



SURVEYING THE COMMON SWIFT – GUIDELINES

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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 make a note of 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/or may have lost their nest sites or may not yet have found one.

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

STREET MAP

Get a 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.



Street maps of larger towns can usually be found on the internet for example : www.mytown.ie
Or you can find your town on google maps and use satellite view which will show streets and houses.

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 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 beneficial to record as much information as possible about each site e.g. is it a stone or rendered building? **Sample Site Report can be found at the end of this document.**

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 future of 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 giving 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.

ALSO, TAKE A PHOTO OF EACH SITE AND PINPOINT NEST SITE LOCATIONS ON THIS PHOTO EITHER BY HAND DRAWING A MARKER (E.G. ARROW, DOT, NUMBER) OR USING COMPUTER SOFTWARE. SEE Example below.

If the nest site entrance can be pinpointed as accurately as possible nest sites this information can be used to protect nest sites during any building renovation work.

You can pinpoint the nest sites by placing a marker such as an arrows or a dot on photographs.

Placing markers such as arrows on a photograph depends on the software you use. With an IMac you can do this in Preview/Tools/Annotate. With Microsoft Paint you select an arrow from the shapes Tab.

Once you have placed the marker(s) on your photograph(s) copy them into a word document. **It is important that you reduce the size of the image in the word document so that the finale file size is not more than 2MB for uploading to the National Biodiversity Data Centre system. You can reduce picture size, as follows :**

- clicking on the image
- in the Picture Format tab select 'Compress Picture'
- Picture Quality should be 150ppi or less

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 endAugust.

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 by post to Swift Conservation Ireland and we'll upload your information for you (Swift Conservation Ireland, c/o Lynda Huxley, CarraJames, Belcarra, Castlebar, Co. Mayo. F23 K235

You can enter your records on-line through the National Biodiversity Data Centre Swift recording page or BirdWatchIreland's Swift Survey page. The most valuable records are those identifying nest sites. Both systems allow you to select the Longitude / Latitude reference for the exact building where the swift nest sites are located.

National Biodiversity Data Centre

<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/swifts#7/53.455/-8.016>

National Biodiversity Data Centre

Home Start Recording Recorder League County League Town Data Record Browser

Swifts

Sample details

Recorder name	Recorder email
<input type="text" value="The name of the user"/>	<input type="text" value="user@domain.tld"/>
Record date	County
<input type="text" value="2018-06-04"/>	<input type="text" value="Select county"/>
Location name	Spatial reference
<input type="text" value="Townland or nearest v..."/>	<input type="text" value="E22N45W or E22.02N45"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Use an map to provide coordinates

Observation details

Species name	Species picture
<input type="text" value="Swift (Hirundo)"/>	<input type="text" value="Choose file"/>
Type of sighting	Number of occupied

Click map for grid reference

Map of Ireland showing grid reference and location markers.

SAMPLE SITE REPORT

NEST SITE REPORT - 2018

Location Name: Claremorris
Address: Chapel Lane
Name of Building: Town Hall Theatre
Protected Structure Reg. No.: Not Applicable
Year of Construction: Not Known
Spatial Reference: 53.71970753, -8.99648845
Natural Nest Sites or Nest Boxes? Natural and Nest Boxes
Total Number of Occupied Nests: Natural = 3, Nest Boxes = 0
Aspects of Nests: Natural SE, nest box NW
Number of Birds Flying: 5



Bird exiting natural nest



In 2015 one Schwegler Triple Cavity nest box (with 3 nest boxes in the one unit) was erected during 'Mayo Swift Week' organised by Heritage Officer and Swift Conservation Mayo.



MORE INFORMATION ON SWIFTS

www.swiftconservation.ie

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

<https://birdwatchirelandswifts.blogspot.com>

<http://actionforswifts.blogspot.ie>

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

www.saveourswifts.co.uk

http://www.commonswift.org/common_swift.html