift sightings reported in 2025
LSS Survey 2025-locked +pictures (Annual Report).xlsx
- D. New Swift Boxes
New Lewes Swift Boxes_2025 (Annual Report).xlsx

¹¹ <https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesSwiftsupporters/lss-annual-reports/>