

**REPORT ON COMMON SWIFT IN TRALEE, CO. KERRY
PRODUCED IN 2016
FOR KERRY CO. CO. BIODIVERSITY OFFICER, CATHY FISHER**



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INTRODUCTION

The Common swift (*Apus apus*) is an amber listed bird of conservation concern in Ireland and across Europe. Swifts come to Ireland's towns to breed, arriving late April and departing in mid to late August each year. They are totally faithful to their nest sites returning to the same one for the duration of their breeding life. A nest site located in a building is referred to as a 'traditional' site in this report.

The swift exists in our towns **without** causing any public nuisance because they do not leave any droppings under the nests, making them an ideal town inhabitant, especially as they provide a good service to us by consuming thousands of flying insects. A pair of adult swifts can consume 500,000 insects when they are here between May and August.

The swift is an important part of our urban biodiversity since the vast majority of its nest sites are now found in buildings in our towns.

WHY HAS THEIR BEEN A MAJOR DECLINE IN SWIFT NUMBERS IN IRELAND?

Swift numbers have declined by over 40% in the past twenty years. **The main cause for this decline is loss of breeding sites** which are found mostly in buildings in towns. Their traditional nests are usually found at the top of walls or in cavities in brick or stone work. They gain access to the tops of walls by climbing behind the fascia board. When repairs or renovation work are carried out to roofs and guttering the birds can no longer gain access to their traditional nesting site. Since swifts are colonial birds, repair or renovation work can often affect more than one pair of birds.

Swifts now rely on the buildings in our towns for their nest sites. In order to secure the future of Swifts we need to ensure that their traditional nest sites are preserved where possible and to provide new nest sites by setting up nest box projects so that the population can recover.

In June 2016 a preliminary survey of swift nest sites in Tralee town was carried to identify where traditional nest sites are located and to assess the overall 'health' of the population of swifts in the town.

This report contains the following information:

- Map of the town showing which breeding sites have been located in 2016;
- Picture and detail of each traditional nest site located. The Swift nest site is indicated with an arrow;
- Recommendations.

MAP OF TRALEE SHOWING 8 NEST SITES – marked by black arrows identifying locations



TRALEE

PRELIMINARY SURVEY

JUNE 2016

NUMBER OF NEST SITE ENTRANCES LOCATED : 30

SITE 1: SCOIL EOIN, PEMBROKE ST., BALLOONAGH

SITE 2: NOS 8 & 9 PEMBROKE ST.

SITE 3: ASHE TERRACE, OFF ASHE STREET

SITE 4: DISUSED MILL, MILK MARKET LANE

SITE 5: ST BRENDAN'S PARK HOUSING ESTATE

SITE 6: KELLIHER'S OFFICE, GARRYRUTH, CLOONBEG

SITE 7: MURPHY'S 'FOUR SEASONS' BAR, UPPER CASTLE STREET

SITE 8: URBAN TERRACE, UPPER ROCK STREET

COMMENTS

The town of Tralee has a large public park, many large trees, protected wetlands along the river Lee and towards the coast, all of which provides good feeding areas for insect feeding birds such as the swift.

The sites on Pembroke Street are very important, especially Scoil Eoin.

St Brendan's Park housing estate was probably the hub of the swift population in years gone by. However, the vast majority of the houses have now had the original guttering replaced with new guttering containing a plastic soffit. The soffit has blocked off the nest site entrances which were located where the roof rafters meet the external walls at the front and back of each house. Swifts were still nesting in properties that still have the rafters exposed.

Site 1 : Scoil Eoin Balloonagh, Pembroke St. (R551)

Protected Structure list on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Reg. No. 21003131

Year of Construction : 1890-1895

Longitude: 52.272436 Latitude: -9.710498

Number of Nest Sites Located : 6

This building was previously known as St John the Baptist's School but is now known as Scoil Eoin. It is located in the townland of Balloonagh on Pembroke Street (R551).

On 24 and 25 June 2016, 6 nests sites were located at the front, side and rear of the building pictured below. This building is a protected structure as detailed above.

The school is planning to carry out extensive building work to the rear of the stone building which involves constructing a large building. This presents an opportunity to create new nest sites for swifts by building in nest boxes (see Appendix A for information on how this can be done).

In addition, the school plans to reroof the stone building because the present roof is leaking. I recommend that any reroofing of this building should be carried out with the aim of protecting as many of the traditional nest sites as possible. **In order to protect all the nest sites, further survey visits should be carried in July of this year (2016) to identify the exact location of all or as many nest sites as possible**

It would be beneficial to gain access to the rear of the building on at least one morning (9-11am) and/or evening (10-10.45pm) to be able to find any nest sites at the rear of the building. The rear of the building is not usually accessible as the gates are locked so special access would need to be obtained.

Identifying the exact entrances of the nest sites will provide essential information which can be provided to the architect and builders who will be responsible for the reroofing. **The ideal time for reroofing which would cause least disturbance for the swifts would be between late August and early April.** **If this is not possible then it is vital that the swifts are not allowed to enter their nest sites when they arrive in late April. If they do enter their nest sites it would be illegal under the Wildlife Act for any work to commence during the breeding period. However, if the swifts were kept out of their nest sites for one year to allow the reroofing on the condition that the builders and architects undertook to retain the nest sites and keep the entrances open then because the swifts are totally faithful to their nest sites they would return the following year to breed (this has been proved to be successful in two projects in County Mayo).**

I would recommend that a copy of the survey results are given to the Conservation Architect in Kerry County Council so that they are aware that special considerations need to be adopted to protect the swift nest sites in this building.



Front of building facing on to the R551. Orientation is South West



Side of the building near the school entrance gate. Orientation is North West.



View of a section of the rear of building. Orientation is North West

Site 2 : St Anthony's (Terraced Houses) Nos 8 & 9, Pembroke St. (R551)

Protected Structure list on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Reg. No. 21003071

Year of Construction : 1865-1875

Longitude: 52.272016 Latitude: -9.709650

Number of Nest Sites Located : 8

This site is a very significant one given that it has at least 8 swift nest sites. It is located just across the road from Site 1: Scoil Eoin.

The rear of No. 8 has had new guttering so there is no access for swifts. However, the rear of No. 9 still has the original guttering and there is at least one nest site there.

Both houses are private dwellings so the swift nest sites are vulnerable to being lost if the owners carry out any work to replace the roof or the original guttering without taking measures to protect the swift nest sites. Furthermore, No. 9 is for sale and the new owner may decide to carry out renovation work being unaware of the swift nest sites.



Front of the building on Pembroke Street. Orientation is South West



Rear of No. 9 Pembroke Street. Orientation is North East

Site 3 : ASHE TERRACE, OFF ASHE STREET/NORTH CIRCULAR ROAD

Protected Structure list on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Reg. No. 21003425

Year of Construction : 1895-1905

Longitude: 52.271432 Latitude: -9.702863

Number of Nest Sites Located : 1

This site is located at the rear of the Eleanor's Florist shop. The terraced houses were originally built to house workers at the nearby railway station.

Just one nest site entrance was located but there may be more because although the guttering has been replaced there are no soffits to restrict entrance to nest sites.



Rear of Eleanor's Florists. Orientation is South West

Site 4 : DISUSED MILL, MILK MARKET LANE/BROGUE MAKER'S LANE

Protected Structure list on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Reg. No. 21003352

Year of Construction : 1880 - 1885

Longitude: 52.270358 Latitude: -9.705496

Number of Nest Sites Located : 1

This disused mill is home to a wide variety of birds including swallows and swifts.

One swift nest site was located as indicated below, however, I suspect there are several more. I would recommend a further survey of this site.



Side of the Disused Mill on Brogue Maker's Lane. Orientation is North West

Site 5 : ST BRENDAN'S PARK HOUSING ESTATE

Number of Nest Sites Located : 2

St Brendan's Park housing estate was probably the hub of the swift population in years gone by. However, the vast majority of the houses have now had the original guttering replaced with new guttering containing a plastic soffit.

There are still some houses with the original guttering and on these houses the rafters provide an overhang at the front of the house. This has provided entrance to nest sites for swifts.

Two nest site entrances were found in two properties with original guttering/rafters. There are undoubtedly more nest sites and I would recommend a full survey is carried out on this housing estate.

However this colony is very vulnerable so recommendations have been made later in this document on how the colony can be protected.



Longitude 52.278053 Latitude -9.703889 Orientation is South West



Longitude 52.277384 Latitude -9.704409 Orientation is South West

Site 6 : KELLIHER'S OFFICE, GARRYRUTH, CLOONBEG TOWNLAND

Protected Structure list on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Reg. No. 21008010

Year of Construction : 1910 - 1920

Longitude: 52.263955 Latitude: -9.694732

Number of Nest Sites Located : 9

This building was an army barracks. The nest site entrances are in gaps in the stone work just below the guttering.

It is quite feasible that there are more nest sites in the this building at the front but unlikely that there are any at the rear because a new warehouse has been built which joins on to the old building.



Front of the building near main entrance to Kelliher's. Orientation is West

Site 7 : MURPHY'S 'FOUR SEASONS' BAR, UPPER CASTLE STREET

Longitude: 52.269020 Latitude: -9.701040

Number of Nest Sites Located : 1

A single nest site located in a gap where the guttering from the Indian Castle restaurant meets the guttering of Murphy's Bar.



Front of the building on Upper Castle Street. Orientation is South

Site 8 : URBAN TERRACE, UPPER ROCK STREET

Number of Nest Sites Located : 2

Urban Terrace fronts on to Upper Rock Street. It is quite possible that there are more than two nest sites in the terrace so it would warrant further investigation.



No. 1 Urban Terrace. Orientation is South East

Longitude: 52.274216 Latitude: -9.704463



No. 18 Urban Terrace. Orientation is South East

Longitude: 52.263955 Latitude: -9.694732

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The town of Tralee has a large public park which contains many large trees and there are large trees and green areas at various locations around the town. There is also a protected wetlands area along the river Lee and towards the coast, all of which provides good food and feeding areas for insect feeding birds such as the swift.

Tralee currently has a healthy population of breeding swifts. In just two days of surveying 18 active nest sites were recorded. However, the majority of the sites are vulnerable because they are located in privately owned buildings. The only site located that is publicly owned is Scoil Eoin.

The most significant sites located were Scoil Eoin and St Anthony's terraced houses both on Pembroke Street. In addition, St Brendan's Park probably has a good number of nest sites despite the fact that most of the houses have had their guttering replaced and soffits installed. In fact, I believe that St Brendan's Park was the hub for the breeding population prior to the renovation works. At the moment there are lots of swifts flying around but I believe many of these have lost their nest sites. It is important to understand that when swifts lose their nest sites they will try to gain access to them for several years before they even start to prospect for a replacement nest site.

It was not possible to gain access to the disused army barracks but many swifts were seen flying in this area so the complex would be worthy of investigation if access can be obtained.

In addition, I believe that there are quite a few single nest sites in the town but it would take many hours of surveying to identify these.

Securing and growing the population of swifts at Scoil Eoin would play a very important role in securing the breeding population of swifts in the town.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SCOIL EOIN

- a. Conduct a thorough survey in July 2016 to identify all the nest site entrances at the front and the rear of the building.
- b. Work with the school management, architects and builders to ensure the preservation of the existing nest sites when the building is reroofed.
- c. Work with the school management to have built-in nest boxes in the planned extension of the school.
- d. Install nest boxes as soon as possible on the tower near the school entrance.

2. ST BRENDAN'S PARK

- a. Conduct a full survey of the estate in July 2016 to assess how many houses still have the original guttering system with rafters exposed. In addition, try to identify how many of these still have nesting swifts.
- b. If there is a housing/tenants association work with them to find out if any house owners are interested in installing nest boxes.
- c. Look into possibility of installing a swift tower in open grass area (see aerial image below) as per the one installed by Roscommon Tidy Towns (see pic below). And/or installing nest boxes on pharmacy building at the entrance to the estate. By installing nest boxes this will help the population recover by providing nest sites for young birds that want to start breeding.

3. GENERAL

- a. Look at other housing estates around Tralee to see if any are built in the same style as St Brendan's Park. If they are then there could be nesting swifts.
- b. Gain access to the Ballymullen army barracks to carry out a survey of any old buildings in the complex.
- c. Survey Ballymullen terrace as this may have swifts nesting there – especially at the rear of the houses.
- d. Replace nest boxes at the Wetland Centre for ones that have the right size of hole that excludes Starlings i.e. depth of hole max. 28cm.