



**Shropshire  
Swift  
Group**

# SWIFTS IN THE STRETTONS 2021



## PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The swift (*Apus apus*) is amber-listed as a bird of conservation concern (due to falling population numbers) and it is thought that the loss of nest sites due to modern building methods and materials has played a key role in their decline. By recording known nest locations, it is possible to monitor whether these sites continue to be used in subsequent years or whether new sites are selected and, importantly, to liaise with residents, builders and planners when works to improve properties is carried out to ensure the preservation of nesting opportunities.

Surveying also indicates where it might be worthwhile installing artificial nest boxes to increase colony size – the birds are sociable and tend to nest within close range of each other.

Swifts are commonly observed in and around the Strettons but there was no formal recording of the locations of nest sites or the number of birds until 2014, when the first “Swifts in the Strettons” was inaugurated by the Stretton Area Community Wildlife Group, under the leadership of Peta Sams. Observations were carried out in 2015 and 2016 which enabled the earlier study to be built on and extended. In 2021 the same methodology was again used, but observations were on a more ad hoc basis. Any reports by members of the public were also followed up.

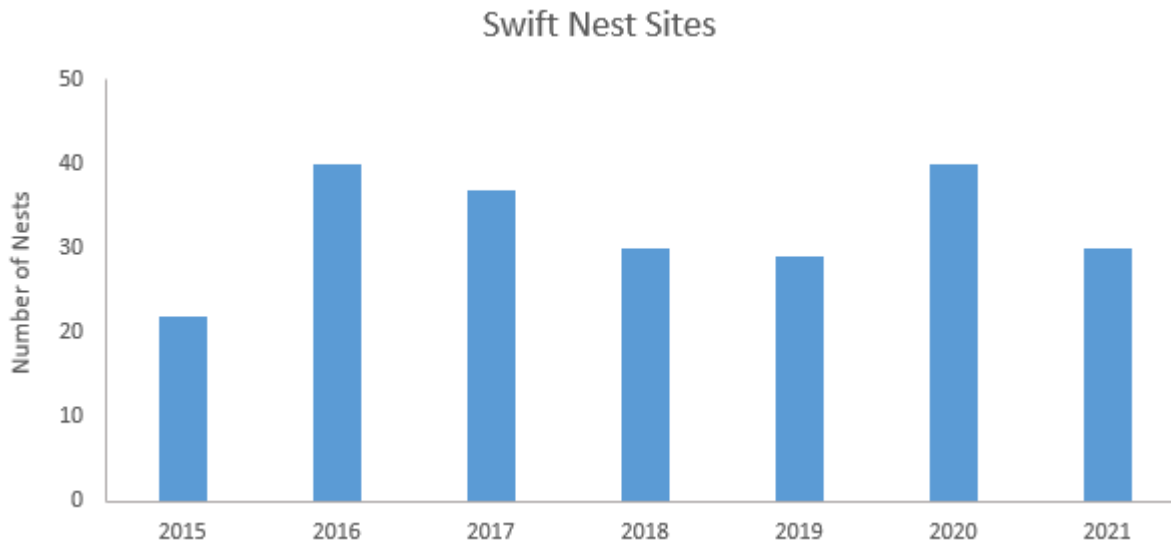
The location of the nest sites recorded will be passed to Shropshire Council, Church Stretton Town Council, Church Stretton Civic Society, RSPB swift survey and the county bird recorder for use when proposals for maintenance or modification of buildings occupied by swifts are filed with planning authorities and to establish the presence of swift populations in the county.

## RESULTS

### General Observations of Swifts in the Strettons

No formal surveying took place in 2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The first confirmed sighting of swifts within the Strettons was 2 May 2021, 20 days earlier than the previous year. As the months of May and June progressed more sightings were observed and recorded as nesting birds. As in the previous three years, some of the key locations that had been recorded in the early years of the survey (2014-2020) did not produce records in 2021. At other hotspots in the town swifts were observed in groups as aerial counts. 30 nest sites were confirmed (ie birds entering a consistent location two or more times, or feeding young, or presence of young), see Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Number of swift nest sites year on year in the Strettons since 2015.**

The last date of observation of a swift was mid-August 2021.

**Swift Nest Site Locations**

Nest aspect is varied although the general trend has been that a westerly aspect is the least preferred (see table 1).

**Table 1: Nest Aspect for Confirmed Nest sites (where known) in 2021.**

ASPECT OF NEST	CONFIRMED SITES
N	7
S	8
E	14
W	1

Of the confirmed nest sites in Church Stretton town they were found in 21 buildings at 21 addresses. Nest sites were confirmed in Little Stretton, however none were reported in All Stretton.

**SUMMARY**

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the confirmed nests recorded in the 2021 survey season:

- Nest observations were down compared to 2020
- The original hotspot area in the town centre continues to see a decline in observations and elsewhere fewer sightings were reported
- Certain post War buildings have a high occupancy rate
- The installation of three nest boxes on one building in Church Stretton resulted again in successful breeding in 2021, and also due to camera technology at this location fighting birds were also observed
- Of the 13 other nest boxes installed in 2017/2018 there was one record of occupancy in 2021.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The 2021 survey saw a reduction in recorded nest sites and this is of concern as one of the prominent locations is currently undergoing a programme of re-roofing. These sites will be lost to swifts unless action can be taken. It also highlights the importance of the surveys as a way of providing evidence of wildlife occupation and the opportunity to discuss with the homeowners/landlords mitigation measures.

Anecdotally the consensus is that there appeared to be fewer swifts (as aerial observations) than previously noted. This may be reflected in the reduction in nest sites counted but it is too early to say if this is a trend. Of note, swift nest recording requires intensive effort to capture all of the records and the decrease in nest sites observed may also be due, in part, to the level of recording effort. It is important to be consistent with effort year on year but weather variation can disrupt this. It is proposed that in the future daily weather records should be made to assist in improving the science behind these surveys.

The 2021 swift breeding season in the Strettons saw reasonable weather conditions and it is surmised that this was beneficial for chick growth. 2021 also saw relatively good weather and it is hoped that within the next few years an increase in the return of breeding birds will reflect this. Of course their success in breeding also depends upon available sites too.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This survey would not have been possible without the efforts of Richard Bacon, Gay Walker, Sandra Whitlock, Will Priestley, Janet Longstaff and Andrew Morton.

Julie Cowley

27 November 2021

## **IMPORTANT: Confidentiality**

This is an edited version of the report without specific site information. Should you need to know further information please pass your request to Julie Cowley (email: [grahamandjuliecowley@gmail.com](mailto:grahamandjuliecowley@gmail.com) or phone: 01694 722310), who will consider whether this is appropriate.