



The Supporter

Newsletter for Lewes Swift Supporters

September 2020

Dear Lewes Swift Supporters,

Here is a brief “end-of-season” newsletter to update you on Swift-related news since our Summer 2020 newsletter was sent out at the end of June. If you are a new Supporter and did not receive our first newsletter, please contact us if you would like a copy sent to you.

Swift Watch Success!



Swifts flying over St. Anne's Church by Dom Greves

It was good to meet several of you during our surveys at the church this year!

Thank you for everything that you have done to contribute to a very successful Swift season! All your valuable observations, whether sent to us via Facebook, Twitter or e-mail, have been included by Kevin, our Recorder, as part of our 2020 data bank. We now have a total of 1,843 sightings! If you would like more details, or a copy of any of the spreadsheets, let us know and we will send them to you!

We hope that you will be eager to take part in Swift Watch 2021 next Spring! More than one of your 2020 observations gave important information that enabled surveyors to follow up and record “new” nest sites, in addition to those recorded in 2019! Thanks to volunteers from amongst you we were able to increase our four 2019 survey areas to six this year. Gill and Chris Garratt began to survey Western Malling, and Sharon Hall surveyed a more extensive area of Wallands than we had been able to cover previously. In view of all your enthusiastic responses, if any more of you would like to become further involved with monitoring Swifts in 2021, please do not hesitate to contact us – it would be lovely to develop our survey areas even further next year!

What have we found out about Lewes Swifts?

Although we have not had time to analyse our data thoroughly yet, there are some key findings that we are able to report!

We recorded **64 active Swift nests** across the town in 2020!

- Western Road – 27 nests, including 19 under the North-facing eaves of St. Anne's Church
- Valence Road and De Montfort Road – 4 nests
- High Street and Station Street – 7 nests
- The Avenue and King Henry's Road – 5 nests
- Southover High Street – 2 nests, including one at Anne of Cleves' House
- Bridgewick Close and Old Malling Way – 8 nests
- Grange Road – one nest
- The Maltings and Market Lane – 6 nests
- St Martin's Lane – 3 nests
- Abinger Place – one nest



Swift entering one of the 8 nests under the eaves at a home in Western Road, by Dom Greves

You may be interested in **installing a swift nest box** on your property, especially if you live near one of these active Swift colonies. We are very happy to help you by sending information, making a visit to help decide on the best site for a box, and sharing contact details of someone who could help with the installation. We have responded to over 40 queries in the last year and we hope that this will result in more homes for Swifts next year!

Up to the time of writing, the **first sighting** of Swifts is recorded as Emma Allen's observation of one Swift above Mill Road on 19th April. The **last sighting** recorded was by Katie Vandyck on 28th August, when she saw 3 Swifts flying over Convent Field!

The **first nest entry** recorded this year was noted by Steve Collett at his home in the High Street on 28th April. The **last nest entry** was recorded by Nick and Audrey Jarvis on 3rd August, at the small colony of 8 nests in upper Western Road. This is the same date and location as the last nest visit recorded in 2019! We are not able to compare first sightings and nest visits with 2019, because we didn't start up our group until 16th May 2019, but it is generally felt that the Swifts arrived back here earlier this year. Similarly, we cannot directly compare the 64 active nests recorded in 2020 with the 34 found in 2019 – but we are pretty sure that all your extra observations were a help!



Swift flying near Steve's nests in the High Street, by Debs Kemp

Someone observed on social media that, with all the events that were being cancelled this year, it was good to know that Flying Ants Day was still taking place! We had several such days, with extremely warm weather, and this seemed to correspond with reports of **large groups of Swifts** gathering at different places across the town in July. A vivid description of an encounter with a large group, on 5th July, was shared by Katie Vandyck who reported:

"Terrible beauty. In the Convent Field just now I was suddenly surrounded by swifts. It's a very long time since I saw a swift in the field and these were swirling overhead and past my feet, getting so close that I could see the detail on their wing and tail feathers. Several times they dropped out of their circling to fly within feet of me. It was spellbinding..."

Another enviable sighting - of 84 Swifts - was reported by Kevin Murphy on Landport Bottom on 8th July!

"This morning's dog walk in the rain was a bit different. At 7.45 a.m., when it was raining with a moderate breeze from the West, we were just South of the dew pond. Over about two minutes, 84 swifts passed over, quite slow and heading straight into the wind. They were only 20 – 30 ft. high and in slow flight so I could count them all. They were in a loose group and no other birds followed. I can only speculate they were first year birds looking for food. Looking at the rain radar they were not really avoiding heavy rain nor flying before a front. Another example of birds not reading the books!"

How might we all help Swifts?

Modern building practices and renovation techniques are thought to have contributed to a decline in swift numbers over recent decades by reducing opportunities for swifts to make a nest: for example, in the gaps under the eaves. By monitoring Swifts and observing where they like to gather and nest, we are identifying good places where new nest boxes might be installed. If new developments are planned for those areas, we can advise and recommend that Swift bricks or boxes are included.

However, not all of us have homes which are suitable for installing a swift box. Because a decline in numbers of insects is also thought to contribute to the fall in Swift numbers there are other ways in which you might help!



- Let your grass grow longer during the summer months, May to August to encourage insects and spiders. 50% of the food that the Swifts catch in the air as they fly around is said to be spiderlings!
- Grow native wildflowers in your garden, window box or patio pots – more wildflowers mean more insects which means more food for the swifts!
- Get together with neighbours and ask the local council to allow the grass verges near you to grow longer in the spring and summer months – you will also enjoy the wildflowers that appear!
- Avoid using insecticides and pesticides in the garden – they will reduce the numbers of insects for the swifts.
- Install a pond, however small – even a washing-up bowl submerged in the ground will attract insects! You could also grow wildflowers in it too, such as water forget-me-not!

Our Plans for 2020 and 2021

Several of the activities which we had planned for 2020 had to be cancelled or postponed because of social distancing guidelines. With your support and involvement, we are determined that we will continue to do everything we can to increase the number of Swifts nesting in Lewes through providing and encouraging more swift nesting. Our current projects and ideas include:

- Going ahead with the Western Road project of providing and installing ten Swift boxes for Swift enthusiasts living in Western Road, courtesy of a generous grant from Sussex Ornithological Society. The latest news is that we may be installing the boxes in mid-October 2020.
- Working with Lewes Town Council to design an information leaflet to promote installation of Swift boxes and Swift bricks in new buildings and extensions that will meet the conditions which Swifts prefer.
- Applying for a grant from Sussex Police to install several Swift nest boxes at their Headquarters in Malling, where there were active nests in the past.
- Arranging virtual meetings and talks for Supporters over the Winter months. Let us know if you would be interested!



Western Road by night, during one of our surveys

Thanks to all of you for your support this year. With lockdown and other restrictions, we had thought that we would struggle to record Swifts effectively – yet with all your pairs of eyes we have done better than in previous years!

A very special thank you to Caroline Russell, our former Communications Officer, who resigned from the Committee at the end of this season. We will miss her, and we are very sad to see her leave – yet very grateful for everything she has done this year to support the Swifts!

Keep in touch!

For any advice on Swift nest boxes or Swift bricks, to share late or historical sightings of Swifts, or to let us know about any nest boxes that you have had installed, we hope that you will keep in touch.

E-Mail: lewesswifts@gmail.com
Facebook: "Lewes Swift Supporters"
Twitter: "Lewes Swift Supporters" @LewesSwifts



Swift rescued from Sharon's kitchen, by Sharon Hall

With best wishes from the LSS Committee and Surveyors:

Mike Ramsey, Chairperson and Surveyor
Kevin Murphy, Recorder and Surveyor
Sharon Hall, Surveyor
Crispin Holloway, Founder member
Gill and Chris Garratt, Surveyors
Nick Jarvis, Surveyor
Audrey Jarvis, Secretary and Surveyor

