

SWIFT BRICKS

An easy win for Builders, Birds
and Biodiversity.



A Swift Timeline

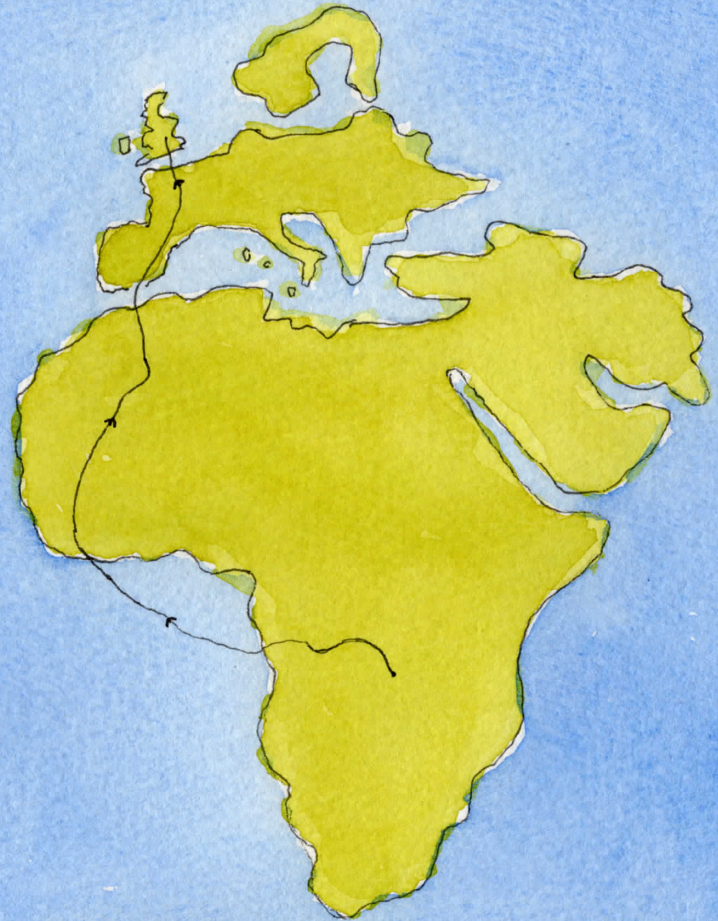
Start Here → Over 60,000,000 years ago, swifts emerged as a distinct species, just as dinosaurs became extinct. They used

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 become more meticulous about sealing up houses, and what was worse, introducing plastic into the process. The plastic swifts 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...)

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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!

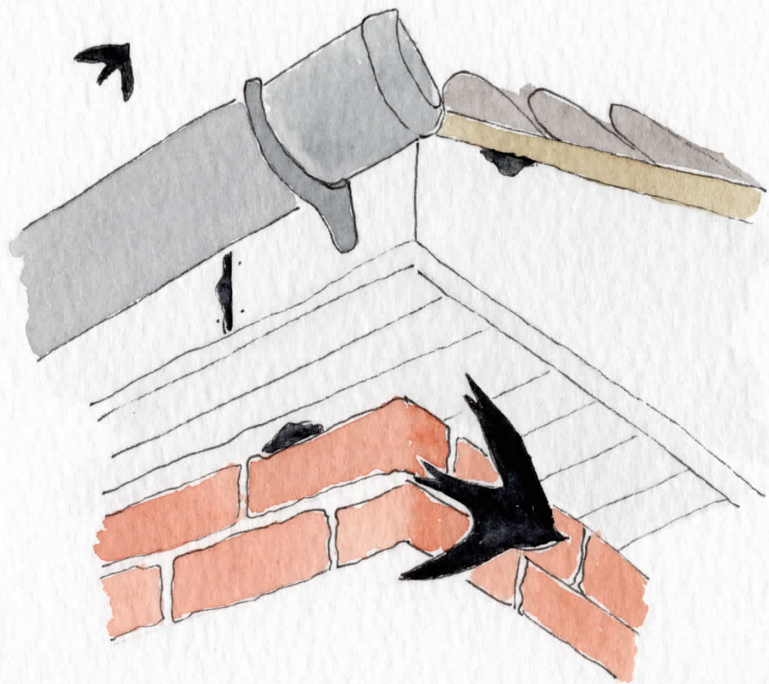
When swifts are not nesting, they are in a constant state of flight. They feed by catching insects and airborne aphids and spiders, and they skim lakes and ponds for water. They even mate and sleep on the wing.

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.



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!





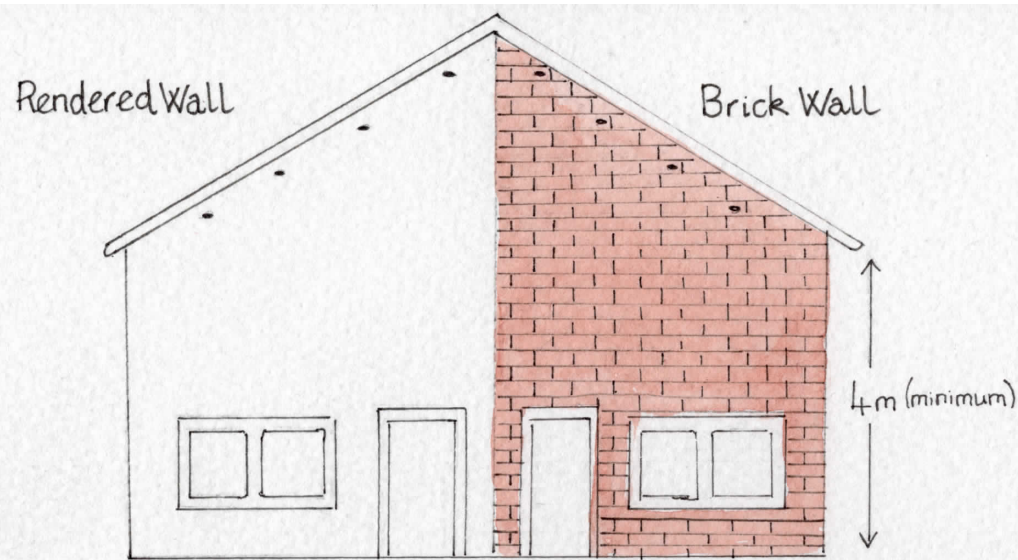
Swifts are almost entirely dependent on humans to provide their nesting places. They find hidden spaces under the eaves of buildings, accessed through little breaks in brickwork or fascias. But the relentless march of UPVC has meant that many fascias and soffits on older buildings have been replaced 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.



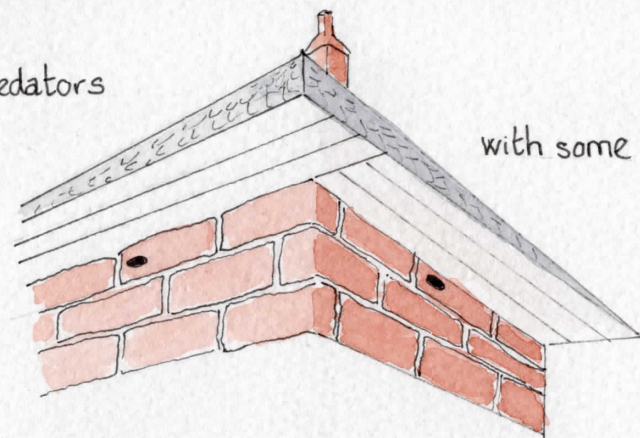


Guidelines for Positioning Swift Bricks.

(Full details may be found in BS42021:2022-Integral nest boxes - Selection and installation for new developments.)

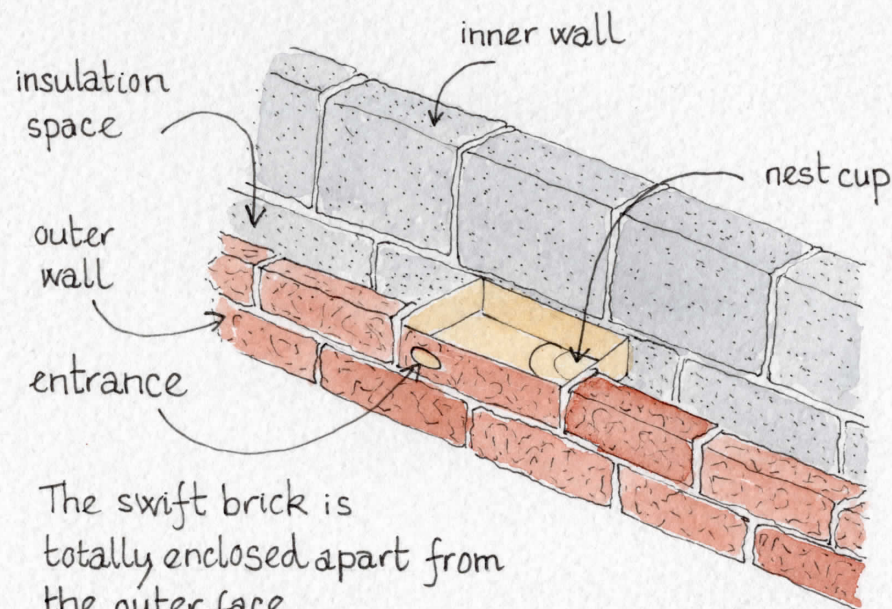
1. Place bricks in groups ~ swifts nest in colonies.
2. A minimum of 4 metres above ground level.
3. Entrance holes 1 metre apart (where possible).
4. If possible, place under the eaves, or at least where there is shade for part of the day.
5. Avoid placing immediately above windows.
6. Allow clear adjacent 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.

When correctly fitted following NHBC guidance, the box does not touch the inner wall, thus preventing cold spots and damp.



The swift brick is totally enclosed apart from the outer face.

N.B. The illustration shows an S Brick (Action for Swifts) ~ other models are available.

What people say...

"It's wonderful to give swifts a home in our home!"
Hannah Marcusson, Ely.

"Because the nesting brick is sealed on all sides except the entrance hole, we know they can't get into the walls or loft space."
Stu Brown, Leeds.

"The swift bricks we had installed in our school building have been a real success. The children learn about life cycles and migration, and the wider need to give nature a helping hand."
Mary Sherwen, Liverpool.

"The swifts are so clean there's never any mess of droppings. You really wouldn't know they're there most of the time."
Aileen White, Cheltenham.

Sourcing Swift Bricks

There are several different brands to choose from.



One of the best, for both design and cost, is the S Brick by **Action for Swifts**. Scan here for more details.

Here to Help

Across the country there are groups of expert swift conservationists who are working to reverse the decline of this iconic bird. They offer free guidance to developers, councils and ecologists and can advise on which bricks or boxes are most suitable, and where best to locate them.

They are known as the **Swifts Local Network** and your nearest group may be found by scanning here.





12th June
Please include swift bricks
in all new housing
developments, at a ratio of
at least one brick per
dwelling*. This small
concession would ensure
nesting sites for future
generations of swifts and
other red-listed birds.

Thank you!

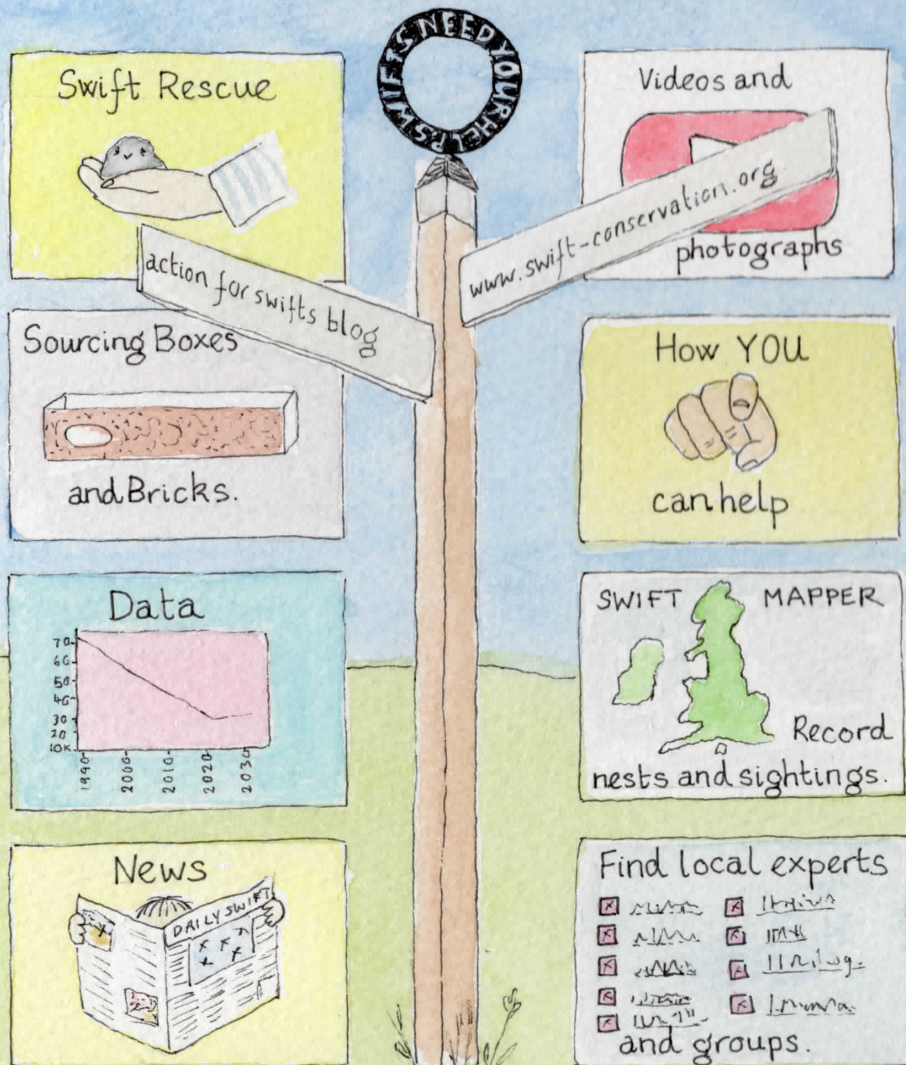
© NELLYCHUE "THE SWIFTS' LAST HURRAH!" 2023



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* Swifts nest in colonies, so bricks should be installed in groups of three or more.

Where Next?



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.

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

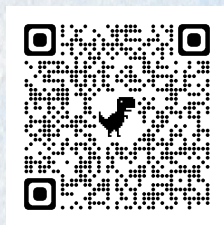


All enquiries to: help.swifts@gmail.com

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"Helen Lucy came to see me and presented me with a very informative booklet about this campaign." Richard Burgon MP.

Hansard, July 2023



Scan here to read the full parliamentary debate.

