

Swift Conservation

The State of Scotland's Swifts

The Common swift (*apus apus*) is a summer visitor to Scotland, arriving in early May and leaving in early August for its wintering areas in southern and central Africa. They are superbly adapted aerial birds which live their entire life on the wing, and land only to breed. Originally using cliffs, crags and occasional trees for breeding, they have adapted well to using man-made buildings.



Photos L-R: © Amir Ben Dov, courtesy of London's Swifts; Daniele Muir

Surveys carried out by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) show that between 1994 and 2003 there was a 62% decline in the population of swifts in Scotland. In 2009 this led to swifts receiving an amber listing, showing they are now a UK species of conservation concern. They are also featured on the Scottish Species List.

It is thought a major contribution to the decline in population is the ever-increasing loss of nesting sites. Swifts are predominately associated with older buildings where they utilise the gaps under eaves and cracks in stonework to nest. They will nest in newer buildings where there are suitable gaps and spaces. However, modern building practices tend to exclude swifts from their traditional sites by using materials and making repairs which seal all gaps and cover ventilation spaces. Wire mesh plates or grids are now used to cover ventilation gaps, and new building materials and techniques do not offer alternative possibilities. There is also a lack of understanding as to when the birds nest, so scaffolding and nets are often erected at the wrong time of year, either excluding the birds from nesting or entombing them on an existing nest.

Swifts and Scottish golf courses

Older buildings on golf courses may already offer nest sites for swifts, and swift nest boxes can be erected to help increase the population, or help establish a new one if swifts are not present.

Swifts are very specific in their nesting requirements due to adaptations to their aerial lifestyle and require the following conditions:

- Nest site to be above 5m
- Nest box to face west, north or east (preferably north-east)
- Nest box to have a clear flight path



Further information

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

RSPB Swifts - <https://www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/discoverandlearn/swifts/>

The Tayside Swift Interest Group (Tayside Swifts) is part of the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership's Urban Working Group and meets regularly to work with volunteer surveyors to run an annual Tayside Swift Survey.

<http://www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk/get-involved/projects/projects-swifts/>