

SWIFTS



Mysterious, Prehistoric, Endangered.



A Swift Timeline

Start Here → Over 60,000,000 years ago, swifts emerge

As a distinct species, just as dinosaurs became extinct. They used to nest in cracks in tall trees. But then man started to cut down the trees to clear land for farming. Their habitat diminished over time, but when the Greeks and Romans started to construct tall buildings out of stone, swifts adapted and used the cracks and crevices in walls and roofs for nesting. For nearly 2000 years, this had been a satisfactory arrangement for both man and swift, but then man started to be more meticulous about sealing up houses, and what was worse, introducing plastic into the process. The plastic soffits did not allow for cracks and crevices like stone and brick had, so nesting sites became fewer and fewer. If sapiens have been around. Makes you think, doesn't it? How can we redress the balance? (Answers on a postcard...)

How long we hom sapiens have been around. Makes you think, doesn't it? How can we redress the balance? (Answers on a postcard...)

As April becomes May, our swifts leave Sub-Saharan Africa and fly some 5,000 miles to their breeding sites in the U.K.



The journey takes about 5 days, storms permitting.



Their instinct is to always return to the same nest each year, and they have a precise memory of its position.

They make nests with feathers and grasses - whatever they can catch floating on the air - and lay two eggs, sometimes three.

Once chicks are hatched, the parent birds spend long periods of time away from the nest collecting food. They catch hundreds of airborne insects and spiders and carry them in a bolus, in the throat. When the weather is poor, swifts may fly hundreds of miles, skirting weather systems in search of food.

Swift chicks can survive long periods of time without food by entering a state of torpor, similar to hibernation.

After 42 days, when the chicks should have reached the perfect weight of 42g, they are ready to fledge.

For the first two or three years after fledging, immature swifts will be looking for potential nest sites for when they are ready to breed. They search out possible holes and cracks in the eaves of buildings, brushing their wings against the openings. They are nicknamed "bangers" because they look like they are deliberately colliding with the wall.

If they think they may have found an empty site, after a few fly-bys they may enter and have a look around to judge its suitability for breeding the following year.




Did you know that when a swift fledges it doesn't touch down to earth again until it's ready to breed? That could be up to three years later!

When swifts are not nesting, they are in a constant state of flight. They feed by catching insects and airborne aphids and spiders, and they skim lakes and ponds for water. They even mate and sleep on the wing.

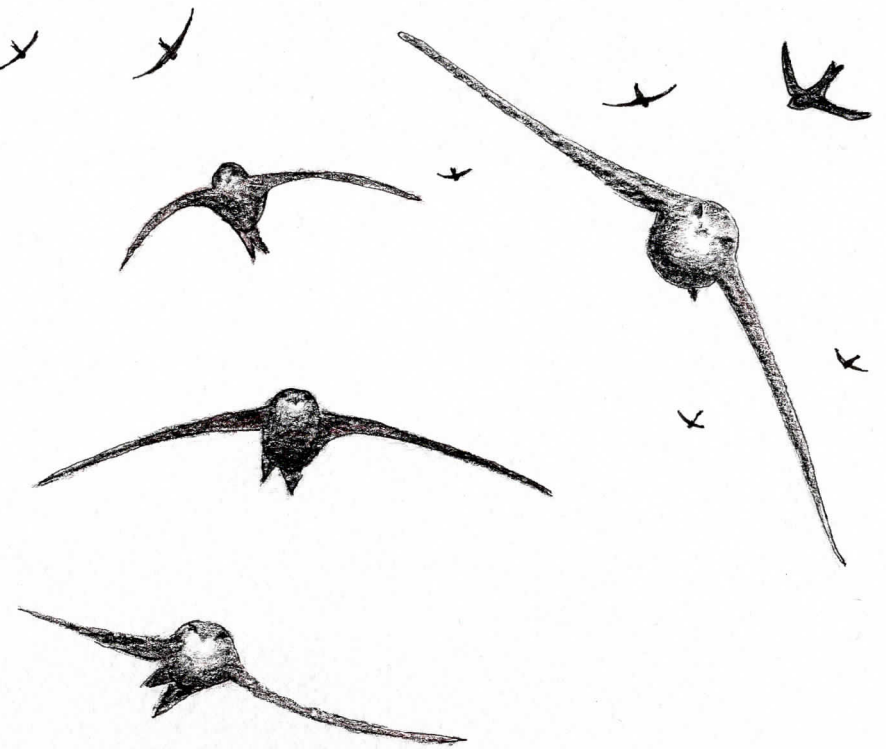
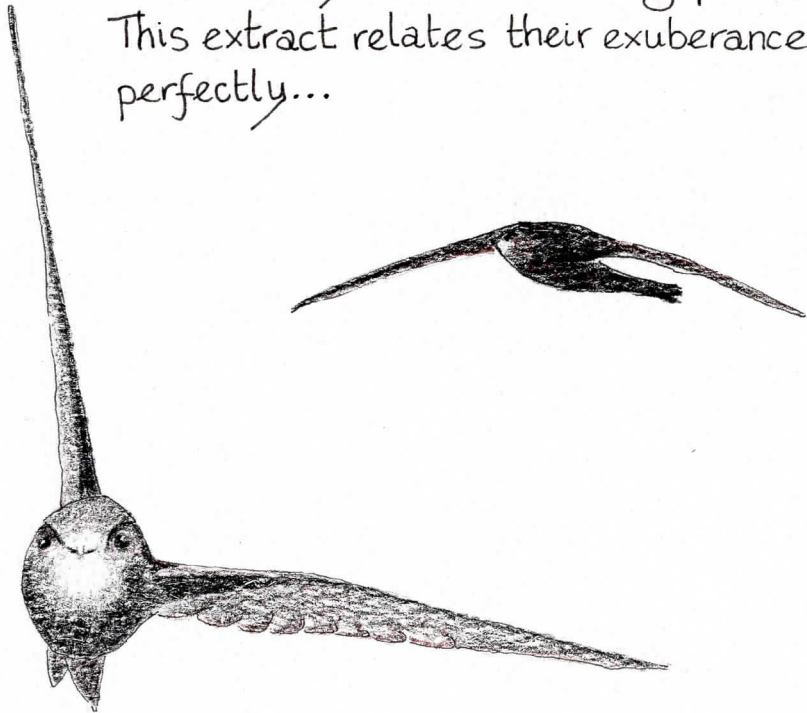
On warm summer evenings, swifts can be seen spiralling high into the sky to spend the night up to nearly two miles above the Earth. Here, they can roost without fear of predators. They shut down half their brain at a time, allowing sleep, but ensuring that their navigational instincts keep them from being blown off course.





One of the most lovely sights and sounds after a long, hot summer's day is a happy band of screeching swifts, swooping over the rooftops in perfect synchronicity.

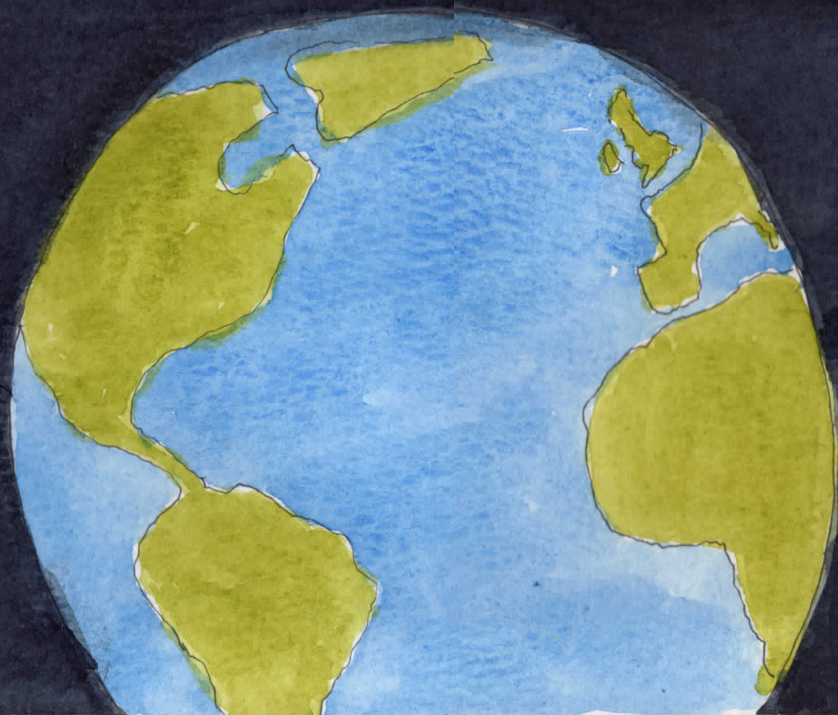
Ted Hughes wrote a beautiful poem inspired by these screaming parties. This extract relates their exuberance perfectly...

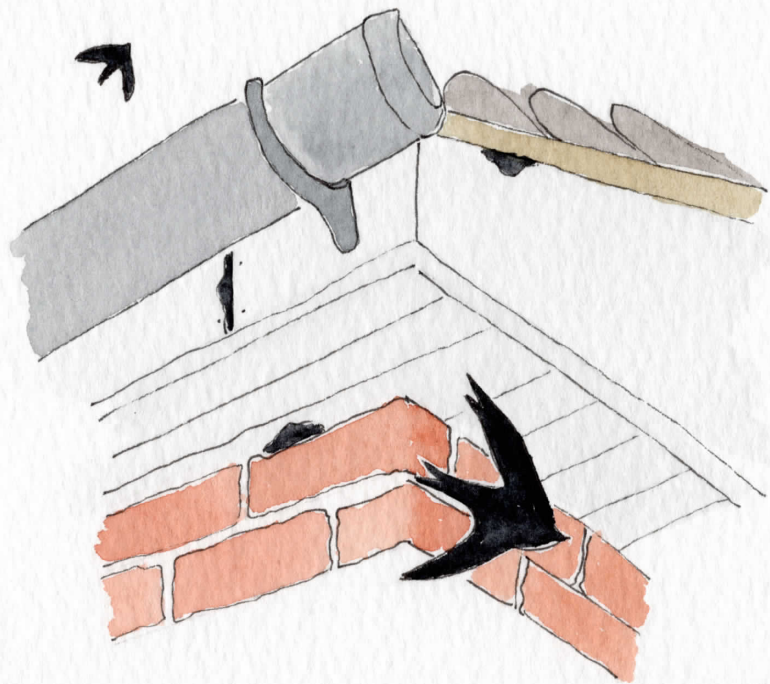


“And here they are again
Erupting across yard stones
Shrapnel-scatter terror. Frog-gapers,
Speedway goggles, international mobsters-

A bolas of three or four wire screams
Jockeying against each other
On their switchback wheel of death.
They swat past, hard-fledged
Veer on the hard air, toss up over the roof
And are gone again.”

Living most of their lives on the wing, swifts will fly an average of 250,000 miles every year. That's just a bit further than flying to the moon!





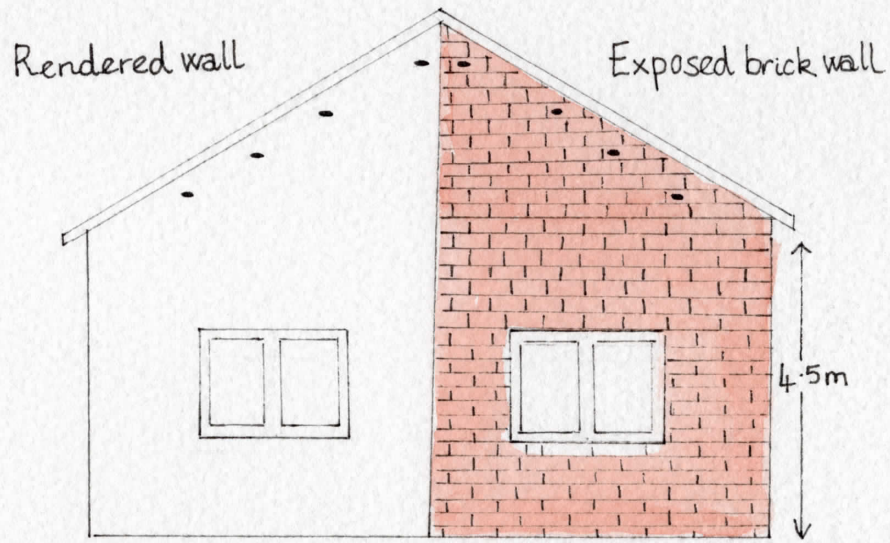
Swifts are almost entirely dependent on humans to provide their nesting places. They find hidden spaces under the eaves of buildings, accessed through little breaks in brickwork or fascias. But the relentless march of UPVC has meant that many fascias and soffits on older buildings have been replaced with plastic boards, which completely block the swift's entrance to the nest. When this happens, the swift will fly repeatedly at the place where it had been, often breaking their wings and dying as a result. UK swift numbers have reduced by more than 50% since 1995. The common consensus amongst swift support groups around the country is that it is mainly due to the accelerating loss of nesting sites. Where established sites are undisturbed, numbers

have remained constant and where new nest bricks and boxes are installed, colonies can quickly build in size.

Boxes are a good quick fix for existing buildings, but installing swift bricks in new developments will ensure secure nesting sites for many years to come. They are cheap and easy to install, will last the lifetime of the building and are maintenance-free. The nest chamber is a sealed enclosure which prevents any wildlife from getting into the fabric of the house.

Although swifts may take time to colonise new nesting sites, these "universal" bricks also offer much-needed accommodation to other red-listed birds, such as sparrows and starlings, and blue tits.

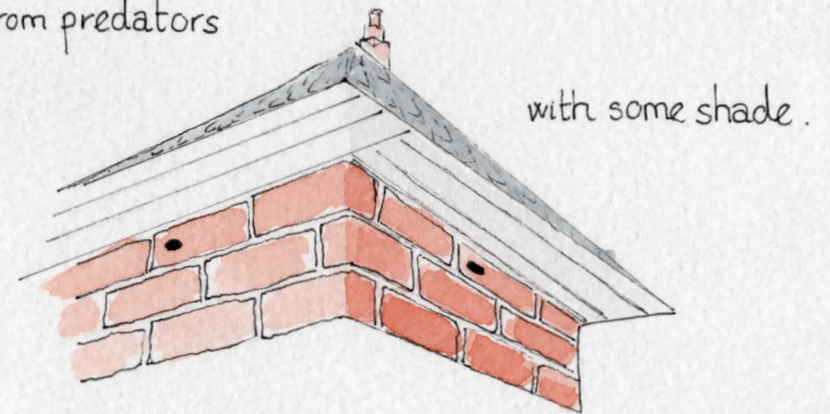




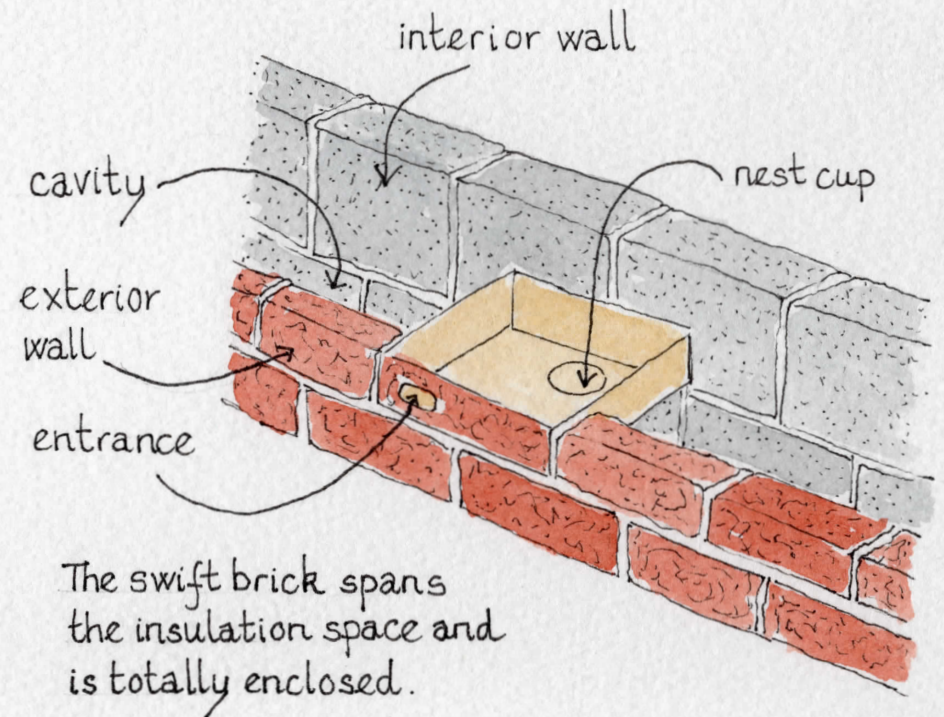
Guidelines for Positioning Swift Bricks.

1. Place bricks in groups ~ swifts nest in colonies.
2. A minimum of 4.5 metres above ground level.
3. At least 500~1000mm apart.
4. Place under the eaves, or at least where there is shade for part of the day.
5. Avoid placing immediately above windows.
6. Allow clear adjacent airspace for swifts to swoop in and out of the entrance.
7. Place away from where predators can perch or climb to the brick.

Safe from predators



Installing a Swift Brick.



The swift brick spans the insulation space and is totally enclosed.

The Swifts Local Network



Across the country, groups of expert conservationists work tirelessly to reverse the decline of swifts. They gather information and offer guidance to ecologists and councils involved with planning for biodiversity. A list of all the local groups may be found on the website: www.swift-conservation.org.

They help people who want to create nesting spaces, advising on suitable bricks, boxes and calling systems and where best to locate them. Much of their time from May to September is spent monitoring breeding sites and advising owners of houses that accommodate swifts how to carry out renovations without endangering the birds.

During the breeding season, volunteers care for injured swifts that have ended up on the ground. Many of these are young swifts who have not yet fully developed and so cannot fly. The dedication of these carers is truly amazing. They are specialists who have undergone specific and detailed training. Even rehabbers of other bird species need to learn to look after swifts, so specific are their requirements.

For at least 3 months every year, their homes are turned into swift rescue centres. They feed the chicks every hour, 18 hours a day. And although there's not much time in between, they also have to source and prepare insects for food, wash and dry the cloths used to handle the birds, and respond to calls when new casualties are found. They get very little sleep!

When the time comes for each swift to fledge, they are taken to a suitable place to be released and begin their journey to Africa.





Who will you send this message to?



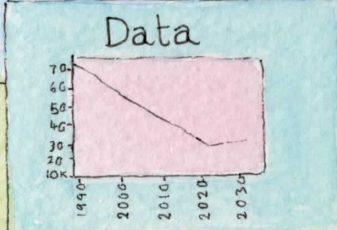
*Ratio is the operative word here: swift bricks should never actually be installed singly. Swifts nest in colonies, so bricks should be installed in groups of three or more.

Where Next?

Swift Rescue

action for swifts blog

Sourcing Boxes and Bricks.



News



www.swift-conservation.org

Videos and photographs

How YOU can help

SWIFT MAPPER

Record nests and sightings.

Find local experts and groups.

| | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SWIFT | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IRLAND |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALBA | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IRE |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SWIFT | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IRLAND |
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www.swift-conservation.org is a comprehensive website for all things swift-related. Also the **Action for Swifts** blog page is an informative commentary on the various activities of people who care about swifts.

Information Bank



Swift Conservation



Action for Swifts



Find a swift group near you!



Get the Swift Mapper App (it's free!)

The RSPB's Swift Mapper is an interactive map of the UK, which you can use to log where you see evidence of breeding swift sites. Little is known about swifts as they are so difficult to track, but the data from this app helps us to protect nests, and to know where best to provide new nest sites.

Protecting Nest Sites.

If you are lucky enough to have swifts nesting in your house already, be careful to preserve the nests and their access. Renovating roofs and soffits often means the entrance to the nest is cut off. You can easily remedy this by cutting a suitably sized hole and placing a nest cup inside the soffit.

Remember... it is illegal to prevent or hinder swifts from entering their nests. Scaffolding should therefore never be erected until after they have returned to Africa.

And finally...

If you find a grounded swift...

DON'T leave it on the ground - it's easy prey for cats.

DON'T throw it into the air or out of a window.

DON'T try to feed it - it's a specialist job.

DO put it in an enclosed, quiet, warm place.

DO post on Facebook page "Swifts and Swallows S.O.S."
You will receive a swift response of help and advice!

Detailed advice may also be found on the swift conservation website.

Inspired by Nature...

The incredibly brave journey of the Swift has always been an inspiration to us here at Ozone, and we even named one of our favourite wings after this most intrepid bird. We're grateful to be able to support this project as part of our ongoing efforts to preserve the wild spaces we live and play in.

Ozone Paragliders and Kites is a company founded by paraglider pilots, with roots in the UK. Since 1998 we have provided our friends and customers with paragliders that carry us deep into the unknown - to world record altitudes in the Himalaya, and across world record distances in South America and the Alps. Like the swift, we trust our wings to carry us great distances.

Paragliding is a beautiful sport that almost anyone can try. If the thought of riding rising currents of air and floating across hundreds of kilometres of distance dancing beneath the clouds piques your interest, please visit our website to learn more about it and find a local school to get your first flight. Most students fly solo on day one!

Cheers, from all the team at Ozone.

www.flyozone.com



With thanks to all the campaigners, photographers, artists and writers who have inspired me, and Ozone for their generous sponsorship.

All enquiries: help.swifts@gmail.com

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