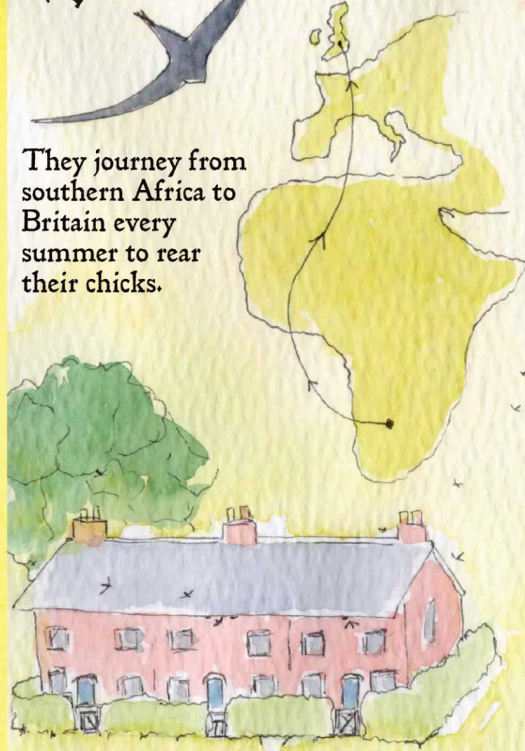


**A SWIFT TIMELINE:** Start here →

Over 60 million years ago, when dinosaurs were dying out and humans had not yet evolved, swifts were flying in our skies. The Earth was covered in trees, and swifts made their nests high up in the cracks of the tallest tree trunks. They have safely reared their chicks in our houses and buildings. Sadly, in the last 40 years, people have begun to seal up the cracks and holes used by swifts, with plastic. The plastic boards do not provide cracks like stone and bricks do, so places to nest have become difficult to find. As a result, the number of swifts has become fewer and fewer. If this timeline shows how long swifts have existed, this tiny section of it, coloured red, would show how long we humans have been around. Makes you think, doesn't it?

This is a swift...

They journey from southern Africa to Britain every summer to rear their chicks.



They nest under the eaves of our houses in cracks and crevices, and lay 2 or 3 eggs.

Both the male and the female feed the chicks and keep them warm.

After about 40 days the chicks are fully grown and weigh about 40g - roughly the same as a creme egg!



In the last few days before they fledge, the chicks can be seen peeping out at the world they are about to join. Do you think they might be excited, scared, or puzzled? All they have known so far in their lives is a dark hole!

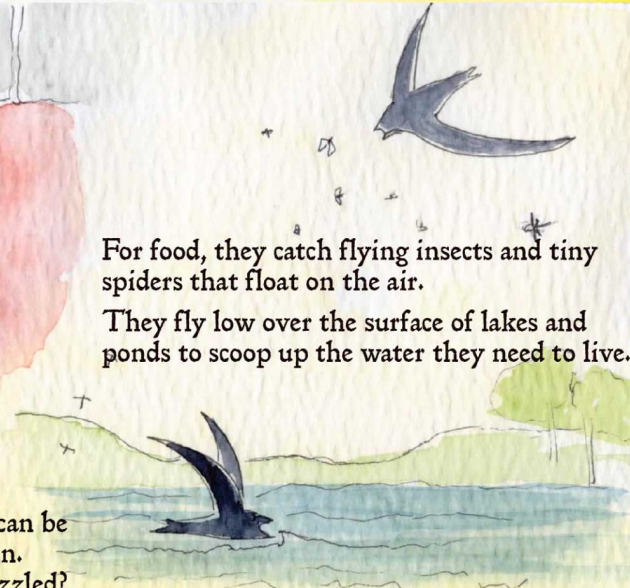
Once they have fledged, it will be at least 2 or 3 years before they touch land again. They fly straight off to Africa, but come back to Britain each summer until they are ready to find a partner and breed.

In an average year, a swift can fly up to 250,000 miles. That's just a bit further than flying to the moon!

When they find a partner, they make a nest and become parents themselves. Each year from then on, they meet up with the same partner at the same nest every summer.

If their nest is destroyed while they are gone, they will have nowhere to lay their eggs and they will be distressed.

For food, they catch flying insects and tiny spiders that float on the air. They fly low over the surface of lakes and ponds to scoop up the water they need to live.



We can help swifts by planting wildflowers in our gardens, to attract a range of pollinating insects that swifts like to eat.

The very best thing you can do in your garden is to make a pond, however small, because they are great for breeding insects.

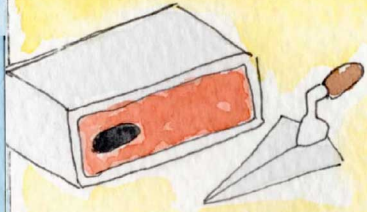
You really can make a difference!



And remember - don't use insecticides!

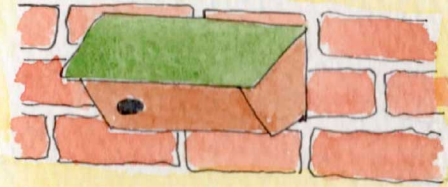
lost their nesting places, until there were only a few left. But when the Greeks and the Romans started to construct tall buildings out of stone, swifts saw that they could use the high up cracks between stones in the walls and roofs for nesting. For nearly 2000 years, swifts have safely reared their chicks in our houses and buildings. Sadly, in the last 40 years, people have begun to seal up the cracks and holes used by swifts, with plastic. The plastic boards do not provide cracks like stone and bricks do, so places to nest have become difficult to find. As a result, the number of swifts has become fewer and fewer. If this timeline shows how long swifts have existed, this tiny section of it, coloured red, would show how long we humans have been around. Makes you think, doesn't it?

## MAKING NEW HOMES



Swifts are losing their places to nest, but we can easily provide new places with a little thought and effort.

Some people replace a few bricks in their wall with special nesting bricks ...

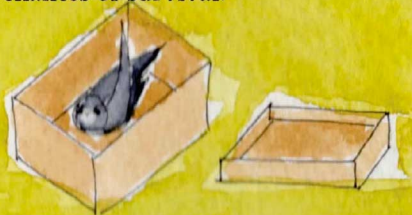


...while others put up swift boxes hoping to attract these lovely birds.

### How to Rescue a Swift.

Sometimes, swifts fall to the ground and need help. Even if it is a very young chick with hardly any feathers, specialist carers can give it a chance to live.

1. Don't leave the swift on the ground - a cat will get it.
2. If it looks fully grown, try lifting it up in your open hands to see if it wants to fly away.
3. If it stays in your hand, put it in a box with a ventilated lid and contact your nearest swift group, or tell the Facebook page "Swift & Swallow SOS Coordinating Rescues"
4. Don't try to feed the swift - the wrong food could seriously damage its chances of survival.



## Test your swift knowledge!

Are you ready for a quiz?

Q1 What do swifts eat?

- a) Flying insects b) Berries c) Seeds

Q2 Where do swifts spend the winter?

- a) Lapland b) Southern Africa c) Tenerife

Q3 Where do swifts nest?

- a) in trees b) in walls c) on the ground

Q4 How many miles can they fly each year?

- a) 500 b) 8,000 c) 250,000

Q5 Why are swifts in trouble?

- a) when houses are done up, nesting holes are lost.  
b) there are fewer insects for them to eat because we use too many insecticides  
c) both of these reasons

Q6 How can we help?

- a) by making our gardens insect friendly  
b) by putting up nest boxes and swift bricks on our homes.  
c) by being careful not to damage nests when we do up our homes.

Answers: Q1 b) Insects; Q2 b) Southern Africa; Q3 b) in walls; Q4 c) 250,000; Q5 c) both of these reasons. Q6 we can help by doing all these things.

Answers