



Lewes Swift Supporters Annual Report for 2019

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

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Audrey Jarvis (Secretary)
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And the additional surveyors: -

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Summary

This document is aimed at providing Supporters with a summary of the key achievement of Lewes Swift Supporters (LSS), which was relaunched in May 2019. It focuses primarily on the survey that was used to estimate the current numbers of swifts nesting in the central area of Lewes. It is intended that this number will act as a baseline to assess any future increase in this population, which is LSS's wider objective. The total number of active swift nest entrance holes recorded was 34, and the total number of swift sightings was 150. No previous systematic survey results were available for comparison of this total number. However, the number of nesting pairs reported at four swift 'hotspots' in Lewes were down in total from 42 to 12 (71%) on the numbers reported in 2000, which is consistent with the reported national decline of 57% between 1995 and 2017^{1,2}. Lewes residents were encouraged to appreciate and support their swifts by activities including open meetings, social media interactions, and swift walks.

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 <https://app.bto.org/birdtrends/species.jsp?year=2019&s=swift>

² <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-and-sustainability/safeguarding-species/help-us-help-swifts/>

- 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.

2. Annual Swift Survey

In order to know whether swift numbers are being increased by the efforts of LSS, it was essential to estimate the current situation. The most robust and useful indicator is the number of entrance holes in buildings seen to be used by swifts. This number is sometimes loosely referred to as the number of 'nests', but does not indicate that successful breeding has necessarily taken place.

2.1 Methods employed

Observations of swifts were made by two different but complementary approaches. All of the results were logged by the LSS Recorder, and subsequently entered into the national and international database BirdTrack, which is hosted by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO).

2.2. Systematic Survey

The central region of the old part of Lewes was selected for the systematic survey of swifts, as it was previously known to contain a number of active nesting³. A grid of four rectangular areas (each approximately 500m x 350m) were positioned over this part of Lewes (Fig 1).

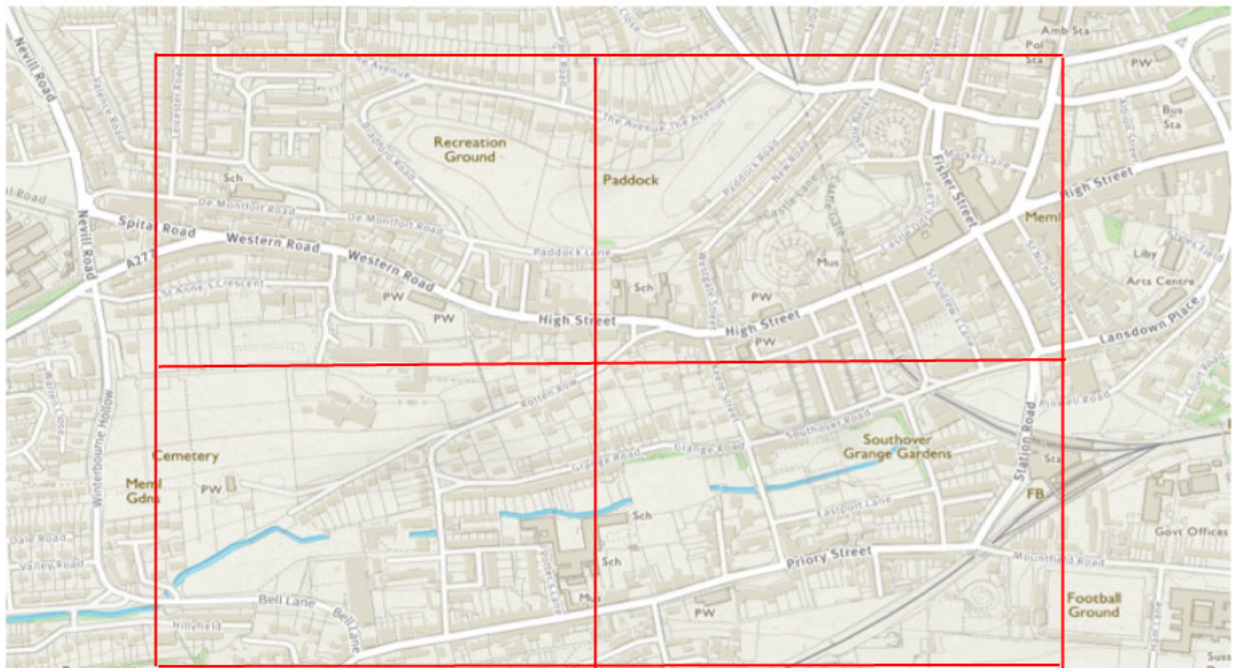


Figure 1. Design of systematic survey of swifts in Lewes used in 2019.

Two surveyors were usually allocated to each area and asked to survey the area twice a month, between approximately 7.30pm and 9.30pm, for the three-month period from May

³ The history of swifts and their nesting in Lewes was discussed in LSS Newsletter, Summer 2020, p7-8

to July, while the swifts are in Lewes. The general survey design, instructions (Appendix A), and reporting forms (Appendix B) used by each surveyor, were adapted from those developed by RSPB Brighton Swift Project⁴. The instructions contain a description of the types of swift activity that were to be reported (e.g. low-flying party, arcs or banging) and those to be excluded (e.g. high-flying swifts above 50m, as not necessarily being local).

2.3. Casual sightings

Casual sightings of swifts were made across with whole of Lewes, including the areas outside that covered by the systematic survey. These reports were partially made by the surveyors, using LSS Reporting forms. Further casual reports were also made by other Supporters, and by the general public, through several different channels including Facebook, Twitter and email.

2.4. Key findings

A total number of 150 sighting of swifts and their active nest entrances, made both in the systematic and casual observations, were reported to LSS in 2019 (Appendix C). A total of 34 active swift nest hole entrances were reported in 15 buildings (Table 1).

Address	'Nests'*
St Anne's Church, High Street	8
Western Road	5
Valence Road	3
High Street	2
High Street	2
Station Street	2
Southover High Street (Anne of Cleves House)	2
St Martin's Lane	2
King Henry's Road	2
The Maltings, Castle Precincts	1
Market Lane	1
Gallows Bank, Abinger Place	1
Grange Road	1
De Montford Road	1
The Avenue	1
Total	34

Table 1. Buildings in Lewes with active nest hole entrances, or 'nests'* found in the 2019 swift survey.

A map (Fig. 2) shows local hotspots with larger colonies of breeding pairs. As already noted, it was not possible to ascertain whether successful breeding took place at all of these locations.

There are no previous systematic surveys of the swift population of Lewes to enable a comparison of the total numbers, but the numbers of 'nests' at some hotspots do have

⁴ Kindly supplied to LSS by Chloe Rose as RSPB Conservation Officer

earlier estimates. For example, Mike Helps reported that in 2000⁵, 30 pairs of swifts nesting at St Anne’s Church, 5 pairs at the [REDACTED] in Market Lane, 4 pairs at The Maltings and 3 pairs at the bottom of St Martin’s Lane. The fact that these four sites are now observed to have 8, 1, 1 and 2 pairs respectively (Table 1), giving a total of 12 pairs down 71% from the 42 in 2000. This 71% decline across four colonies can be used to give an approximate indication of the scale of the general decline in the breeding population in Lewes. Helps also reported colonies of 10 pairs at the Chapel in Market Street, and 2 pairs at the bottom of St Andrew’s Lane, neither of which have survived. If these two colonies were included in the calculation, the decline would be -78% (i.e. 12 down from 54 in 2000). These estimated levels of decline is broadly similar to the national picture of 57% between 1995 and 2017⁶

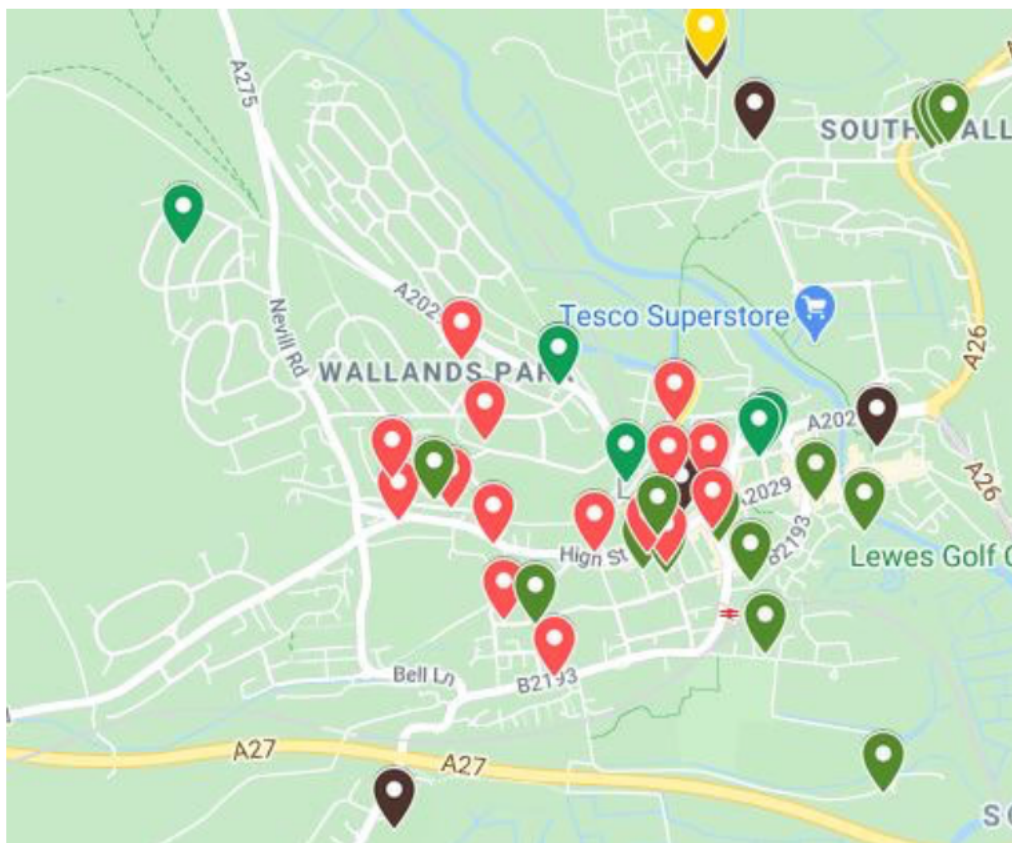


Figure 2. Locations within Lewes of: 📍 33 Active ‘nests’ at 15 locations, 📍 swift showing interest in nesting at other sites, 📍 swift sightings reported in other areas, 📍 nest boxes not yet occupied.

The preferred spatial orientation of the entrance hole to the nests (Table 2) was found to be predominantly to the north (with 20 were facing N, NE & NW), in preference to the south (10 were S & SE). This information agrees with national evidence⁷, and can have important implications for the optimal installation of new swift accommodation around Lewes in the future.

⁵ Mike Helps (2004) 'Lewes Landscapes and Bird' (Private Publication, copies in Lewes Library)

⁶ <https://app.bto.org/birdtrends/species.jsp?year=2019&s=swift>

⁷ https://www.swift-conservation.org/Leaflet_1_Swifts_Nest-boxes_at_Your_Home-small.pdf

Orientation	No. of nests
Northeast	10
South (and broadly south)	9
North (and broadly north)	8
Northwest	2
Broadly southeast	1
West	1

Table 2. Orientation of entrance holes to nesting sites in Lewes recorded in 2019

3. *Other LSS activities in 2019*

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

3.1 Site visits.

LSS supporters made 7 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.

3.2 Swift boxes and swift bricks

Twenty-four swift boxes and eight swift bricks were recorded as present in Lewes (shown on Fig. 1), mainly already installed prior to 2019.

3.3 Public Events

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

- a public meeting held in the Depot Cinema (June 2019)
- swift walks around the main nesting sites (June & July 2019)
- hosting an LSS stall at Lewes Societies Fair (Sept 2019)
- distributing LSS information postcards (via letterboxes and Depot Cinema reception (June 2019)

3.4. Interactions with external bodies

Links between LSS and other organisations are important to further our objectives. As already explained, the founding of LSS depended on the financial and scientific support of SWT and SOS, and our survey design on ideas from RSPB. Valuable advice has been received from Edward Meyer, who inspired the formation of LSS by a talk in Lewes Town Hall in around 2015, and he now continues to provide very valuable resources at Swift Conservation⁸. Links are being developed with Lewes Town Council (LTC) and District Council (L&EDC) in order to embed advice on providing swift accommodation in the consideration of suitable Planning Applications.

4. *Recommendations for future work*

The experience and findings from the operation of LSS in 2019 were used to plan improvements for 2020. These included:

⁸ <https://www.swift-conservation.org>

- extending the systematic survey to include areas in the areas of Wallands and West Malling, which had been identified from several casual sightings
- increase the community out-reach to involve a wider range of the public in LSS activities (e.g. by extended use of social media).

5. *Conclusions*

In 2019 Lewes Swift Supporters successful conducted the first systematic survey of the swift population of Lewes. From a total of 150 reported sightings, LSS has estimated the number of active nests (i.e. hole entrances recorded as used by swifts) as 34. There were no previous systematic survey results the enable this total number to be compared. However, the number of nesting pairs reported at four hotspots in Lewes were down 71% on the numbers reported in 2000.

6. *Appendices*

Copies of the following six appendices are available on request from the LSS Secretary, contacted via lewesswifts@gmail.com

- A. Survey Instructions for LSS Surveyors 2019
Lewes Swift Survey 2019 – methodology (Annual Report).pdf
- B. Survey Reporting Forms for LSS Surveyors 2019
 - a. Lewes Swift Survey 2019- recording form (Annual Report).pdf
 - b. Lewes Nest Activity Log 2019 (Annual Report).pdf
- C. List of all swift sightings reported in 2019
LSS Survey 2019 (Annual Report).xlsx
- D. Nest hole entrances reported
LSS_Nest_sites_2019 (Annual Report).xlsx
- E. Swift Boxes
Lewes Swift Boxes&Bricks_2019 (Annual Report).xlsx