

Swifts Conservation in the Cherwell District Project Guidance

**Kirtlington Wildlife and Conservation Society (KWACS) and Cherwell
District Council**

Background

Information collected by the British Trust for Ornithology shows that the number of Swifts breeding in Britain has declined considerably over the last 12 years. Much of this decline is caused by the loss of nesting sites, due to building repairs or even simple repointing of brickwork, which means that Swifts can no longer access a traditional site.

The Cherwell Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), published by Cherwell District Council (CDC) in 2005, is a working document that focuses attention and resources on those habitats and species that are particularly important in the District. The BAP identifies Swifts as an important local character species and includes a specific action within its Settlements Habitat Action Plan to –

‘Identify buildings, including churches, which support important Swift colonies and seek measures to safeguard and enhance these colonies. Promote Swift-friendly building maintenance and promote the use of Swift nestboxes on domestic properties’.

How will information about Swifts be used?

Our hope is that this year we can start to build up a record of Swift nesting sites in the Cherwell District so that they are known when planning applications are made. If this information is available, it is not difficult to preserve nest sites. Existing nest places can be reinstated, new ones designed and built into eaves or Swift nest boxes can be installed. Without this information, sites will continue to be lost. We hope that if we know where Swifts are nesting, it will also help with the establishment of new sites.

How can Parish groups help?

Cherwell District Council does not have the resources to implement the action relating to swifts in the Biodiversity Action Plan unless concerned people help gather information about where Swifts are nesting. The two local Ornithological Societies have offered their support (Banbury and Oxford) and the Council’s Biodiversity and Countryside Officer, Sue Marchand, has agreed to forward this information to you and other local organisations to ask for help.

Swifts are only in this country between the beginning of May and early August so May, June and July are the months to be looking out for them.

Swifts nest in the eaves of buildings or in gaps in the wall or tiles of a building. Their nests are not visible from the outside. In fact they use very little by way of nest material at all. It is not easy to find the exact site of a Swift's nest, unless you see one entering the building where it nests. If you are lucky enough to see that, please record the details of the location.

However, breeding Swifts have a distinctive screaming display flight particularly noticeable on fine summer evenings. When you hear this you can be sure that they are breeding nearby.

We would ask you to make a note of places (churches, other buildings or part of a street) where you see /hear Swifts displaying like this. Please use the accompanying form for your records.

Please do not send in casual records of flying Swifts. These birds can cover very long distances to collect food in adverse weather conditions. So you may see Swifts far away from the nesting place. That is why we need to restrict the records to displaying and nesting birds.

What to do with the records you collect

Please send the recording forms to Chris Mason, a member of the Kirtlington Wildlife and Conservation Society, who is currently co-ordinating the Swifts Conservation Project in the Cherwell District. His postal address is 21, Hatchway, Kirtlington, Oxfordshire OX5 3JS and telephone number is 01869 350518.

The information will then be passed on to Sue Marchand who will make it available to the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC). TVERC is funded by a partnership of organisations, including Cherwell District Council. It collects, collates and makes available information to help people make sound decisions about the natural environment in Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

Recording other species

House Martins make a nest of mud, usually under the eaves of a house or other building.

Swallows build a nest which is usually placed on top of a beam or ledge inside a barn or similar building.

If you would like to record details of places where these other birds are nesting, or where you know bats are roosting, that would be welcome and very useful too. These species also need protection and the information would be passed to Cherwell District Council and to TVERC. Please use the accompanying form for your records.

Thank you for your help.