



# Recommendations for Swift conservation in Billingshurst

Billingshurst is well placed to boost its local population of Swifts. Several pairs are known to nest in St.Mary's Church, near which there are many buildings suitable for provision of artificial Swift nest sites. Other nest sites have been logged by SOS in recent years, offering further possibilities. There are ways that the main colony, at St.Mary's, can both be preserved and grown.

## **General advice**

Swift boxes should be placed at a point at least 4.5m high on buildings, ideally along the eaves or below an equivalent rim/overhang. When installing a box, the south side of a building should be avoided (due to the heat of the midday sun), as should any positions where the birds' flight path is impeded by a nearby tree, wires or other object. (Swifts are great flyers but their long wings are not good for tight manoeuvres over a short distance).

The chances of attracting nesting Swifts are better closer to existing nest sites, and better still with the use of an electronic playback system loaded with recordings of calling Swifts. Yearling Swifts will visit the area around an existing colony (drawn in by the nesting birds) to scout for nest sites for future years (inspecting locations where they hear Swifts calling).

Special steps can be taken to provide dedicated nest sites for Swifts behind church louvres. It's worth exploring these posts on the Action for Swifts site:

<https://actionforswifts.blogspot.com/search?q=church>

The best place to start looking for Swift boxes is the Swift Conservation shopping page: <https://www.swift-conservation.org/Shopping!.htm> - the Swift Conservation website as a whole is well worth studying for general guidance.

Billigreen is welcome to apply for SOS funding for Swift boxes, a form is attached.

## St.Mary's Church

There are plans to renovate the interior of the church. Alterations to the structure of the tower, inside and out, should be avoided if possible, as it is hard to know where Swifts are nesting within the tower and how any changes may affect their entry and exit, or their ability to successfully raise young. If work on the tower is absolutely

necessary at any point, May-August should be avoided, and the Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS) will be happy to provide advice on minimising the impact on Swifts.

There is the potential to increase the number of Swifts using the church tower by installing boxes behind the louvres, which are otherwise unvisited by nesting Swifts according to Helen Toole.

### St.Gabriel's Church

The building is close enough to the Swift colony at St.Mary's to offer a good chance of attracting further nesting Swifts. There is no overhang on the building, so any boxes on the exterior should be placed, in order of suitability, on the north face, the north end of the east face or on the north side of the west face to avoid extremes of heat and weather conditions.

Interior boxes behind the louvres should be given priority, though (again, general advice is attached).

### The King's Arms

This pub was identified as a good starting point for introducing artificial Swift nest sites to the High Street and its businesses, and for inspiring the public to do the same on their private properties. A warm summer evening in a pub garden with Swifts screaming overhead is a valuable and thrilling wildlife experience – therefore it's also a boon for the publican! Two or three Swift boxes on the rear side of the pub building would stand a good chance of attracting Swifts, especially with a Swift call playback system used over the spring/summer.

### Private residences

The greatest potential to grow Billingshurst's Swift population lies in residents installing Swift boxes (or bricks) on their property. Residents of one house off the High Street, interested in helping Swifts, have already been offered advice, and their location near The King's Arms is auspicious. Other residents can be inspired by word-of-mouth, speaking and outdoor events ('Swift walks'/photography), local media, social media or printed material.

Referring to the records in the sheet attached, as well as considering proximity to St.Mary's church, may help steer provision of boxes towards the areas most likely to have success.

### Local planning

The suggestion could be made to Billingshurst Parish Council that a condition requiring provision of Swift bricks is attached to planning applications which match Swift-relevant criteria (basically the content of the first paragraph of 'general advice'). In theory, this is quite simple and has the potential to provide a powerful

boost to the local Swift population. Similar measures have been introduced successfully in Lewes and Brighton.

Alternatively, comments can be made on individual planning applications, including new-builds with the potential to offer new nest sites, as well as where work on existing structures which might affect known Swift nest sites.

### Record keeping

Reporting observations of Swifts showing breeding behaviour is of great value to conservation. SOS monitors Swifts (and all other birds in Sussex) through data received from a variety of channels, publishing the information each year in the Sussex Bird Report and storing it in a secure database containing millions of records. Having this data is a powerful asset when providing advice on Swift conservation and when commenting on planning applications, in addition to its power for tracking population changes.

BirdTrack ([www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net)) or the Swift Mapper app can both easily be used to report your local Swifts, informing future conservation efforts and decision-making.

Attached is a copy of the records SOS already holds of Swifts showing signs of breeding in Billingshurst (i.e. excluding any sightings of birds simply flying over, or where the observer has given no detail).