



# The Supporter

Newsletter for Lewes Swift Supporters

April 2021

Dear Lewes Swift Supporters,

Welcome to the April newsletter from Lewes Swift Supporters! Last year, our first reported sighting of a Swift in Lewes was on 22<sup>nd</sup> April – so we have not got long to wait!

## De Montfort Road Project

As a result of our Swift monitoring during 2019 and 2020 we identified two active nest sites in De Montfort Road: one under the eaves and one in an existing nest box. This road is on a popular flight path for Swifts nesting in nearby Western Road so perhaps it was no surprise to record that young Swifts were prospecting for nests in this area by “banging” against the eaves.

Following the completion of our successful Western Road Project in October, we applied for grants so that we might fund purchase of 15 Swift boxes and callers and installation of the boxes. Thanks to generous donations from Friends of Lewes, Chalk Cliff Trust, Sussex Police and Lewes residents, we could go ahead with the first phase of this project by installing six nest boxes in February 2021.

More boxes will be going up soon, but we still have some funds remaining! So, if you live in De Montfort Road, or know somebody who does, please contact us if you think your home might be suitable:

[lewesswifts@gmail.com](mailto:lewesswifts@gmail.com)



*One of the Peak single nest boxes installed at a home in De Montfort Road.*

<https://peakboxes.co.uk/>

## Swift Conservation and Supporting and Enhancing Urban Biodiversity

We are thrilled to have been able to engage Edward Mayer, of Swift Conservation, to give a talk especially for Lewes Swift Supporters on **Tuesday 20th April, from 7.00 p.m.**, via Zoom. If you have not already contacted us to register to receive the Zoom link, please get in touch as soon as possible! Edward is an exceptional speaker who knows a great deal about Swifts – as you may find out by visiting his website:

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



*Swifts over Campaglia by Eugenia Parisi, by kind permission of Swift Conservation.*

## **Annual General Meeting of Lewes Swift Supporters**

On Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2021 we invited Supporters to our first Annual General Meeting via Zoom. Having held our elections by email beforehand, we were able to use the time to share four talks from Committee Members. Mike Ramsey, LSS Chairperson, gave an overview of our findings from 2020, (see Annual Report 2020, previously circulated to Supporters), and he outlined our aims for 2021. This included the hope of increasing the number of survey areas so that we could cover a wider area of Lewes – and six volunteers have already come forward to make this possible! Audrey Jarvis, LSS Secretary, shared headlines on the activity at St. Anne's Church, (see our previous newsletters), Sharon Hall, our Surveyor for the Wallands area, shared her experiences during her first year of monitoring Swifts. Finally, Kevin Murphy, our Recorder explained his important role. Extracts from Sharon's and Kevin's talks are shared below.

### **My first year as a Surveyor with LSS, by Sharon Hall**

My interest in this magical little bird began when I discovered some birds nesting in my attic. I showed a photograph to a friend who thought they might be Swifts. By comparing the sounds I could hear to an online recording of Swifts, I found that they were very similar. After reporting the nests to LSS I was invited to their Committee meeting, and when I found that a surveyor was needed for the Wallands area it seemed obvious that I should offer to do it!



*Sharon's Swift on the nest*

I started with an evening's training with Mike - we walked the route and he pointed out the types of observations that should be recorded. It's the most wonderful thing to see a swift rush at a building and disappear into it! But I found it was quite rare to actually witness that happening - the birds are so fast and almost seem to be distracting you to not see where their nests are. I witnessed a magpie sitting on my guttering very near to the nest so it's understandable that the birds want to get in quickly with little fuss.

The bottom line of making the surveys, as I understand it, is to establish how many breeding pairs of swifts there are in Lewes and whether this number is going up or down. The critical information from an evening's survey is to record where you see the swifts, what day and time it is and what the birds are doing. The recommended number of surveys to do is once a fortnight, but I got into the habit of venturing out for an hour or two at least once a week, from around 7.30p.m. until dusk, with my camera phone and notebook in hand. The more I learn, the more interested I become and the more I want to share my enthusiasm. I listened in to a webinar recently given by David Campbell, the Swift champion for the Sussex Ornithological Society, and he talked about Swifts being birds that 'everyday people' can be interested in and help. I like that idea.

### **The role of the LSS Recorder, by Kevin Murphy**

I have always been interested in birds, especially Swifts. My first meeting with Swifts was in 1959 when the family moved to Godalming Railway station. My father worked on the railway and so we had a very large tied cottage! It was a Victorian three-storey building made of Bargate stone. My bedroom was at the top, built in to the roof so that the ceiling sloped on one side to accommodate the slates. Every year the Swifts

would nest above my head. These were magical times that ended with the railways being sold off. Unfortunately, contract decorators came in and filled up the gaps so there were no more Swifts!



*Kevin's childhood home, where he first met Swifts!*

So, what is the Recorder all about? A better description would be a Collator, but that term is not used in the birding world. Sightings and survey records are sent to me and my role is to assemble this information in ways we can all understand. I create a new map on Google maps for each season that the birds are with us and update this on a daily basis to show the nests as they become active and also the new nest boxes fitted that year, (for examples of maps, see LSS Annual Reports from 2019 and 2020). At the same time, I collate all the information on an Excel spreadsheet.

The map and spreadsheet together show any interested parties the state of play during the nesting season.

At the end of nesting, around mid-August, I put together all the sightings and surveys etc into a big Excel sheet that runs to thousands of lines! This makes for interesting reading, if you are that way inclined, (and is available as an Appendix to our Annual Reports).

My last job is to upload relevant information onto the BTO BirdTrack website. This means that all our hard work can be shared by County Recorders or other relevant bodies.

We have a lot of useful information already, but I know there are places we cannot see. For example, only last Autumn we found out about a nest site in Southover that we had no idea about because we are always looking from the road and cannot see what happens on the other side. The more eyes we have the better we will do!

### **Lewes Swift Watch 2021!**

Thanks to a number of volunteers who came forward following our AGM in March, we are very pleased that we will be able to add new survey areas for monitoring during the 2021 season: Cliffe, Nevill, and the eastern side of Malling. You can help by joining in with Swift Watch 2021! During the 2020 Swift season our formal surveys were very much enhanced by reports of Swift sightings from Swift Watchers all over Lewes. You may remember that they helped us to identify a "new" colony in Malling! We very much hope that you will contribute your sightings again this year. This is what we would like to know:

- Date and time;
- A good description of the location, e.g., the address nearest to your sighting;
- Number of Swifts seen;
- Weather conditions, e.g., any helpful information about whether it is raining, windy, sunny or cloudy, and the temperature.

If you are able to add any more details, that would be great! For example, are the Swifts flying low? Could they be prospecting for a nest site by repeatedly showing an interest in a particular building? Did you see a Swift enter or leave a nest?

You can send us your sightings via:

- Our Facebook group: Lewes Swift Supporters
- Twitter: @LewesSwifts
- Email: lewesswifts@gmail.com

*Photograph of two Swifts flying from their nest behind the High Street – by Debs Kemp, who contributed regularly to Swift Watch 2020 via Facebook.*



## **New - Lewes Swift Supporters Website!**

During March we began to build our very own website so that we could share information more widely. You can have a look at what we have done so far by visiting: <https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesswiftsupporters/>

## **Spread the word about Swifts!**

If, like us, you are enthralled by these fascinating Summer visitors, a good way of helping Swifts to have a secure future in our town is to spread the word about them to your family and friends. You are welcome to share this newsletter with them and encourage them to register for free membership and find out more.

## **LDC Local Lottery**

We are very grateful to the residents who have donated to Lewes Swift Supporters to help to fund our mission of providing more Swift accommodation in Lewes. If you would like to support us regularly, you might like to consider choosing us as your “good cause” in the LDC Local Lottery. For every £1 ticket you purchase, 50p is given to the Swifts!

<https://www.leweslocallottery.co.uk/support/lewes-swift-supporters>

With best wishes from the LSS Committee:

Mike Ramsey, Chairperson, Acting Treasurer and Surveyor

Kevin Murphy, Recorder and Surveyor

Sharon Hall, Surveyor

Crispin Holloway, Founder Member and Surveyor

Audrey Jarvis, Secretary and Surveyor

