

The life of the Swift

The swift is a truly amazing bird, spending practically all its life in the air and only needing to land to breed. Feeding, sleeping, collecting nest material and even mating is done while on the wing.

It can live for more than 20 years, feeding entirely on flying insects such as midges and flies and can travel up to 4.8 million miles in its lifetime.

It arrives in Ireland in late April to breed and will be heading back to its winter home in Africa by late August.

A chick born in Kildare will travel up and down to Africa at least three times before it attempts to breed.



Swifts predominately nest in villages and towns and are most noticeable on fine summer evenings when they come together to form screeching parties that fly rapidly up and down the streets of our towns.

Nest sites are generally under the eaves or in cracks or crevices of old buildings such as houses or churches. Swifts have only 1 brood per year. Typically, 2 to 3 white eggs are laid. Incubation takes 19 to 20 days and chicks leave the nest between 37 to 56 days after hatching, depending on the availability of food.



Why are Swifts in Decline

Swifts have declined by more than 40% in just the last 20 years. While there are possibly a few factors involved, the loss of nesting sites appears to be a serious problem. Swifts are nest site faithful, meaning that they return to the same nest every year. Once a building is renovated with new fascia and soffit the entrance to their nest site can be blocked off and lost forever. Sadly if a site like this is lost to a pair it may take many years before they nest again. Modern building technique unfortunately offer little opportunity for swifts to breed.

Swift in County Kildare

3 years of intensive surveying of every village and town in Kildare has produced a detailed picture of its distribution throughout the county. Athy, with many breeding pairs, is undoubtedly its stronghold. Coill Dubh, Celbridge, Maynooth, Castledermot and Newbridge still have good populations of nesting birds. Sadly breeding populations have seriously declined in Sallins, Kill, Suncroft, Monasterevin, Ballymore Eustace and Clane. So much so that these towns are at risk of losing their nesting birds

The Future for the Swift

It is important to provide breeding opportunities for swifts.

If you are renovating a house or building that is used by breeding swifts and wish to allow them to continue using it, please contact Wild Kildare who will advise on such matters.

Remember, swift and their nests are protected by law and it is an offence to wilfully disturb them on or near a nest containing eggs or unflown young.

Fortunately, swift readily take to nest boxes. A call system, playing swift calls, can be attached to attract swifts to the nest box. This call system is very discreet and generally not noticed or heard by people.

In 2017, Wild Kildare embarked on an ambitious project to halt the decline of swift in County Kildare by providing nest boxes and call systems in towns where there are known swift populations. Currently nest boxes and call systems have been installed in 16 towns and villages, mainly on schools.

Wild Kildare also encourage the use of Swift Bricks. These nestbox bricks are incorporated into the outer walls of new buildings at planning stage and are readily used by swifts. Swifts are very clean, leaving no mess underneath their nests.

We will continue to survey each town with the help of local volunteers on an annual basis monitoring the population.





Other similar species

Swift can easily be confused with a few other species, particularly the house martin or swallow. Swift are noticeably larger, black-brown plumage, long scythe-like wings and short forked tail. Swift never perch on wires or posts like martins or swallows. Swift nest inside the building, usually under the eaves in holes and crevices, whereas house martins build a mud nest underneath the eaves, usually at the apex and swallows build their mud nests inside sheds or other buildings.



About Wild Kildare

Wild kildare is a non profit voluntary conservation group who aim to promote, enhance and protect the wildlife and biodiversity of County Kildare through educational talks and outings, wildlife surveys and working on various conservation projects halting the decline of species and their habitats occasionally in partnership with other groups.

Volunteers

If you feel that you would like to volunteer or make a donation to aid with any of our worthy projects please contact us at any of the following.

Paddy Sheridan: 087 687 2939

Theresa Bennett: 087 795 3392

Email: wildkildare@gmail.com

Facebook: wildkildare

If you find an injured or sick bird or animal please contact the kildare animal foundation for help and advice.

Dan Donaher 085 814 1992

Acknowledgements and Copyrights

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SWIFT IN KILDARE



*Declining as a breeding bird
 in County Kildare
 and needs our help*