



Taking action to stop the catastrophic decline of Sheffield's swifts

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SHEFFIELD'S SWIFT SURVEY MANUAL

If we don't know where they are, we can't protect them!

Thank you for volunteering to help us survey for swifts, we can't protect them without you. Further information on our [website](#) Please send your records [here](#)

NB Our form contains no personal details, and emails/details will be treated with strictest confidence. Please record swift entering a nest space and [screaming parties](#)

Records are shared with the following environmental agencies for protection:

SCC Biological Records, SRWT, Sheffield Bird Study Group and RSPB Swift Mapper, LNRS

OUR OBJECTIVE

To identify and record the exact location of swift nest sites Sheffield in order to:

- protect nest sites in case of property renovation, repair etc
- diversify and expand existing colonies by possible provision of nest bricks and boxes
- raise public awareness of the decline of swifts

LOCATION

Let us know where you'd like to survey. It could just be your road, your estate or even a particular section on a map. Swift colonies seem to be more prevalent on social housing estates because roof renovations are less likely so do concentrate efforts there if possible.

We would hope that you would be able to repeat the survey at least **twice a month** (Mid-May to mid -August) so don't take on too much. If you prefer, we could allocate an area for you to survey.

When surveying, avoid areas where access is limited (eg, large private properties with inaccessible grounds or blocks of private gardens behind terraced housing).

WHEN TO SURVEY

Time of year:

The Swift breeding season takes place mid-May, June & July (a few birds stay into August and even September, usually because their breeding has been delayed by loss of eggs or the late arrival of a mate).

It would be fantastic if you could carry out **at least two surveys per month from late May until mid-August**. If you'd like to do more than that feel free. Do record the start and end times of our survey as well as the weather conditions, as this can affect the behaviour of swifts.

Swifts arrive back in "waves":

- Breeding birds start arriving the first week of May
- 2nd & 3rd year non-breeders arrive back from late May onwards
- 1st year birds arrive in June



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Time of day:

Surveys should be carried out in the evening, during periods of **peak low flying swift activity**, usually between 7.30pm and 9.30pm, this changes throughout summer so **an hour before dusk** is ideal.

Length of survey:

There is no set length of time for the survey but do cover the area or road thoroughly. Spend more time in areas where you have already observed low flying screaming parties, arcs or birds disappearing into a potential nest site

Conditions:

Carry out surveys in dry, still conditions

WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR

Swifts typically nest in: open eaves in our roofs // in holes in walls where pipes have been removed // under flashings around chimneys and sky lights // in gables behind barge boards // under loose roof tiles // in swift boxes & bricks



We are desperate for nest site records the following information are indicators as to where swifts might have a nest.

Screaming parties or Swifts flying at roof height

Please take a moment to [watch this video](#) this is a 'screaming party'

The presence of low flying **screaming parties** indicates the presence of a nest sites close by. Listening out for screaming parties is a good guide to where to start looking for actual nest sites. Record all low flying swift parties (within approximately 20m of rooftops, or 50m off the ground) and make a note if the swift party were heard screaming

At the beginning of the season screaming parties will be composed of breeding adults but as the season progresses the size and frequency of these parties will be boosted by the later arrival of non-breeders.

Please record the number of swifts in these parties.

Arcs and Bangers

As soon as a low flying party is seen, watch the flight path carefully and identify any parts of a building (usually the lower edge of a roof/gable) where the party comes within 1-2 metres. This is called an 'arc'. Please note down which part of the building the swifts fly close to (eg Left hand barge board front of house, half way down). You may even hear a 'tap' as a flying swift bang's it's wing to see if anyone is already nesting there. That's a banger!

Please record the exact point wherever possible.



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Nesting Swifts

Sometimes, especially where a nest has been established for a number of years, the adult birds will sneak in without warning. You might just catch the movement in the corner of your eye. Watch out for any swifts entering a spot and disappearing. If they don't come back out, they may be on a nest, possibly feeding young, and quietly trying not to attract predators. Revisit that site and look out for a swelling in their throat, they are carrying chick food.

This is the information we desperately need to help us protect that nest.

Once the eggs hatch, the swiftlets become increasingly demanding, then both adult Swifts be accessing the nest to supply food. The best time to look for nest sites is when both adults are feeding young. Please return to the nest site and watch for frequent visits

YOUR SAFETY

Your safety is of utmost importance. Always carry out surveys with someone else.

Carry a charged mobile phone and let people know where you're going. If possible, wear light or reflective clothing or a high vis vest – they are very fetching. Do be aware of traffic. It's so easy to be distracted and step into the road to get a better look at a particular nest.

PRIVACY OF OTHERS

Swifts are likely to be nesting or flying around private properties. Do use your discretion when carrying out your surveys and avoid any behaviour that could be seen as intruding on people's privacy. **Don't use binoculars.** Perhaps carry a clip board and wear a high vis vest and engage passers-by and explain what you're doing and why. Many nests have been found by chatting with neighbours whilst surveying.

Thank you so much. Above all else enjoy yourself! [The Sheffield Swift Network](#)

Many thanks to our friends at [Derbyshire Swift Conservation Project](#) for allowing us to reproduce material