



# The Supporter

Newsletter for Lewes Swift Supporters

July 2022

Dear Lewes Swift Supporters,

Welcome to the July newsletter from Lewes Swift Supporters! It is time to begin saying goodbye and good luck to our special Summer visitors - until next year! Our last observed entries in 2021 were on 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> August and, although the Swifts were late in arriving this year, the good weather may mean that the chicks have had enough food to depart at their “usual” time.

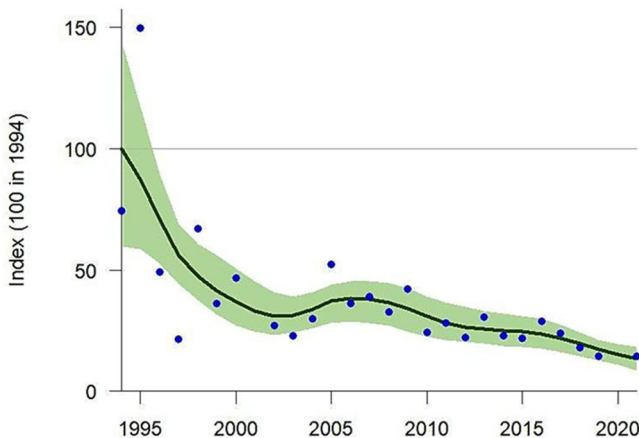
At the time of writing, we are almost, but not quite, at the end of the 2022 Swift season and we have confirmed seventy-nine active nests across Lewes! It is tempting to compare this overall total with previous years: seventy-six nests in 2021, sixty-four in 2020 and thirty-two in 2019. This increase year by year in the number of nests we discover is definitely positive news and owes a great deal to the regular reports from LSS surveyors and valuable contributions from Swift Watchers.



*Photograph by Debs Kemp*

Thank you to everyone for their persistent watching and reporting! However, an increase in nests recorded may not necessarily mean that Swift numbers in Lewes are increasing – it could be that hard work and a spot of good luck has led us to find more nests! As our surveyors know, being in the right place at the right time is not always easy – we have shared our experiences of watching at one colony and seeing all the nearby Swifts flying to another one several streets away!

**BBS index for Sussex 1994–2021  
Swift**



Swifts were placed on the **red list** of birds of conservation concern earlier in the year because of the decline in their numbers by 58% since 1995. Dave Boddington, the new Swift Champion for Sussex Ornithological Society, attended our last LSS committee meeting and he gave us a more local picture by sharing this trends graph showing Swift numbers in Sussex from 1994 to 2021. It will be interesting to see what might be discovered when the 2022 results are added.

## An update on Swift activity from each of our survey areas

### School Hill area



You might remember that we reported in our last newsletter that Mike had found four nests at the rear of the Flea Market – well, now there are seven! This equals the total number of nests confirmed last year. The survey by Mike Helps in 2020 recorded ten nests here, and this inspired Mike to investigate this colony again,

*Photograph from Mike showing the nest entrances he has confirmed at the Flea Market, viewed from the East Street car park.*

### Mid-town



*The paint shop in Station Street*



*The Maltings*

The colonies in the mid-town area, surveyed by Kevin, have proved to be very popular with nesting Swifts, with thirty-two out of our seventy-nine nests found here! Kevin has confirmed two nests in the High Street, one in Market Lane, three in Abinger Place, six at St. Martin's Lane, and four at the top of St. Swithun's Lane. His marked photographs, above, show the additional eight nests in the Maltings, and eight above the paint shop in Station Street.

During July we have seen large groups of young non-breeding Swifts flying around Lewes. Some of them will be one year old and returning to the area to feed – others will be two year old Swifts prospecting for a nest where they might breed next year. For example, on 24<sup>th</sup> July Kevin saw his largest high-flying group of over fifty Swifts above Steward's Inn Lane at 9.00 p.m. On the same evening, from 8.20 p.m. to 8.50 p.m., Nick watched a constant stream of large groups of Swifts flying over Ireland's Lane and St. Pancras

Church and past the East end of St. Anne's Church to the South. He reckons he must have seen about two hundred Swifts altogether!

## Southover

New surveyors Sue and Lubna have been monitoring this area. Lubna reports that it has been an absolute joy to walk around Southover with Susan in the evenings. She has also been watching from her garden each evening and during peak activity saw the groups of ten to twelve Swifts circling each night. She has had comments from lots of friends and neighbours about how they have been hearing and loving the swifts this year and says it has been great talking to them and giving out our LSS information cards. She has also seen the most amazing sunsets!

*Photograph of a Swift flying to the nest at Anne of Cleves' house by Douglas Dodds, 2021*



Lubna and Sue have confirmed four nests in Potter's Lane, and thanks to Swift Watcher Margaret we now know there are three more at the rear of Southover High Street – two of them in her double nest box! Although Kevin was sure he could hear Swifts inside Anne of Cleves' House, we have had no confirmed nest entries or exits there – yet! Please let us know of any which you have seen!

## Top of the town

Nearby residents, and those of you who attended our Swift Walks, will be familiar with the narrow terraced house opposite the old Canon O'Donnell building at the junction of Western Road and Spital Road. This hosts a thriving colony of Swifts with nine nest entrances and the Swifts faithfully return there every evening just before the street lights come on. Audrey and Nick survey this area and they have seen some dramatic activity there recently!



For example, on 25<sup>th</sup> July in the five minutes from 9.05 p.m. they saw six Swifts circling the junction and two flew up to nest 1. Both birds attempted to enter but only one was successful at the first attempt – the other had to fly around the lamp post and try again. Four Swifts screamed low and fast over the junction and two of them flew close to eaves before one entered nest 2 and one entered nest 6. Just seconds later another Swift entered nest 6. One Swift made a failed attempt to enter nest 1, another Swift made a failed attempt to enter nest 2 then entered successfully. Then one Swift attempted to enter nest 6, then banged four times at nest 4, circling incredibly low around the lamp post between attempts. All of this action was almost too fast to see and provoked loud calls from within the nests!

Two Swifts continued to circle low around the lamp post, almost touching a neighbour who was watching, then one entered nest 1. The remaining lone Swift circled repeatedly and attempted to enter nest 2, nest

4, nest 3, and entered halfway into nest 4 then retreated. It then circled lower and lower around the junction three times before attempting to enter nest 4, nest 5, nest 7 and banged against the wall below twice before flying away to the North!



In De Montfort Road, Audrey and Nick were pleased to see the Swifts returning to the nest box opposite St. Pancras School playground. Over the last fortnight they have seen one or two chicks peering out of the nest entrance almost every evening – what a treat!

Western Road resident Michael has a garden which gives an excellent view of this Swift box and any activity around it. He has shared an interesting diary of his observations - and this excerpt gives a taste of the thrills of Swift watching!

*“In the afternoon when standing in the garden, one Swift flew from the North towards me over the garden wall and passed my head. I could see its wings break its flight and up it went to enter the nest box. I waited to see if it would exit, and it did with its mate just half a metre behind! The tandem exit was thrilling and noisy as they flew North and upwards to join the crowd. I have noticed that, more often than not, a Swift will exit the nest box if others fly by calling. I suppose that is sometimes how they gather. I had not understood that before but time and time again it seems to be the case. After nine seasons of watching, I have never seen so much activity in ‘my’ box.”*

There have been some gains and some losses at the various colonies which we visit regularly. One of the unexplained decreases in numbers has been at St. Anne’s Church on Western Road. In 2020, Audrey and Nick found nineteen nest entrances there and were hard pressed to keep up with the entries and exits at dusk! Last year the numbers were down to twelve and this year, despite visiting the church almost every evening, they have only been able to record six active nests. Let us see what happens next year!



East end of St. Anne’s Church



West end of St. Anne’s Church

## Wallands

Surveyors Mary and Steve have recorded four nests in The Avenue, near the junction with Bradford Road which overlooks the popular Swift feeding area of Baxter's Field. Nearby is Mark's nest box which we reported on in the last newsletter – installed in March and taken up by the Swifts in May! Thanks to a chance meeting with a painter at work on a house at the rear of Prince Edward's Road, we also know of an active nest under the eaves there. The homeowner feels very honoured!

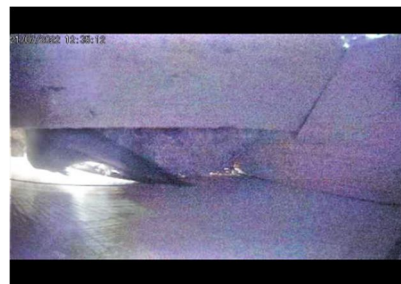
The nest cam video from the Swift nest under the eaves at King Henry's Road showed us a probable egg on 23<sup>rd</sup> May. After a short interlude when the nest cam was offline, we were able to see that there were two chicks in the nest, and we were able to watch them grow! Early in the morning of 21<sup>st</sup> July, we could see that they were still there and highly active in the nest - but by 12.35 p.m. on the same day the last Swift left the nest to fly to Africa!



23<sup>rd</sup> May – egg



21<sup>st</sup> July 4.36 a.m. two chicks



Last view of the Swift leaving

## Malling

Emma surveys the “new” Malling Estate and has found that it is a real hotspot for Lewes Swifts, with upwards of thirty birds circling and screaming around the green each evening towards the end of this season. The Malling Swifts seek out slipped tiles and holes in soffits for their nest sites and definitely prefer the tall, tile-hung townhouses and flats on the Eastern side of the estate, plus the Lambert Place and Harvard Close area. She discovered a new nest site this year, on the back of a house in Lambert Place - where the Swifts skilfully hop a low fence and airbrake immediately to enter the nest site. She is quite certain there are more birds nesting in this area - with so many twittens criss-crossing the estate - and such fast-moving birds - it has been hard to keep up with them!

Emma thinks it is highly likely that some of the nests she has not spotted are on the backs of houses and flats - particularly in Bridgewick Close and Peckham Close, around the flats by the green on Old Malling Way, on the corner of Boughey Place, on the backs of houses in Lambert Place and Harvard Close, especially those on the footpaths. It would be great if Swift Watchers in new Malling could let us know if you have seen any Swift activity on the backs of your homes this year - then we will have a better idea of where to focus next season!



Nest entrance in Bridgewick Close

## Swift Awareness Week, 2<sup>nd</sup> July to 10<sup>th</sup> July

Swift Awareness Week began in 2018 as a national week dedicated to the support of Swifts. On Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> July, Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> July, and Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> July, LSS committee members led Swift walks around the town to celebrate the week and share information about Swift activity in Lewes this year. It was lovely to meet both new people and familiar faces and it was a special pleasure to be able to lead these walks again

after Covid restrictions had prevented them for the past two years. We visited colonies at the Flea Market, Market Lane, The Maltings, the top of St. Swithun's Lane, St. Anne's Church and in upper Western Road – where the dependable Swifts made sure that everyone had a chance to see at least one nest entry! On the Wednesday, Matthew even saw three nest entries on his way home past the old shop in Valence Road!



*Top of St. Swithun's Lane*



*Market Lane*



*St. Anne's Church*



*Junction of Western Road and Spital Road*

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

A reminder that Lewes Swift Supporters are holding their Annual General Meeting at the Linklater Pavilion on **Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September from 7.30 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.** We will be able to share the end of season results from our 2022 surveys and there will be time for you to share your experiences and questions. Tea, coffee, and biscuits will be available. An invitation will be sent to you nearer the time – we hope to see you there!

## **Spread the word!**

There are many ways in which we can all work together to help to reverse the decline of Swifts!

So far, we have supported or funded the installation of 112 nest boxes across Lewes. Since some of them are double or triple boxes, this has increased the number of potential nest spaces by 147! But not everyone has a home that is suitable for a nest box. Making a small pond and growing wildflowers or trees, or watering a young tree growing near you to sustain its growth, are all ways in which we can help to increase habitat for the insects and invertebrates that Swifts depend on for food.

Edward Mayer of Swift Conservation always reminds us that a great way to help Swifts is to “spread the word” about these marvellous Summer visitors. Please feel free to share this newsletter with anyone who

you think may become interested – and encourage them to join Lewes Swift Supporters! Membership is free! Encourage them to get in touch with us, and to visit our website, for more information:

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



*With best wishes from the LSS Committee:*

Mike Ramsey, Chairperson and Surveyor

Kevin Murphy, Recorder and Surveyor

Sharon Hall, Treasurer

Crispin Holloway, Founder Member

Emma Allen, Surveyor

Audrey Jarvis, Secretary, Surveyor



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

Facebook: **Lewes Swift Supporters**

Twitter: **@LewesSwifts**

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