



WE ARE SWIFTS - WE ARE IN TROUBLE

SWIFT NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH:



SWALLOW



HOUSE MARTIN

Both have large areas of pale colour - Swifts do not.
Unlike Swallows and Martins, Swifts do not perch on wires.

SINCE YOU WERE BORN



There are over 40% fewer Swifts visiting us.

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

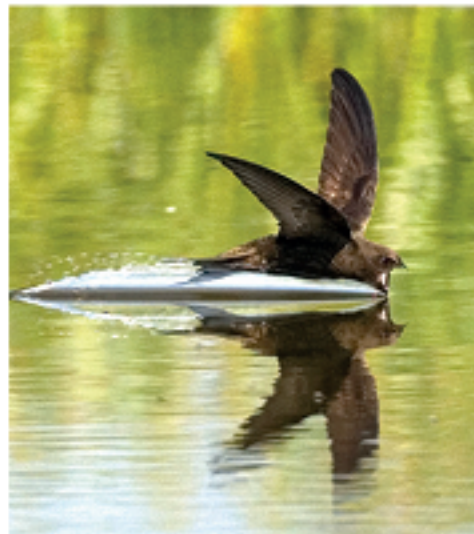
They
are amazing
are mysterious
are very very fast
eat millions of insects.



© Albrecht Gösser

SOME FACTS ABOUT SWIFTS

- They eat, drink, preen, sleep and mate while flying
- Their scientific name is *Apus apus*, that means 'no foot no foot'
- Actually, they have small feet with sharp claws which they only use at their nest site.



© Albrecht Gösser

Swifts have been around a long time;
one of their ancestors, who died 49 million years ago,
was found in Germany.



© Nick Jaffe

They fly about 500 miles (800kms) a day.
During their lives, they fly about 2 million miles -
equivalent to more than four
trips to the Moon
and back!



© J. ac. Vithanovwww.factz.be



They eat flying insects like flies, mosquitoes, midges, and greenflies as well as airborne spiders.

- They come to Europe each summer arriving in this country at the end of April/ beginning of May
- They make their way back to Africa in August
- A round trip of 14,000 miles!

— Southward migration
— Northward migration
— Winter range and movements





- They are one of the very best fliers
- They have very rapid wing-beats: 8 wing-beats per second, followed by gliding and zooming about at very high speed, usually screaming as they go
- You will hear and see 'screaming parties' around the houses.

A 'screaming party'
in Westport.





- At night they sleep as high as 3,000 metres
- They approach their nests at more than 40 miles per hour and come to a stop without slowing down
- They do not normally land on the ground because it is difficult for them to take off.

FAMILY LIFE

- Swifts usually stay with the same partners for their whole lives
- They can live for at least 21 years!
- Mostly, their nests are in spaces under roofs and nooks and crannies in old buildings.



- They catch bits of stuff from the air, like feathers, leaves, petals and pieces of paper, then stick them together to make a cosy nest for laying their eggs
- They lay white eggs, usually 2 or 3
- Both partners take it in turns to sit on the eggs to keep them warm until they hatch
- The eggs hatch after about 18 days.



SWIFT CHICKS

- When the chicks hatch, they are blind and have no feathers
- Many times a day, the male and female bring the chicks balls of 300-500 insects, collected in a big pouch under the beak
- The chicks open their eyes about 6 days after hatching
- Their feathers grow and they get quite fat





© Utsch Tiger

SWIFT CHICKS IN THEIR NEST

- Chicks have an area of white around their beaks so the parents can see them in the dark nests.



Swift with pouch full of insects.

© M. M. Ashford/Courtesy

- The chicks stop eating and lose weight before they leave the nest - you can't fly if you are too fat!
- They do push-ups on their wings and tails to make them strong enough for flying
- Once they can hold a push-up for 10 seconds and they weigh about 45 grams, they are ready to fly away
- They are 6-8 weeks old when they leave.



© Michael Casey

- After they leave the nest, *they keep flying for 2-3 years* until they are ready to find a partner, make a nest and raise a family
- The year before they breed, they check out a possible nest site by flying up to it and having a look. They are called 'bangers' because they bang against the nest site
- Young birds can be 100s of miles south only 2 days after leaving their nests.

SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

- Swifts nest in old buildings
- Old buildings are being knocked down or repaired
- New buildings have no nooks and crannies for Swifts
- So when Swifts arrive back from Africa to raise a new family, they find their nesting places have gone - *they are homeless!*

SO HOW CAN WE ALL HELP SWIFTS?

- Leave existing nest sites undisturbed
- When repairing buildings, make sure new access holes match exactly the location of the old ones
- When providing new nest sites make internal nest spaces, as they last longer
- If you can't make internal spaces, put up nest boxes
- Survey your town buildings for Swift nest sites
- Tell *Swift Conservation Ireland* where you see Swifts nesting
- Take part in the BirdWatch Ireland on-line National Swift Survey.

Email: swiftconservationireland@gmail.com

TYPES OF ARTIFICIAL NESTS

The best type of nest box is one that is built into the structure of a building

IBSTOCK BRICK



SOFFIT HOLES



Alternatively boxes can be fixed to the outside of a building.

LIVESTREAM OF GMT SWIFTS

GMT Mayo Green Campus Committee installed 12 nest boxes for Swifts in 2012. You can visit the college to see them at any time and you can follow the 'livestream' from these nest boxes between May and August.

www.gmit.ie/mayo-campus/swift-live-streaming



SWIFT ENTERING SCHWEGLER NESTBOX



AMNONN'S STORY

Amnonn worked in a smelly, noisy, motorbike garage in Israel. He went paragliding in his spare time to be free, in peace and in the fresh air. He was so good that he reached the final of a national competition.

Everyone was losing height.

Amnonn saw some Swifts and joined them. There were Swifts all around him, spiraling upwards in a thermal. He went up too; he fell in love with them.

He won the competition!



Amnonn has, since then, devoted his life to Swift conservation. The people of Israel are now very aware of the need to help Swifts. They hold an annual welcoming ceremony at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem to mark the start of the breeding season.



Jan Wierhele

SOME USEFUL WEBSITES

<http://swiftconservationireland.blogspot.ie>

<http://actionsforswifts.blogspot.ie>

www.swift-conservation.org

www.saveourswifts.co.uk

www.commonswift.org

www.concernforswifts.com

www.birdwatchireland.ie

www.lwt.ie

www.irishwildlifematters.ie

www.facebook.com/greencampus.gmitmayocampus

A SWIFT ON THE GROUND NEEDS HELP

Unlike other birds, a swift on the ground will not be able to take off on its own and will need to be rescued.

What to do:

Place it in a cardboard box and get advice from:

www.Irishwildlifematters.ie

swiftconservationireland@gmail.com

Lynda Huxley 094 9032422





Swift Conservation Ireland



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Environment, Community and Local Government

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