



## Swift

*Apus apus*

### Description:

Larger than swallows and martins, swifts are black all over with a small pale patch on the throat. The swift is a fast-flying, streamlined bird with long, curved wings and a short, forked tail. Originally nesting on cliffs, it now mainly nests in buildings such as churches, chimneys and even tower blocks; it is particularly common in older parts of towns and cities. Arriving in Britain in April from their wintering grounds in Africa, swifts feast on flying insects.

**National status:** Classified in the UK as an Amber List species under the Birds of Conservation Concern review.

**Local status:** Common across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

**Associated habitats:** Urban habitats/gardens, farmland, coastal, upland, grassland, woodland and heathland.

**Key sites:** The Swifts housing development, Fulbourn, Cambridgeshire

### Suggested actions to benefit this species:

- Leave existing nest sites undisturbed
- When repairing buildings, make sure new access holes match exactly the location of the old ones
- When providing new nest sites make internal nest spaces, as they last longer (e.g. Schwegler Delta box (No 604), swift bricks and soffit holes)
- If you can't make internal spaces, put up nest boxes
- Report sightings of swifts to the local records centre: <http://www.cperc.org.uk/>

### Sources of further information:

<http://www.swift-conservation.org/>

<http://actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk/>

<http://actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/fulbourn-update.html>

<http://www.appliedecology.co.uk/case-studies/ecological-mitigation-saving-the-fulbourn-swifts/>

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-and-sustainability/safeguarding-species/help-us-help-swifts/case-studies/fulbourn-swifts/>



## Case study: Fulbourn swifts

164 houses of the Windmill Estate in South Cambridgeshire were due to be demolished/redeveloped beginning in 2007. Due to local concerns over substantial visiting swift populations, a dedicated conservation project was put into place and thanks to planning policy, possibly one of the largest swift populations in East Anglia (or the country!) has been preserved through the installation of artificial nest sites.



- 164 homes each offering 8 or more potential nest sites led to a huge population of swifts over the previous 40 years
- Known for their high site fidelity, the same individuals return to the same nest site year after year- therefore removing these sites would cause great destruction.
- Luckily the redevelopment was planned as a phased project- in the hope of minimising impact on the swifts.

## Early trials

Properties set for early demolition were blocked-off to swifts and Schwegler No.17 triple chamber external nest boxes were put in place. However swifts appeared to ignore these new boxes and tried to access their blocked-off nest sites instead. The following year, the nest boxes were relocated, along with the addition of 12 Zeist wooden nest boxes. Again, success rates were low.

## Main development phase

Due to the swift's reluctance to use external nest boxes, Hunters architects with the help of Swift Conservation designed a bespoke internal nest box. 72 of these boxes were incorporated into the new properties and added onto remaining dwellings, as well as 50 1MF Schwegler double chamber boxes. Swift call CD's were played in the hope of attracting passing birds attention.

Applied Ecology Ltd were commissioned to monitor swift activity, beginning in the summer of 2009. Their surveys provided positive results, with a third of the colony using nestboxes in 2011. In 2011 the Fulbourn Swifts Group (FSG) was set up, aiming to carry out community swift surveys. In 2012 it was reported the Swifts were steadily occupying the new boxes, but so were the Starlings, especially in the Schwegler boxes, as their entrances were larger than is necessary for Swifts. A group of local volunteers rectified this problem by reducing the entrance size using Polyfilla (see picture).



The 2014 swift survey carried out by the FSG observed swifts using 102 out of 159 internal nest boxes and 8 out of 98 external nest boxes. With all building completed at the end of 2014, the total number of nest boxes was 270.