

Swift



Photo. Iain Livingstone

Scientific Name:
Apus apus

Current factors causing loss or decline

An important focus of the concern for our Swift populations is loss of nest sites due to modern building practices. Increasingly swifts are excluded from their traditional sites by repairs which seal all gaps and cover ventilation spaces. Wire mesh or grids are now used to cover ventilation gaps and new building materials and techniques do not offer alternative possibilities.

Current Action

Glasgow City Council Housing Services agreed to a policy of swift nest site conservation in 1997. Where possible, existing nesting habitat is retained. Where no other possibilities exist, nest boxes are being installed at sites where swift colonies exist. Boxes are made up by SWT training teams and painted and installed by City Building during renovation work. Discussion continues with architects regarding other and more sustainable ways of making provision for Swifts. Glasgow City Council's Development and Regeneration Services (Heritage & Design) has agreed to issue a leaflet regarding Swift nest site conservation to owners of older properties who apply for grants.

A teaching aid "Swifts and Flight", designed to fit the 5-14 curriculum, has been produced and is available from Concern for Swifts, Scotland.

A survey of the Swift colonies in Glasgow is in progress (Concern for Swifts/SOC).

Current status

Swifts are summer visitors to Britain, arriving in Scotland from Africa at the beginning of May and leaving in August. They are notable for their wild aerobatics and shrill screaming around roofs and chimneys in summer when they reach incredible speeds. They are fully adapted to life on the wing. In Glasgow Swifts nest mainly in the older sandstone properties and in the peripheral housing estates built in the 1930s to 1950s. They can be seen feeding at Hogganfield Loch, Pollok Country Park and other areas within the City or on the periphery.

It is thought that Swifts originally nested in crevices in cliffs and holes in trees. More recently they have adapted to nesting almost exclusively in buildings. They are recorded as nesting in church towers, under tiled roofs, and under the eaves of buildings, where they gain access via gaps and cracks in stonework, bricks or concrete.

If disturbed or excluded from a nest site, they may find it difficult to relocate to a new nest site,



Photo. David Callan

at least for that season. Young pairs find new unoccupied nest sites during their first summer as adults, and return to breed in them the following year, i.e. when they are 2 years old.

The British Trust for Ornithology estimates the total swift population in Britain to be 80,000 pairs. A survey of the colonies in Glasgow is in progress (1999 onwards). This survey is showing colonies to be small - rarely more than 12 birds - and absent from some places where they were seen in the past.

Swifts are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) which makes it illegal to knowingly destroy or disturb the nest site during the nesting season. An increasing number of people both in Britain and abroad are becoming concerned about the perceived drop in numbers. As there is a connection between loss of nest sites and loss of breeding colonies, it is important to take action to ensure future nest site availability.

Objectives and targets

The key objective of the action plan is to stabilise and increase the swift populations in Glasgow, by ensuring that provision is made for Swifts in new buildings and during renovation. In principle this is not a difficult task, because permitting Swifts access to actual or potential nest sites is technically easy. Swifts seem to prefer a small entrance giving access to a larger internal space for nesting. The small entrance generally excludes house sparrows and starlings. However, achieving action requires continuing liaison with house owners, local authority personnel, NGOs, builders and developers.

Objective 1: *To stabilise and increase the Swift populations in Glasgow.*

Objective 2: *To monitor breeding populations within the City.*

Objective 3: *Promote awareness of Swift populations and importance of nest sites.*

Proposed Action with Lead Authorities

Action	Lead	Delivery	Objective
Policy and Legislation			
Continue the implementation of Glasgow City Council Housing Services policy on Swift nest site conservation.	CfS	CfS, GCC-HS	1, 3
Have Swift conservation measures included in planning conditions for new build or change of use proposals in suitable locations.	CfS	CfS, GCC-DRS	1, 3
Site Safeguard and Management			
Liaise with local authority historic building conservation sections to promote conservation of Swift nest sites when considering grant aid for the repair or renovation of historic buildings (involve Historic Scotland, National Trust for Scotland and Scottish Executive).	CfS	CfS, GCC-DRS, RSPB	1, 3
Agree design details for future repairs with local authority officials, or agreement to put up nest boxes as appropriate.	CfS	CfS, GCC-DRS, GCC-HS	1
Species Management and Protection			
Promote the practice that building repair work should not begin between mid May and end of July where Swift nest sites are suspected to exist.	CfS	CfS, RSPB	1
Advisory			
Promote designs which permit Swift access when buildings are being renovated or when new buildings are being constructed, and promote the use of nest boxes where no suitable accessible space.	CfS	CfS	1, 3
Promote the use of Swift nest boxes as a tool for education and awareness e.g. on schools and in Country Parks. To make links with the Sustainable Schools project.	CfS	SWT, GCC-ED, GCC-LS(CRS)	1, 3
Future Research and Monitoring			
Continue to survey and monitor locations where there are swift colonies.	CfS	CfS, GCC-LS, SOC	2
Monitor numbers of feeding Swifts over key sites such as Hogganfield Loch and Bishop Loch.	CfS	GCC-LS(CRS), RSPB, SOC	2
Communications and Publicity			
Distribute leaflets as appropriate.	CfS	CfS, GCC-LS	3
Encourage involvement of schools in areas where there are swift colonies.	CfS	GCC-LS(CRS), GfC, SWT	3
Liaise with Lead Agencies of national Swift SAP.	CfS	CfS	1, 2, 3
Review the progress of this Action Plan by 2006.	CfS	CfS	1, 2, 3

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Glasgow City Council: Development and Regeneration Services(GCC-DRS), Glasgow City Council: Land Services(Conservation Group) (GCC-LS(CG),

Glasgow City Council: Culture and Leisure Services (GCC-CLS), Glasgow City Council: Education Services (GCC-ES), Glasgow City Council: Housing Services (GCC-HS)

Glasgow City Council: Land Services Countryside Ranger Service (GCC-LS(CRS)), Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC), Greenspace for Communities(GfC), British Waterways (BW), Forestry Commission (FC), Farming Wildlife

Advisory Group (FWAG), The WISE Group (TWISE) Glasgow Natural History Society (GNHS), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Scottish Natural Heritage

(SNH), Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), Clyde Amphibian and Reptile Group (CARG), Butterfly Conservation (BC), Concern for Swifts (CfS)