

# Shropshire Swift Group Newsletter

## January 2016

### Introduction



There were too many warm and dry days to tempt me outside before Christmas so I have been somewhat tardy in pulling together all the recorded swift nest sites from 2015. However it is all now stored in suitable format, submitted to Shropshire Council and also to the county bird recorder. In total there are 120 swift nest site records from across the county for 2015 – a fantastic effort by all.

Members of **Ludlow Swift Group** held their now customary **Welcoming the Swifts** events in May and were also busy surveying the town for new nest sites and checking that known sites were still in use. It turned out that a few well known sites that had been used for many years were not occupied in 2015 and the number of nest sites on a key building was well down compared with 2014. In general it was felt to not be the best year for swifts in the town.

**Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group** carried out their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of surveying and it was good to see that a few new sites were located. Interestingly there were a few buildings that were discovered in 2014 that were used again in 2015 - but the birds were entering the building in a slightly different place. Another nest or just a new entrance to it? What will happen in 2016?

The new **Shrewsbury Swift Group** – part of Shropshire Wildlife Trust – started surveying the town centre and suburbs in 2015. It was a great start for a large town as we all know how long it can take to pinpoint nest sites. As expected older residential buildings in the town centre together with 1930's era housing in the suburbs are favoured locations. It was exciting to find that Ditherington Flax Mill is still well used by swifts.

Records for other market towns, villages and even isolated houses all help add to the picture of swifts across the county.

As I write this the Action for Swifts blogspot tells me it is 110 days until swifts return to the UK. So below is some information about other projects for swifts across the UK to give you a flavour of what is happening and perhaps some ideas of what we could do here in Shropshire. Also some dates for your diary and a request for some more active members of the group to help take forward some of the ideas.

I will be in touch again in the Spring but in the meantime I would love to hear from you with your thoughts about how we ensure a good future for these wonderful summer visitors.

*Peta*

# Swifts on BBC Autumnwatch



Photo © Mark Glanville

2015 was the year that Bristol held the title of European Green Capital and swifts played a large part in the celebrations. Swift enthusiasts Mark And Jane Glanville worked with the BBC to film the swifts at their house. The start of the breeding season was seen on Springwatch but when the programme ended in June their chosen swift family were incubating three eggs which were just about to hatch.

So it was not until November when Autumnwatch returned to our screens that we were all able to find out what had happened to the chicks over the summer and hear that they had fledged. The program is still available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0371xqd>.

## Bristol Swift Project Seminar

In November Bristol Swift Project - which includes RSPB, Bristol Naturalists' Society, Bristol Zoological Society, Avon Wildlife Trust and Bristol Swifts – organised a seminar for developers, planners, architects and ecologists. The title was ***Enhancing the built environment for wildlife around Bristol*** and its aim was to provide a wider understanding of the environmental and social well-being benefits of making provision for nature within new and restored buildings. But it was not really just about Bristol – it is relevant to all our towns and cities.

Did you know we have a MP who is a swift champion? Kerry McCarthy Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Bristol East MP and wildlife enthusiast spoke about her role as RSPB 'Swift Champion' in the conservation of swifts at the meeting.

Other speakers were

- **Edward Mayer** – Swift Conservation – Follow the link to see the slides for his (and all the other) talks. [10% to Save the Swift](#)
- **Mike Oxford** - Chair of British Standard Institute panel on Bio-Diversity in Buildings, a member CIEEM and Project Office of Local Government Ecologists spoke about ecology and planning considerations. His talk is called [Light at the wrong end of the Tunnel](#)
- **Marcus Grant** - Director of SHINE (Supporting Healthy Inclusive Neighbourhood Environments). His talk - [As Swifts so as to Humans : All health is rooted in nature.](#) - was about the importance of urban conservation to the health and well being of residents.
- **Claire Hector** - Arc Consultants - [A Developer's Perspective](#) in successfully incorporating wildlife habitats within buildings. See Freshwater Fields below for more information.
- **Jan Stannard** - founder of Maidenhead, Marlow and Cookham Swift Group related her experiences with Whitbread/Premier Inn and McCarthy & Stone. [Helping swifts and building reputations](#) highlights how for a small cost of swift boxes good PR is created..

You can read more about Bristol Swifts and the seminar at <http://www.bristolswifts.co.uk>

# Freshwater Fields – Isle of Wight



Spectrum Housing Group – a not for profit organisation based in the south of England has a 4Bs (Birds, Bees, Bats and Bugs) Nature Nearby initiative. The group has recently built 50 new houses on the Isle of Wight which incorporate 50 swift nest bricks. Photo © Spectrum Housing

There are more and more developments across the UK that are incorporating swift bricks – housing associations and both large and small developers are becoming more swift aware – but we all need to continue to ask for swift bricks where appropriate. You can see some more examples at <http://actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk/2015/10/new-houses-for-people-and-for-swifts.html>

## Birds of Conservation Concern

The latest Birds of Conservation Concern was published in December 2015 and it is not a cheerful report. Swifts are still amber listed but numbers are down around 45% just under 20 years (1994-2012) with annual losses reckoned to be about 3% a year. That's appalling. We need to make sure that these birds have somewhere to nest and breed. There may well be other factors but if there's nowhere for those that do get here each year to breed these numbers can only get worse. For more information see <http://www.bto.org/science/monitoring/psob> and <http://britishbirds.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/BoCC4.pdf>

## Daventry



It's not just houses that need swift bricks and boxes – industrial buildings used to be wonderful homes for swifts until they were all knocked down. But a new factory in Daventry has boxes thanks to someone who works there persuading the owners to put up nest boxes. The boxes have only been up 2 years, but in 2015 birds were seen flying into 2 of them.

There must be plenty of similar opportunities at factories, offices and other non-residential buildings. Could you put swift boxes up where you work?

# Sedbergh



Photo © Tanya Hoare

Sedbergh Community Swifts arranged for Swift nest bricks installed into the walls of the People's Hall – the community building for the town of Sedbergh in Cumbria. A new gym extension to the Hall was being built during the winter so this was an ideal opportunity to get the bricks installed.

The building is of blockwork with a rendered exterior, and it was important not to compromise the insulation of the building. Four Schwegler bricks (Type 1A) are incorporated in the gable end. Also included was the facility to play Swift attraction calls, using the Cheng Sheng amplifier system. As swifts often fly over the adjacent playing fields and a few nest in nearby buildings it is hoped it will not take too long to attract them to these new boxes.

Edward Mayer of Swift-Conservation gave advice and architects Garsdale Design offered enthusiastic support. The project was funded by a grant from the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

## Swifts in churches



In 2007 **Action for Swifts** installed 12 Swift boxes in the north side of the massive belfry of St Mary the Virgin, St Neots in Cambridgeshire. Attraction calls have been played and in 2014, 9 of the 12 boxes were occupied.

With the help of generous funding from '*St Neots in Bloom*' 32 more boxes have now been added - 16 in the east side and 16 in the west.

In July 2015 it was found that 2 pairs of swifts had occupied the new boxes on both the east and west sides and the occupied boxes in the north increased from 9 to 10 pairs.

So – churches are also great for swifts and they apparently do not mind the noise of the bells. Perhaps you know a church near you that could house a few boxes?

## Dates for your Diary

By **May 7<sup>th</sup>** swifts will be back – so we will arrange swift surveying again this year wherever we can across the county.

**Saturday June 11<sup>th</sup>** – Cuan Wildlife Open Day. We spoke to a lot of people at this event last year so it would be good to take our display boards and leaflets again this year.

**Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September** – Heritage Open Days at Ditherington Flax Mill



# Help Needed



Shropshire Swift Group always welcomes more members as the more people we have able to take on some of the work the more we can do to help swifts across the county.

- Can you help write articles for the local press? A steady feed of articles and/or letters would really help get the message across.
- Set Help with social media?
- Help at local events?
- Run a Welcoming the Swifts event?
- Lead swift walks?
- Set up a surveying group in your town/village?
- Talk to your neighbours and local businesses and ask people to put up swift boxes?
- Run a children's swift event?
- Any other ideas to help raise awareness about swifts?

Please get in touch [shropshireswifts@gmail.com](mailto:shropshireswifts@gmail.com) if you would like to do more to help swifts.