



The Supporter

Coming Up: 1-4: Swift boxes 4-6: Identification 7-8: History 9-17: Swift Watching

Supporting the Swifts

The 27th June to 5th July is Swift Awareness Week!

But before we celebrate just how incredible the swift is, let's take a minute to reflect. You may not realise this but in England, swifts declined by 57% between 1995 and 2017!

In Lewes, 70 pairs were recorded in 1970 and 54 pairs in 2000. Last year our surveyors counted 34 nests. This year we've counted 59 so far! That's a big jump, boosted by the eight newly identified nests in Malling, an area that was not surveyed last year. No doubt we missed a few others in 2019 but some of the 'new' nests recorded this year are likely to belong to first year breeders. We can't make direct comparisons with earlier surveys. Yet it would be surprising if the Lewes swift population was doing anything but falling, as elsewhere.



Swifts certainly need all the help they can get! Their food supply is diminishing with the crash of the insect population. And they're losing nest sites as we seal up every last gap into our houses and build energy efficient homes. It's difficult to digest but the decline in this species lies squarely with us.

Over recent years, many local swift groups have sprung up across the UK to fight this cause. Just last year, Lewes Swift Supporters reformed after a two year lull.

Nest sites (red - active; green - new record / update; amber - interest shown)

One way to help the birds is to install swift boxes. This year, with funding from The Sussex Ornithological Society, we had intended to fit at least 10 single boxes along Western Road, where one house has a colony of eight pairs. Due to Covid-19, we've had to postpone this project until next year. But we've been thrilled by the response from this residential street. It's an encouraging first step for the future conservation of swifts in Lewes. Neighbourhood unity must surely be the way forward!

This year we've advised a number of Lewes residents on swift boxes and where best to place them. The addresses extended across town, covering Houndean Rise / Southdown Avenue, Rotten Row, the Westgate area of the High Street, Windover Crescent in Nevill and Spences Lanes in South Malling.

Just the other week, Steven Sparks of Sparks Property Developments contacted us regarding The Crown Inn, which is to be converted into nine apartments and three commercial units. One telephone call, several emails and a site visit later, and Steve's bought two double boxes. His contractor, Cheesmur, is to install them free of charge. Swifts are known to nest behind this building, on Market Lane. So fingers crossed that the birds find the boxes easily enough, along with the four single boxes fitted earlier in the year, on the building almost directly opposite the nest site.

Steven Sparks: "As a Lewes based development company, we appreciate the beauty of the National Park that we are all fortunate to have around us. We always aim to support all types of wildlife in conjunction with restoring or building beautiful buildings. You can follow the progress of The Crown and our Swift boxes on our Instagram @sparksproperty."



The swift boxes above Market Lane Car Park - fitted for Malcolm Mundy by Dave Boddington

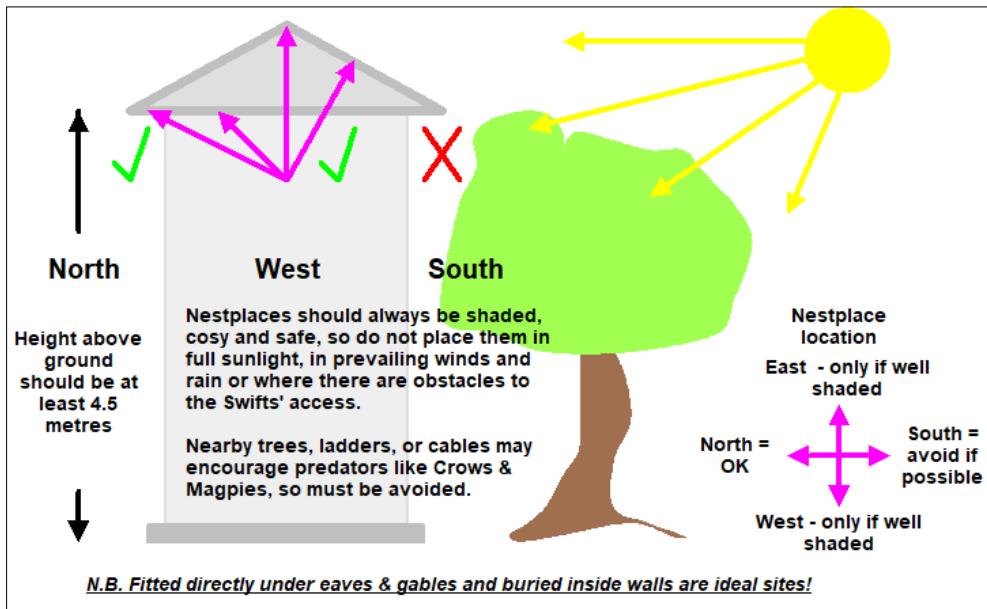
Installing a Swift Box

Although we only have one month left before the birds depart back to Africa, there's still time to install a swift box on your house. Whilst adults will be busy feeding their young, those birds under the age of four will be out prospecting for nests in low-flying screaming parties. If you wish to install a swift box, here's our guide to help you decide where best to do so:

- Do fit the box above a height of 4.5m. The higher the better. Under an eaves is best as it provides shelter from all extreme weather conditions.
- Don't fit the box on a wall facing SW to SE. This stretch of the sky gets the most sun during the day. It would be too hot for the birds and they'd bake!
- Don't fit the box where the flight path is obstructed by trees and buildings. The birds don't want any nasty surprises from lurking predatory birds. Avoid placing the box near any drain pipes that could serve as a perch.
- Do play the swift calls. Particularly if you don't live near a swift hot spot. This will greatly increase the chances of swifts finding your box. They'll investigate the calls, find an empty nest box and hey presto!

Above all, be patient. You may be lucky and have swifts interested in your box within the year. But then again, you may have a wait on your hands!

The [Swift Conservation](#) website has good advice on swift box installations, including how to set up the MP3 swift calls. They'd be a good first port of call. Feel free to email us at lewesswifts@gmail.com if you need further assistance. We're here to help!



Swift Conservation guidance on where to install a swift box



Q. Do you have a swift box installed?

We're looking to create a list of installed swift boxes in Lewes. With this information to hand, we can start asking questions about their success rate and how best to increase it. Email us at lewesswifts@gmail.com.

Roger and Liz Fenn emailed in on the 19th April. They've got their boxes installed on Barons Down Road, and they're waiting with anticipation. Thank you Roger and Liz!

This June, after eight years of waiting, Paul Stevens finally had touch down at the nest box on his house near Storrington. Nice one! House sparrows may find the boxes before the swifts. But that's good too, as sparrows have a conservation status of red - the highest priority there is and one above the swift, which is on amber.



Anne of Cleves House on Southover High Street. Last year, two pairs of swifts nested at this historic property owned by the Sussex Archaeological Society - one to the front, beside the porch, and the other to the rear. Douglas Dodds confirmed that the front nest was active this year when he saw a bird enter on the 9th June. The building was fitted with two nest boxes in 2019.

Identifying Swifts from your Swallows and House Martins

Swifts, swallows and house martins are all welcome summer visitors. But when all three have a forked tail, how do you tell them apart?

Swifts have sickle-shaped wings and look dark black all over. They have no white underparts, unlike the swallow with its long forked tail and the house martin with its white rump. Also, have a listen - if it screams, it's a swift!

Swifts are urban birds. Whereas swallows tend to keep to the countryside. You won't find a swallow nesting in Lewes town centre. If you can see a nest on the outside of a building, that'll be a house martin's. Swifts nest out of sight, under the eaves and swallows like to nest inside open-sided barns and outbuildings.

To improve your ID skills, why not spend time watching swifts in Lewes, then walk down to the old fire station on North Street to see the house martins. For swallows, the Downs above the racecourse is a safe bet. If you've got access to a car, we'd highly recommend a visit out to Plumpton College to see the 40 odd pairs of house martins. Just head around the back of the main building and you'll see them. It's an amazing sight!

The skill of identification comes with practice. But when you finally get it, it'll be a light-bulb moment that'll stay with you forever!



A swift, a swallow and a house martin (courtesy of the RSPB). The size comparison is wrong.

Visual Reminders:



Caroline Russell thinks of swifts as mini X-wing Starfighters!

Whilst Jon Gunson sees house martins as mini-killer whales!



Q. What of swallows? Anyone?

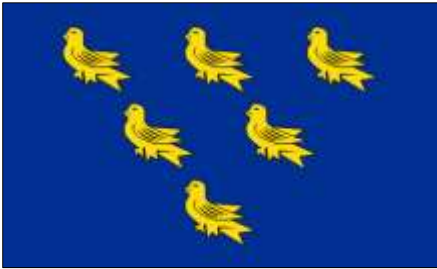
Fact

Swifts are more closely related to hummingbirds, than they are to swallows and house martins! Swifts are a family of highly aerial birds called *Apodidae*, which together with hummingbirds, fall under the order *Apodiformes*. Swallows and house martins, on the other hand, belong to a family of passerines called *Hirundinidae*. They're Hirundines! Swifts, swallows and house martins have evolved to catch insects on the wing, which is why they resemble each other.

The Sussex Flag

On the 28 May 2011, the Sussex flag - bearing six yellow birds on a blue background - was officially flown at Lewes Castle, eight days after it was registered by the Flag Institute.

These birds are heraldic martlets, which are not unique to Sussex or even the UK. Their uptake as the county emblem appears to have originated from the coat of arms of a 14th century 'Knight of the Shire'.

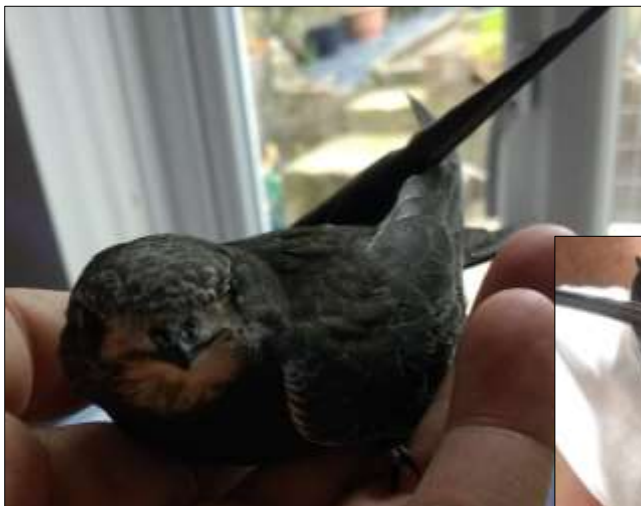


That's interesting in itself. But is the Sussex martlet, with its forked tail, a stylised representation of a swift, swallow or house martin? That's what we'd like to know.

Let's take the swift and focus in on the Sussex flag. Its martlets have wings that are far too short for a Swift - they don't even reach the tail feathers. But their stumpy legs are an accurate enough portrayal. Swifts are very short-legged birds...as they spend three-quarters of their adult life on the wing, they only really need legs to scramble into the nest and give themselves a scratch! Their Latin name, *Apus Apus* (without feet), is in reference to this physical trait.

The martlets have broad legs, which makes me think that they're feathered like a swifts. These birds ascend to high altitudes of up to 2500m during both dawn and dusk, possibly to get their bearings. It'll be cold up there! We would have thought that stockings are a definite necessity for swifts. House martins have them too but swallows don't for some reason.

And getting to those feet...we're looking at a side-on profile of the martlet, in which we see two toes to each foot. Swifts have four toes, which become opposed when they cling onto vertical surfaces. For although the birds now live under the eaves of our buildings, they traditionally nested on cliffs, rock faces and tree holes, and sharp clasping claws were another must have feature.



Fallen baby swifts cared for by Sussex Swift Bird Rescue, July 2019

Taking all the above in....it seems that there's no definite answer. Perhaps the martlet on our Sussex flag is a real hodgebodge. A mix and match affair. And too stylised to make any sense of whatsoever!



Lewes Castle



Swifts could have been cohabiting Lewes with us from when we first made this place home. But when did these birds leave their tree holes to start nesting in our buildings?

Swifts may well have nested under the tiled roofs of the Roman villas in Plumpton and Barcombe. But in Lewes, more permanent structures, built of brick or stone, are thought to have come later in the medieval period. Could the Norman buildings of Lewes Castle, Lewes Priory and St Anne's Church have been the first to have had swifts nesting in them?

The earliest reference of swifts in Lewes is for the 'castle turrets' in 1824. This drawing from 1831 (unknown artist) shows an unloved keep with its two turrets. It has clearly been romanticised. But

with age, the stonework of this old building must have been wearing away, opening up holes for the swifts to nest in.

Today, no swifts nest within the medieval castle remains. Yet two pairs are known to nest in the castle precinct, within the late 18th or early 19th century building of The Maltings, just uphill from the Lewes Arms.

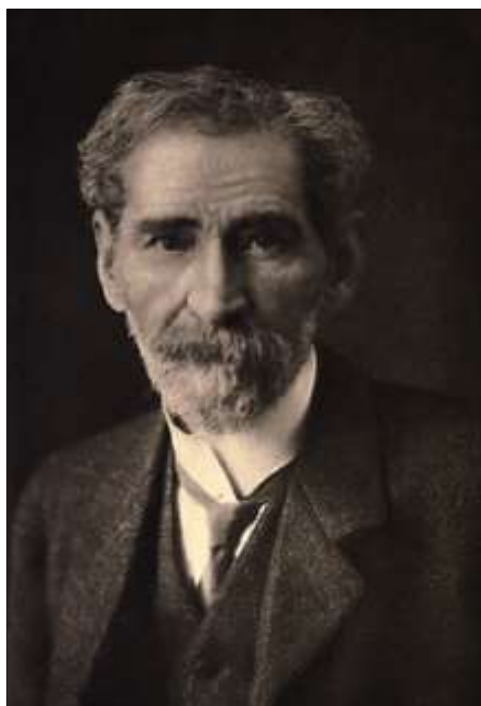


William Henry Hudson

William Henry Hudson was an ornithologist and naturalist, who helped found the RSPB in 1889! His book '[Nature in Downland](#)' was published in 1900 and records a chance sighting he had with Swifts in Lewes.

The piece is beautifully written, with no attention to detail spared. For this reason, it is quoted in full below. He first describes having watched '[bangers](#)', immature birds searching for places to nest:

'One day at Lewes I noticed a lot of swifts, about twenty-four birds, rushing round and round in their usual mad way, and at each turn coming down and passing so close to the gable of a stone house, a public school near the station, as to touch the stone wall a yard or two below the roof with their wings. At intervals after five or six rushes they would scatter all about the sky, then in a minute or two gather and resume their mad flight over the same aerial racecourse, touching the wall again each time as they swept by.'



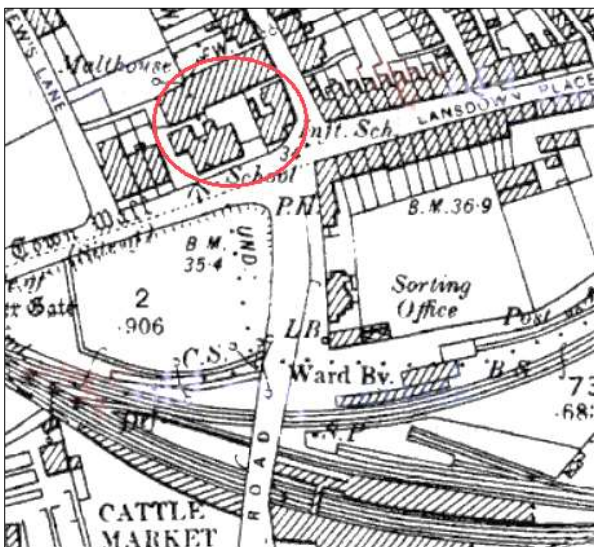
William then goes on to relay an interesting and rather amusing conversation he had with a workman:

'I presently noticed that half a dozen workmen, standing close by in a group, were also observing the birds and talking about them. "I wonder what these mad birds are after?" I said, going up to the men. One of them undertook to enlighten me. "They are swifts," he said, "but here we call them **Black Jacks**.

They are after insects - that's what they feed on. I mean flies," he kindly explained. He then went on to say that when swifts are seen rushing round in a bunch at one spot it is because flies are most abundant there, and that the birds catch many more flies than they can eat. He once saw a swift fluttering on the ground, unable to rise, and picking it up he found that flies were swarming all over it. So many flies had this swift caught and put there in its feathers that the weight of them had borne it down to the ground. I ventured to tell him that he was wrong, that the flies he had seen swarming in the plumage of a fallen swift were parasitical on the bird, and that the swift was probably in poor condition and so much infested and tormented by the insects as to be unable any longer to fly...'

We like the idea of swifts carrying a larder around with them, particularly on those days when the weather is too wet, windy and cold for the birds to go hawking for insects. However, William was not entirely right! A **Swift Louse Fly** can't strictly speaking be called a parasite. Whilst it displays all the traits of a parasite, various studies have failed to discover how it is harmful to the common swift!

Today, the nearest nest site is the paint shop on Station Road, where two pairs of birds reside. You've got to wonder if these swifts are the descendants of those birds that William watched more than 120 years ago! How many generations of swifts would that be?



The school building in 1899 and as it is today on Southover Road, just up from the railway station.

First Sightings 10th April - 4th May

Emailed in, posted up on Facebook or tweeted!

10th April (Easter Friday) - The first swift in Sussex was seen in Goring. That's three days earlier than the county's 10 year average.

15th April - East Sussex catches up, with a single bird seen above Hove.

18th April - Carina Morissy thought she saw a swift fly low over her garden, north of Lewes prison, at about 5pm.

19th April - On seeing a swift fly over Swanborough Lakes at about midday, Tristram Moore rushed home to Lewes to begin playing his swift calls. At 2.29pm, Jenny Harding saw a pair of swifts up by the racecourse. At around 5pm, Emma Allen had her first sighting of a swift over her house on Mill Road: '...Although it was low, it was flying north and probably on passage as it was just ahead of a small mixed group of swallows and house martins taking the same line.' One birdwatcher tweeted a lone swift over his North Chailey house in the early evening. It possibly flew over Lewes on its way north, as with other swifts seen north and south of the town over the next few days.



Audrey's 'first sighting' - a drain hopper head on Southover High Street. From a Facebook post on 20th April.

22nd April - At 7.30pm, Audrey and Nick Jarvis saw their first swift flying in circles above Abergavenny Road, going towards Leicester Road.

26th April - At 5.34pm, Stephen Lowe Watson tweeted 'Heard and then saw two swifts over Nevill, Lewes just now - my first of 2020.'

27th April - Early that morning, Mike Elliocock saw three swifts feeding for a good 45 minutes over Baxter's Field. First sightings for Liz Thomas and Phil Howe. Phil tweeted 'Watching swifts from my garden in Lewes for the first time this year. Always a happy moment.'

30th April - First sightings for Joe Tubb and Evelyn and Douglas Dodds.

2nd May - First sighting for Jon Gunson

4th May - First large influx of swifts into East Sussex, with 67 recorded from the cliffs at Newhaven and 53 seen over Seaford. Many of the Newhaven birds are likely to have followed the River Ouse northwards up to Lewes and beyond.

First sighting for Maria Antoniou.

By this date, our local birds were beginning to display their territories. At 7.30pm, Douglas Dodds saw five flying low over Southover School. And twenty-five minutes later, Audrey and Nick Jarvis saw six flying low over Western Road, almost down to the top of the lamp post!

Apologies if we've missed anyone off the list!

Where Best to Swift Watch

Unless you already have a prime position at home, here are the best places in Lewes to watch swifts:

- **St Anne's Church** and the fork at the top end of Western Road - your chances of taking in some top swift action should be pretty good, as two of our largest colonies reside here. Take a listen when you stand in front of the church. Can you hear the chicks begging?
- **Lewes Castle** - when it reopens, why not flash that Sussex Archaeological Society membership card or pay up to get a fantastic view of the town and its swifts. Right now, the SAS would appreciate your support.
- **Lewes Golf Club** - puff your way up the hill and take a well-earned breather at the top. But don't forget to bring your binoculars! You'll need them. It'll be distant speck watching, otherwise.
- **Lewes Arms** (as suggested by Jon Gunson) - when it reopens, support your local pub and have a swift pint. On the street, alfresco style! The Maltings, just up from this pub, is home to two nests. The pub garden of The Pelham Arms is a good spot too!

The best time to see the birds is during a warm, calm evening. Swifts are most active in the half hour before dusk, when they'll fly around, dropping lower in height until you see them skimming over the rooftops and racing up and down the streets. Enjoy! But be warned, swift watching can become addictive!



What a viewing spot! The roof top terrace of Debs Kemp on the High Street behind Cote Brasserie.



The view from Lewes Golf Club

Swifts at St. Anne's Church by Audrey and Nick Jarvis

Our survey area for Lewes Swift Supporters, at the top of the town, is something of a hotspot for swifts - and one of the main nesting sites is St. Anne's Church. We had recorded eight nests there in 2019, so, as soon as the swifts returned to Lewes at the end of April, we started walking past every evening during the daily permitted exercise of early lockdown.



From early May we were seeing small groups of up to six swifts in low fly-pasts over the church, which is a good sign that they are our local birds, and on 8th May we saw our first swift exit from under the eaves of the eastern end of the church! We were eager to return the next evening to see if we could confirm this nest and, not only did we see two swifts fly in at exactly the same point, imagine our amazement when we also saw swifts fly into four other places!

Last year we had been wondering whether it was possible to clear some of the "rubble" from under the church eaves to allow more swifts to nest there. Any obstructions may not have proved an obstacle to determined swifts looking for a new nest: on one still, warm evening we watched as a swift returned to the same position fifteen times before successfully entering under the eaves - phew!

From 18th May to the beginning of June, once the sun started to set the skies around the church became frantic with activity: repeated screaming fly-pasts, "banging" against the wall (to check whether the nest site is already occupied), calling from within the nests and very low flights along the church path right in front of us. On one occasion a swift passed between the two of us at knee level before flying along Ireland's Lane towards Baxter's Field. Other interesting behaviour has included: a swift flying past us at head height and giving one loud "cheep"; swifts flying head-on into a nest, so that its head disappears, and then backing straight out again; and swifts "hanging" on the wall just below a nest for up to five minutes. Once or twice we have seen two flying swifts making a food pass in flight - when they look as if they are kissing each other in mid-air!



When we arrive at the church, while it is still light, we typically see the swifts flying back and forth over De Montfort Road, to Western Road, to St. Anne's Crescent and returning. Their favourite places to congregate in the sky seem to be above the reservoir (where there were a lot of lovely wildflowers this year, so perhaps lots of insects too), and above the Black Horse (which has an active nest box on a house behind it in De Montfort Road). Often, we can see some of the swifts fly in a

wide circle taking in Baxter's Field and upper High Street - and this is when their wings can catch the glow from the sun and look golden. As the evening draws on, this circle becomes smaller and smaller to focus on the church.

Since then, through May and into June, we have recorded nineteen nests (or nest entrances, since we cannot see what is happening inside), along the front of the church, facing into Western Road. This includes seven out of the eight nests recorded last year, so we may yet observe another one. Eight of the nests are in the east section and ten of them are in the longer west section. Although these nests are "new" to us, they are probably not new to previous generations of swifts because thirty pairs of swifts were recorded at the church by Mike Helps in 2000.

We have learned a great deal from watching the swifts at St. Anne's Church and there is so much more to find out. We've had some exciting evenings there, yet sometimes, with the same weather conditions, it can be very quiet indeed and we just watch the sun go down and wait for the Pipistrelles to come out.



Swifts above St. Anne's Church (Audrey Jarvis)

Jon Gunson: 'One summer I...saw the swifts heading towards St Anne's at full speed, and seeming to disappear into a medieval stone wall. They must put the brakes on at the last minute and swerve up to the nests under the eaves. Breathtaking sight, though.'

Q. What do you love about swifts? What fond memories do you have of these amazing birds? Email us at lewesswifts@gmail.com.

Inside Information

Some of our 'Custodians' have been in regular contact with us about their swifts.

Douglas Dodds (Grange Road)

For the Dodds, things took a while to get going. On the morning of the 6th May, three swifts flew close to the nest entrance, within which two house sparrows were nest building. A repeat of 2019 looked like it was about to play out! Score to date: Swifts 1 - 0 Sparrows. One swift made a partial entry that evening but didn't stay. On the 8th, one bird snuck in when the house sparrows weren't around but it didn't stay either! Things went quiet until the 15th when the swifts reappeared and settled in. By this time, the sparrows had seen sense and left.

The Grange Road birds are a 'threesome' and have been for the past few years. We asked the [Swifts Local Network](#) about this. The answer? Breeding pairs often have a non-breeder following them, showing them the ropes.

Steve Rockett (the High Street, opposite the castle)

One pair of Steve's swifts were reunited sometime in the early morning of the 28th April. His birds usually arrive on the 3rd to 5th May, so they were over a week early! He 'heard them, warbling away and scratching the ceiling with their little claws.' What a lovely way to find out that your birds have arrived home safe and sound - with the birds saying their hellos to each other after nine months apart!

In 'Swifts in a Tower' (1956, pgs. 43-44), [David Lack](#) gives us an insight into what was probably taking place above the ceiling of Steve's lounge: 'Almost immediately after a pair of swifts have met in the box, they start to preen each other....This mutual preening is the chief courtship action of the species. It occurs throughout the breeding season....' '....It perhaps helps to inhibit potential hostility between the pair, or to cement the pair bond....' '....One of them [likely the female] also gives a call, which is much softer and of lower pitch than the usual scream. This call is characteristic of the courtship period....'.

Steve noticed that his second pair of swifts had returned by 21st May, when he saw one enter elsewhere under the eaves. This year, this second pair had to share their cavity with house sparrows. Thankfully, the swifts left them alone.

And for the first time, Steve has a third pair of swifts nesting with him! Spotted on the 25th May.

Wendy Bell (Valence Road / Leicester Road)

Swifts were first noticed at Wendy's house in 2017, when they evicted the house sparrows from their nest. This year the two pairs of swifts and the house sparrows are living in harmony with each other, because the sparrows are staying clear and nesting under the lower part of the fascia board on Wendy's front gable wall. The swifts have the prime spot, of course - the very apex.

On 24th May, Wendy reported seeing swifts darting around her house and heading into the eaves. She'd heard much 'squeaking' and wondered what was making the noise. Perhaps, once again, it is the female bird calling, bonding with her partner. We've yet to see evidence of a third nest in use, which was recorded last year.

[Gillian Bailey](#) (top end of Western Road)

Gillian's house is home to the second largest colony in Lewes. That's eight pairs of swifts! As with Steve Rockett, Gillian first heard her swifts. A single 'cheep' at 3am on the 6th May and several more 'cheeps' later on that morning at 6.38am. Right on cue, Audrey and Nick Jarvis saw two swifts entering two different places under her eaves that very evening.

Fast forward 19 days, about the time it takes for swift eggs to hatch, and Gillian found some newly-broken egg shells on the pavement below her eaves. This was on the morning of the 25th May. As the weather has been largely good this season, we'd expect at least one or two broods of swifts at Gillian's to fledge the week commencing the 6th July - that's six weeks after the eggs have hatched, six weeks for the chicks to develop their long wings and leave fully formed, the same size as adults. And when they do leave, that's it, they're off, there's no hanging about. Goodbye Lewes. Hello Africa!

[Liz Thomas](#) (The Avenue)

Swifts have been nesting with Liz since 2019. Having herself seen them around the house from the 4th May onwards, it was not until the 21st May that a nest was confirmed as active. Audrey Jarvis saw a bird enter under the eaves, where a pair of house sparrows had begun to nest until they changed their mind. Good call sparrows! They'd have been turfed out otherwise, by the swifts seeking to reclaim their nest from the previous year. Liz noted that there was much excitement in the eaves when a parent returned with insects at 9am on 11 June. It then dawned on her that a lack of earlier activity around her house was due to one or other parent on incubation duty. Liz is keeping an eye out for a possible second nest.

[Sharon Hall](#) (King Henrys Road)

Sharon and her family have been living with swifts ever since they moved into the house five summers ago. Last season turned out to be eventful when, on the 14th July, she found a baby swift under the wheelie bin at the side of her house. Sharon is surveying one of our two new survey areas for 2020. During her first survey of the Wallands area on 9 June, accompanied by LSS Chair, Mike Ramsey, Sharon confirmed that her two pairs of swifts are safely back with her this year. She thinks that there may even be a third!

Unfortunately, the baby swift she rescued didn't make it. It was cared for by Samantha Whitworth and James Leadbetter of [Sussex Swift Bird Rescue](#).

On the 25th June this year, when it was a sweltering hot day, [Wildlife Rescue & Ambulance Service \(WRAS\)](#) took in four baby swifts, including the youngest one from Old Malling Way, Lewes, pictured here (WRAS photo below). It's expected to make a full recovery and all being well, will be released on Malling Down.



If you do find a baby swift that has fallen from its nest, [Swift Conservation](#) provides good advice that you should follow on its [Swift Care & First Aid](#) webpage. Then call [Sussex Swift Bird Rescue](#) or [WRAS](#). Contact details can be found on the last page.

The 'new' Malling estate

Last year, on 29th June, LSS Recorder, Kevin Murphy, checked out the 'new' Malling estate. He saw up to five low-flying birds in Harvard Place, with banging activity occurring on one house.

On delving into the records held by The Sussex Ornithological Society and the RSPB Swift Mapper, it was clear that this part of Lewes has a history of swifts. Or at least as far back as 2007, when a screaming party was recorded. There was a screaming party of six in 2010, which doubled to 12 in 2011. Two nest sites were recorded in the following year - one at 10 Lambert Place and one in the Sussex Police HQ, located above the 'Post Room', in a building pre-dating 1919. Each nest site was recorded as having one nest, although as the house attracted 20 screamers, it's likely that more swifts nested in it or the neighbouring houses. In contrast, only four birds screamed around the HQ nest site. With a three year interval, the records began again in 2016, with anything from two to 12 low-flying birds having been seen every year since.

This year we extended our survey areas outside the town centre to include Wallands and Malling. With what we'd learnt in 2019, we couldn't not! We launched our Facebook group in April and with it our [Swift Watch](#) appeal. The sightings for the 'new' Malling estate started to come in via Facebook, Twitter and email.

At the beginning of the season, [Wendy Muriel](#) emailed in her sightings for three days in a row and noted that the birds were keeping to the north end of the estate. She lives nearest the highest point with good views across the whole estate.

[Emma Allen](#) provided us with a gem of information on the 4th April when she Facebooked to let us know that the birds had nested in Bridgewick Close three to four years ago. The obvious question was whether the birds still nested there.



Emma and her son went to find out. The result? By 14th June and after several visits by car and on foot, they'd identified two nest sites with one nest each. Plus a possible second nest on one of the houses, where they'd observed lots of banging and thought a nest was being defended.

Step in [Gill Garratt](#), who'd posted up about the swifts in this area on the 7th May. Gill and her husband, [Chris](#), volunteered to survey the estate where they live. The first survey, with Nick and Audrey Jarvis, was a great success. They found another five nests at Bridgewick Close and Old Malling Way, and confirmed Emma's third! No. 10 Lambert Place was visited but it didn't look hopeful, as two new builds now stand very close to its north gable wall - this being the likely location of the nest recorded in 2012.

The discovery of this 'new' colony is one of the highlights of the season. We'd like to thank everyone involved! We've only scratched the surface and it's very likely that more nests will be found here given time.

A quick note on [Swift Mapper](#). It's quite nifty because it comes as a mobile app, so you can record whilst you're on the go. But one down side is that it doesn't incorporate the LSS sightings that we record on [Bird Track](#). It's not giving you anywhere near the full picture, with the evident lack of nest sites being a good example of this. If you do use Swift Mapper - fantastic stuff, carry on. But also please let us have your sightings as well, so we can have a centralised database for swifts in Lewes.

A Photo Challenge




Are there any would-be photographers out there willing to take up the challenge of getting a good swift photo?

It'll be tricky! Swifts are the fastest bird on the horizontal and can power themselves up to and even upwards of a speed of 69.3mph. Now, that's swift!

Debs Kemp managed to photograph a flyby of 11 swifts on 26 June.

Your Quotes

Steph Powell on 20th May - 'Just heard lovely swifts flying over Western Road. We are near St Anne's. Love their sound! 

Ruth Jayawant on 19th May - 'I've had to stop raising my eyes to the heavens as I walk around because I nearly took a tumble the other day. So I was delighted to hear swifts whilst walking up Bradford Road yesterday morning at 11.35. I managed to catch sight of three.'

Julie McNamee on 22th May - 'Had a lovely treat this morning while I was brushing my teeth - watched a group of 6 swooping around for a bit (out the back of High Street in Keere Street direction). I'm presuming they were screaming but I had the radio and the electric toothbrush going...'

Jenny Clarke in the Pells area, between 9pm and 9.30pm on 23rd June - 'They were having a whale of a time....Everything from pretending to be fighter pilots, screaming sideways round the roof, to the swift equivalent of a murmuration - certainly >30 but tricky to say.'

Who are Lewes Swift Supporters?

Swifts are on the decline and need our help. Lewes Swift Supporters seek to protect and expand the town's falling population by caring for the nest sites that we have and by creating new homes for the birds.

LSS Committee:

Mike Ramsey (Chair)

Audrey Jarvis (Secretary)

Kevin Murphy (Recorder)

Caroline Russell (LSS Communications Officer)

Nick Jarvis

Crispin Holloway.

Facebook: Lewes Swift Supporters **Twitter:** @LewesSwifts **Email:** lewesswifts@gmail.com

FALLEN BABY SWIFT? Contact:

Sussex Swift Bird Rescue (Samantha Whitworth and James Leadbetter)

Tel: 07715 681 662 or 07480 841 000

Email: samanthawhitworth4@gmail.com

WRAS

Tel: 07815 078 234 24 hour Rescue Hotline



Western Road, where our swift box project will take place next year.
Something to look forward to for 2021!