



SURVEYING THE COMMON SWIFT – GUIDELINES

By Lynda Huxley (2017)

BEST TIME OF DAY AND WEATHER TO CARRY OUT SURVEYS

Despite what you may think, Swifts are not early risers!

Morning : 9 to 11.30 am

Evening : 9 to 10.30pm

Their activity is affected by weather conditions. On a wet day they may spend most of the day at the nest site. On a wet evening they will go into the nest site early e.g. 8pm and stay there until the next morning.

Fine, breezy weather is best when there are lots of insects to feed on.

BEHAVIOUR

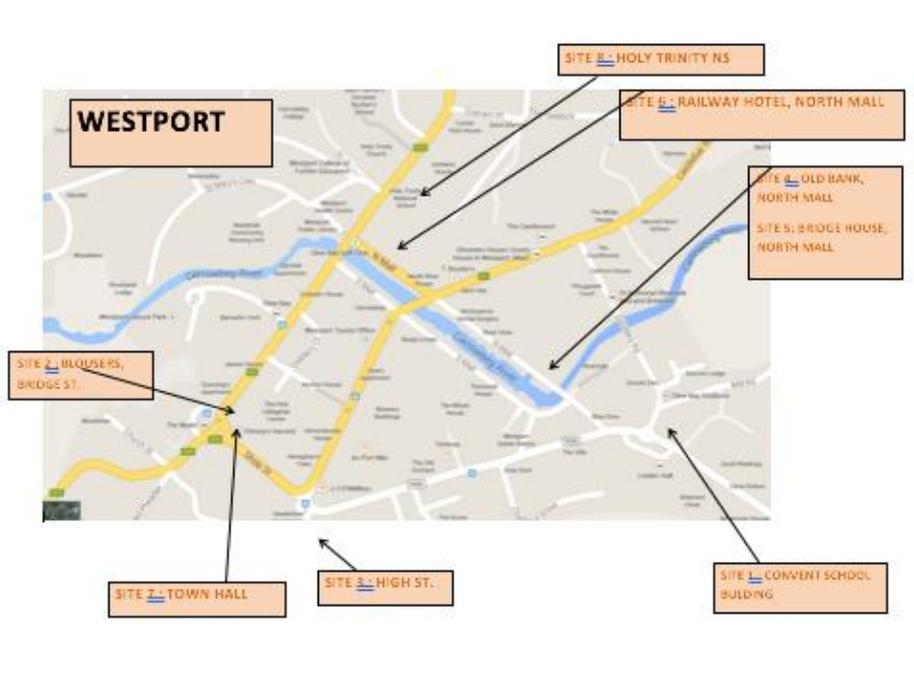
Swift can be seen flying in 'screaming' groups in certain parts of our urban areas. If you notice a 'screaming' group repeatedly flying close to a certain part of a building then this probably signifies that there is/was a swift nest site in there.

It is useful to note the total number of birds seen flying in a town/village as this gives an indication of the size of the local population. However, this number does not equate to number of breeding birds as many of them may be too young to breed and others may have lost their nest sites or not found one.

Identifying the actual nest sites is the only way of knowing what the size of the breeding population is.

STREET MAP

Get an electronic copy of a street map so that you can mark nest site locations on this map. It's a good way of seeing at a glance where buildings with nest sites are located. See example below.



SITE No.

There will probably be more than one building containing swift nest sites in your town/village, therefore, it is helpful to give each site a number e.g. Westport Site No. 1 : Holy Trinity National School (see pic above)

GRID REFERENCE / COORDINATES OF A LOCATION

Here are a few ways of obtaining the coordinates for a location :

- Smart Phone if you have one
- If you enter your sightings on the BirdWatchIreland or National Biodiversity Data Centre sites (see below) this process involves highlighting site on a map which in turn gives a location reference
- Google maps
- GPS

DETAILS ABOUT EACH SITE

To help with protection of Swift nest sites, It is advisable to record as much information as possible about each site e.g. is it a stone or rendered building?

If you know or can find out the year of construction it's useful to note that too.

Is the building a protected structure? It's important to know this because if it is then the County Council's Heritage Officer and/or Conservation Architect should be made aware that there are Swifts nesting in the building. By doing this it may be possible to secure the nest sites because most building works carried out on a Protected Structure have to be approved by the Council. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage website has details, by County, of all Protected structures which gives details of each building with photographs <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/Surveys/Buildings/>

Is it a Public owned building such as Church, Library etc. If it is then you could send a copy of your survey report to the County Council Heritage Officer and ask him/her to notify the relevant office – this may help protect the colony in that building.

DO A DRAWING OF EACH SITE AND MARK NEST SITE ENTRANCES – rather than rely on memory alone.

TAKE A PHOTO OF EACH SITE AND DRAW ARROWS ON THIS PHOTO SHOWING NEST SITE ENTRANCES.

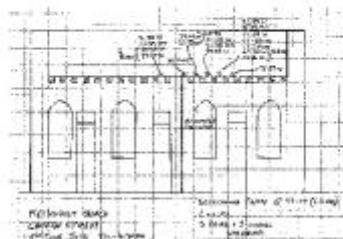
SITE 2: METHODIST CHURCH, CHURCH ST.

GRID REF : M 87285 64454

NEST ENTRANCES = 6

The building is listed on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niha/>. It is a limestone building that was constructed around 1850.

The swift nest sites are located where the rafters meet the stone work (see diagram and photograph below). Birds were seen entering at six separate locations.



NEST SITE ENTRANCES (NATURAL NEST SITES OR NEST BOXES)

Swifts use the same nest site for the duration of their breeding life. It is very important to note the exact location of a nest site entrance on a drawing and/or photograph. The value of this is that if renovation work such as reroofing, reguttering etc. is carried out on the building then if owners of the building are agreeable the exact nest sites can be preserved if the work is carried out in the right way (this has been achieved at several locations in Mayo). Please note that it would be illegal for any building work to be carried out when the swifts are at their nest site i.e. late April to end August.

In addition to noting the exact location of the nest site, you should also note which aspect they face e.g. N, S, E or W and this can be done using a compass (many smart phones have a built-in compass).

RECORDING YOUR SIGHTINGS ON-LINE

If you are a computer user then it is worthwhile entering your observations on-line. If you are not a computer user you can send your report to Swift Conservation Ireland and we'll upload your information for you.

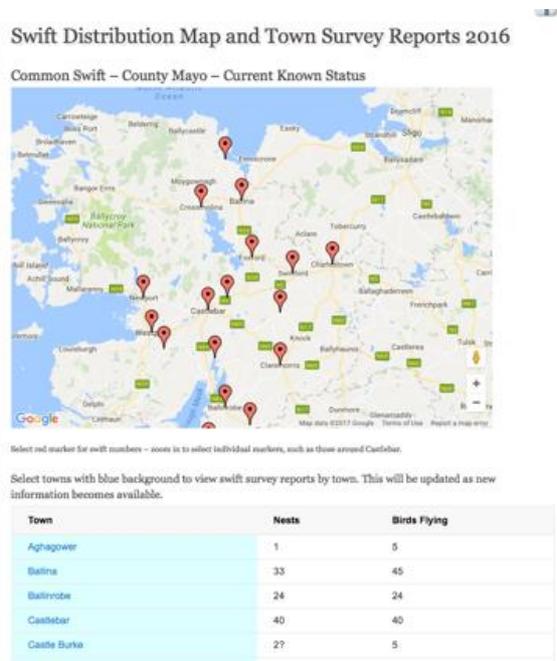
You can enter your records on-line at any or all of the following :

Swift Conservation Ireland

<http://swiftconservation.ie/information-by-county/>



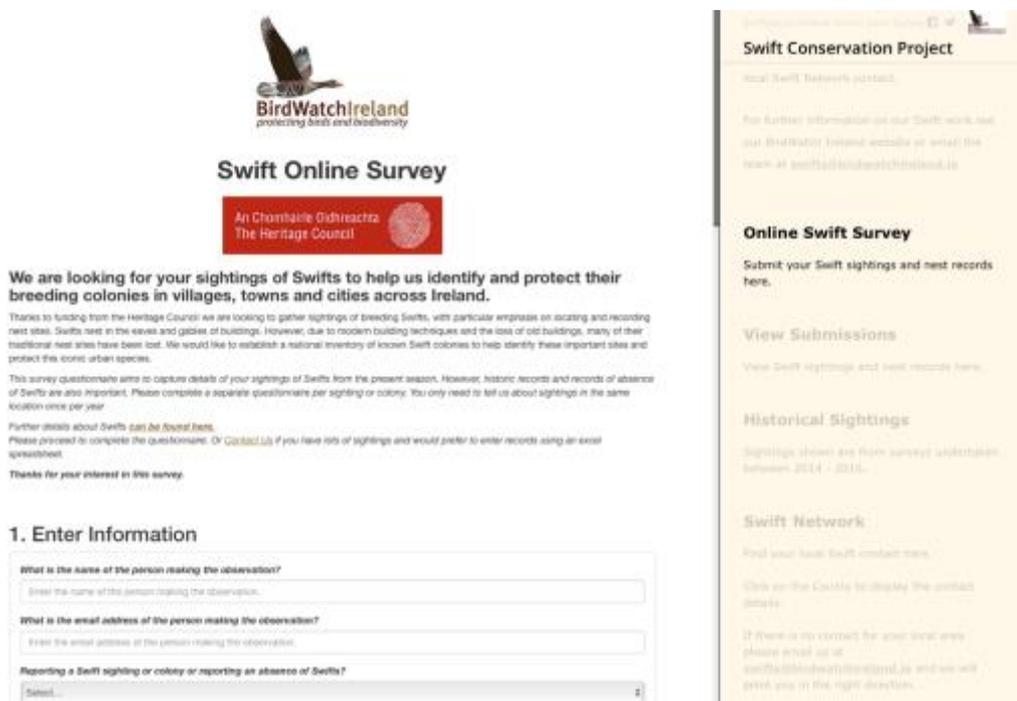
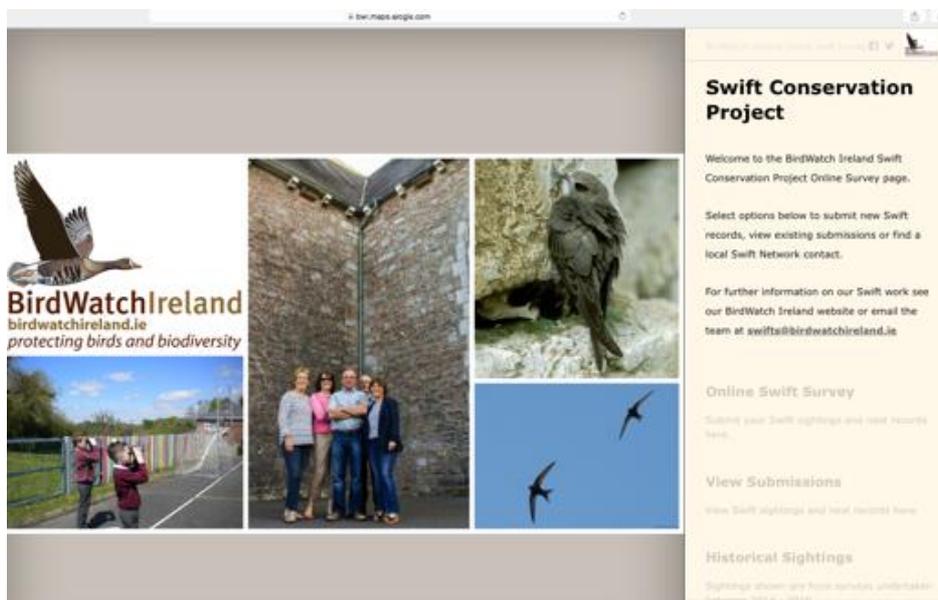
Your town/village report can be emailed to Swift Conservation Ireland and this will be posted on the website and will be available for everyone to see: swiftconservationireland@gmail.com which is important to try to help save nest sites. See below example of Mayo page which links to report for each town



Bird Watch Ireland

<http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/OurWork/ResearchSurveys/SwiftConservationProject/tabid/1389/Default.aspx>

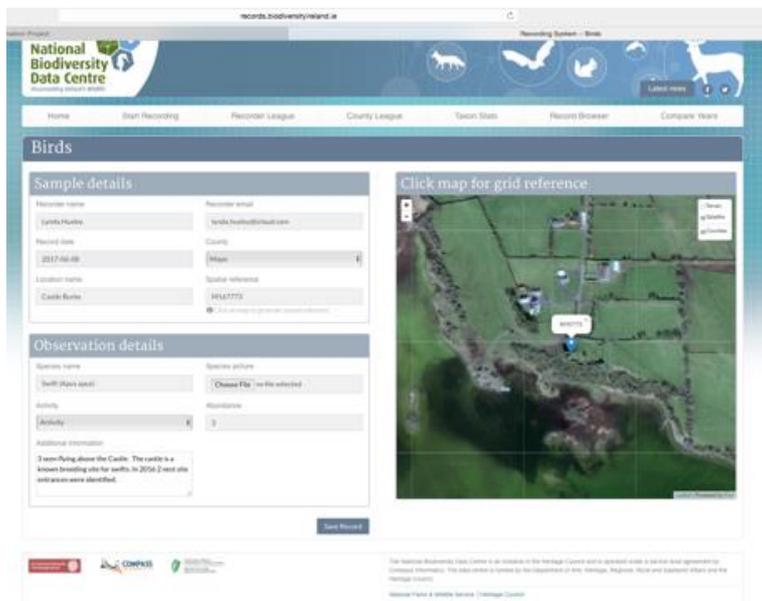
There is a section dedicated to recording Swift sightings on BirdWatchIreland's website. Information submitted to this site is made available to the National Biodiversity Data Centre and the County Councils. In addition there is a brief note of sightings and their location on the website which is available for public viewing.



National Biodiversity Data Centre

<http://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/birds>

Records from the Data Centre are available to public bodies for conservation purposes. You can also view data on-line by searching the site.



BirdTrack run by the British Trust for Ornithology
<https://app.bto.org/birdtrack/main/data-home.jsp>

MORE INFORMATION ON SWIFTS

www.swiftconservation.ie

‘Living the Wildlife’ documentary <http://swiftconservation.ie/media-articles/>

<http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/OurWork/ResearchSurveys/SwiftConservationProject/>

<http://www.swift-conservation.org>

www.saveourswifts.co.uk