

Have you seen swifts in Tayside?



Swifts visit Scotland from Africa for just over three months each summer. They eat, sleep and mate on the wing, never perching on wires or posts like swallows and martins do. In fact the only time they land is when raising their chicks. They are faithful to one nest site and return there year after year. On fine summer evenings swifts gather in 'screaming' parties, chasing each other around the buildings where they nest.

Have you seen this? If so, please let us know as we are building up a picture of where swifts nest and feed across Tayside.



Why do we need to help?

British Trust for Ornithology figures show that since the mid-1990s there has been a 62% decline in Scotland's swift population, mainly due to the loss of nesting and feeding sites. Increased use of pesticides may also be affecting swift numbers.

As old buildings are renovated and newer ones improved, swift nest sites are being lost. But it's easy to make sure this doesn't happen.



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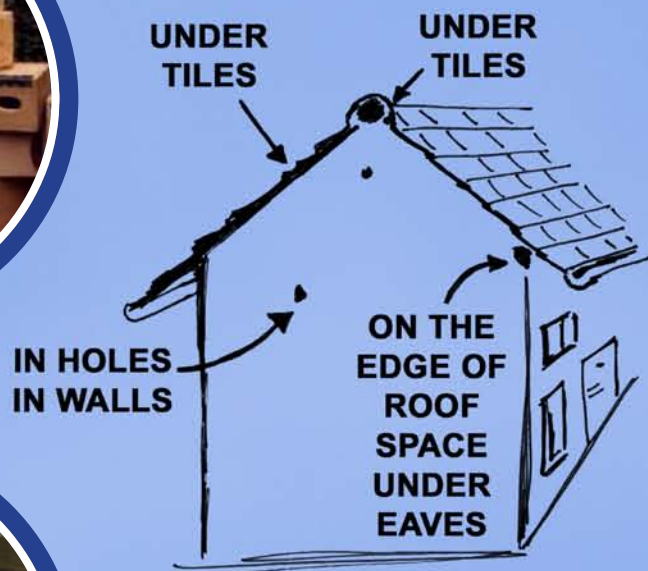
Where swifts like to nest

Underneath the guttering is a common place for swifts to gain access to a nest site. They make next to no mess and often you won't even know they are there.



© Graham Roberts / London's Swifts

Where swifts nest



© Concern for Swifts Scotland

How you can help swifts

- If you have swifts nesting in your property and need to make repairs, work outwith the nesting season of May-August (the nests are protected by law so you cannot disturb them). Make sure you retain the gaps swifts need for access to the nest site.
- Why not put up a swift nest box on the building when undertaking repairs: see the London's Swifts website for further information.



© Martin Ridley

The picture below shows two nest boxes on the Council office in Crieff. Young swifts have been seen flying past and screeching so hopefully they will soon nest in the boxes.

- Consider including integral 'swift bricks' into a new build. We are happy to advise householders, planners and developers in making way for swifts.
- Help us map the distribution of swifts in Tayside. It is very simple - go online, contact a Ranger or pick up a leaflet.



© Daniele Muir



Swifts are unique



© Amir Ben Dov / Swift Conservation

Good feeding spots are found over lochs, rivers and reservoirs, at forest edges and in front of reed beds. Great places to see swifts in Tayside include Loch Leven, Forfar Loch and over Comrie.

- *The swift's scientific name is Apus apus which means 'without feet'. Swifts do have feet but having very short legs makes it difficult for them to take off if they are grounded.*
- *Swifts usually nest at least 5m above ground level so they can get airborne easily.*
- *Swifts catch their insect food on the wing and store it in a 'ball' to feed to their young.*
- *Swifts can fly up to 10 km high.*
- *Swifts fly hundreds of miles every day just to feed, often flying around bad weather systems.*
- *Young swifts can go into torpor when food is scarce - growth ceases and the bird's system slows down.*
- *Good feeding spots are also high in thermals where they feed on the insects trapped there by the rising heat.*
- *Young swifts do 'press ups' on their wings to strengthen their muscles before they fledge.*
- *Before people understood migration, swifts were thought to spend winter in mud at the bottom of ponds.*
- *Scottish names include 'lum screamer' and 'screecher', while the Gaelic 'gobhlan dubh' means black swallow.*



Swifts are the largest species at 17cm long. They are dark sooty brown and look like a flying boomerang!

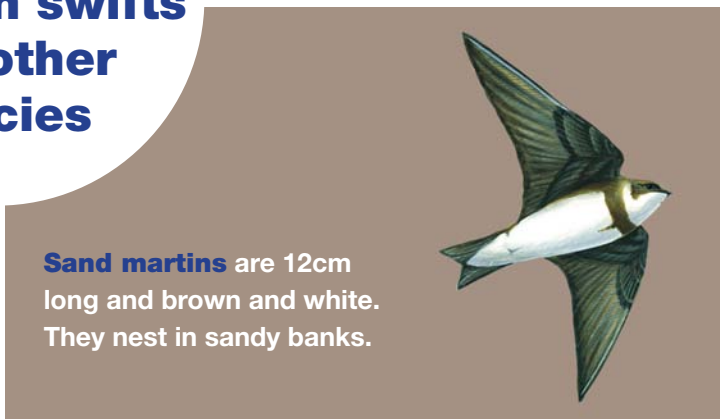


House martins are blue and white with a very obvious white rump. They are about 13cm long.

How to tell the difference between swifts and other species



Swallows are 19cm long (including their long tail). They are blue and white with an obvious red throat.



Sand martins are 12cm long and brown and white. They nest in sandy banks.

All illustrations © RSPB

The Tayside Swift Survey

We need to survey the whole of Tayside so please let us know where you see swifts. The online survey is at: www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk or pick up a survey leaflet locally.

Further information from:

www.swift-conservation.org
www.londons-swifts.org.uk
www.concernforswifts.com
www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk



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