

INVITING THE SWIFTS TO COME TO TOWN

Written by Lynda Huxley



A Swift in flight.

Swifts are the most amazing birds: they are one of Ireland's fastest birds, they eat and drink on the wing, they sleep on the wing and they even mate on the wing. They land only at their nest site to raise their young. Because they have evolved to be the ultimate 'flying machine' you won't see these birds perched on branches or roofs.

One of the most extraordinary facts about this unique bird is that when a chick leaves the nest it will fly non-stop for up to 3 years, only making its first landing when it has found its very own nest site here in Ireland. During those 3 years it will have migrated between Ireland and Africa three times.

The time Swifts spend in Ireland, from May until September each year, is extremely important to their long-term survival because they come here to raise their young. They nest almost exclusively in buildings in our towns and are a major part of our urban biodiversity. Because their nest is hidden from view and because they do not leave any mess or droppings underneath their nest site we often do not realise in which buildings their nests are located.

This reliance on our buildings for their nest sites has regrettably led to a serious decline in Swift numbers in Ireland. This is because when we renovate or demolish old town buildings with Swift nest sites, we can unintentionally destroy those nest sites or block off the entrance holes to the nest.

The decline of the numbers in Ireland has been around 45%. But, all is not doom and gloom because, through the enthusiasm of many communities nationwide who are setting up nest box projects, the trend is being reversed and Swift numbers are gradually recovering.

The Tidy Towns group in Dughterard has joined the group of communities that are helping the Swift. Through grant funding from the Heritage Council, Swift Conservation Ireland has been able to

donate Swift nest boxes. The nest boxes have now been installed on the side wall of the Dughterard Courthouse ready for the return of the birds to Ireland in May. Come and see if you can spot the nest boxes at the Court House, and in June Lynda Huxley of Swift Conservation Ireland will be coming to tell us all about the Swift and to show us how to identify Swifts. Everyone will be welcome to join this event - date to be confirmed.

Because of their aerial existence, it may take the Swifts a few years to locate the nest boxes but to help in this process an attraction call system has been installed next to the boxes.

If you'd like to learn more about Swifts you can visit the website dedicated to Swift Conservation in Ireland www.swiftconservation.ie.



Swift boxes, consisting of nest sites, installed on the side wall of the Dughterard Courthouse.