

# Mullingar Swift Survey Report 2025

Survey work undertaken by the Birdwatch Ireland Westmeath Branch  
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Photograph by Conor Henry

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Photograph by Conor Henry

## Introduction

The Common Swift (*Apus apus*) is a migratory species that breeds in Ireland and winters in tropical Africa. The species has undergone unprecedented declines in Ireland over the past two decades and is now red listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland List (Gilbert et al., 2021). The reason for these declines is poorly understood but it has been theorised that it may be due to loss of suitable nest sites and a reduction in available insect prey.

The town of Mullingar is an important breeding location for this species but is not free from these dramatic declines. In the summer of 2025, volunteers from the Birdwatch Ireland Westmeath Branch made an effort to survey previously known nesting sites within the town of Mullingar and potentially discover new sites. The survey design was similar to that conducted in the 2018 Swift Survey of Westmeath undertaken by Birdwatch Ireland. It aimed to determine nest sites of high breeding potential where Swifts were seen entering and/or leaving but this survey was restricted to the town of Mullingar. It is important to note that results will hold some inaccuracy, and not all sites were resurveyed during the period. This reflects the time constraint of the nesting period in a busy time of year for our volunteers, coupled with some access constraints.

## Method

Former nest sites were observed during June and July to determine the presence/absence of Swifts. Surveys were carried out on days without rain, and an effort was made to survey on days with the least cloud cover. Volunteers would observe the location for a minimum of 1.5 hours in late evening between 7-10pm. A picture was taken of the sites, and a mark was made where an entry/exit occurred.

## Results

In total, 73 probable nest sites were found during the survey period. The locations of these sites and the number of nests at each site is broken down in the table below.

<b>Photo Reference</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Number of Confirmed Nests</b>	<b>Building Type</b>
1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g, 1h, 1i, 1j, 1k.	St. Loman's Hospital, Delvin Road	41	Public
2a, 2b, 2c.	St. Mary's Care Centre, Castlepollard Road	18	Public
3a	Martin's Lane N91 K5CV	3	Business
No Image	Private Residence (Nest Boxes)	2	Residential
4a	Courthouse, Mount Street (Nest Boxes)	2	Public
5a	MABS Building, Blackhall, beside the library (Nest Boxes)	1	Public
6a	Permanent TSB, Blackhall Street (Rear of)	1	Business
7a	Mullingar Army Barracks, Ashe Road	1	Other
8a	2-3 Meeting House Lane	1	Business
9a	Mullingar Cathedral Parochial House	1	Other
10a	Castle House, Castle Street (Rear of)	1	Business
11a	Rear of No. 4 Dominick St.	1	Business

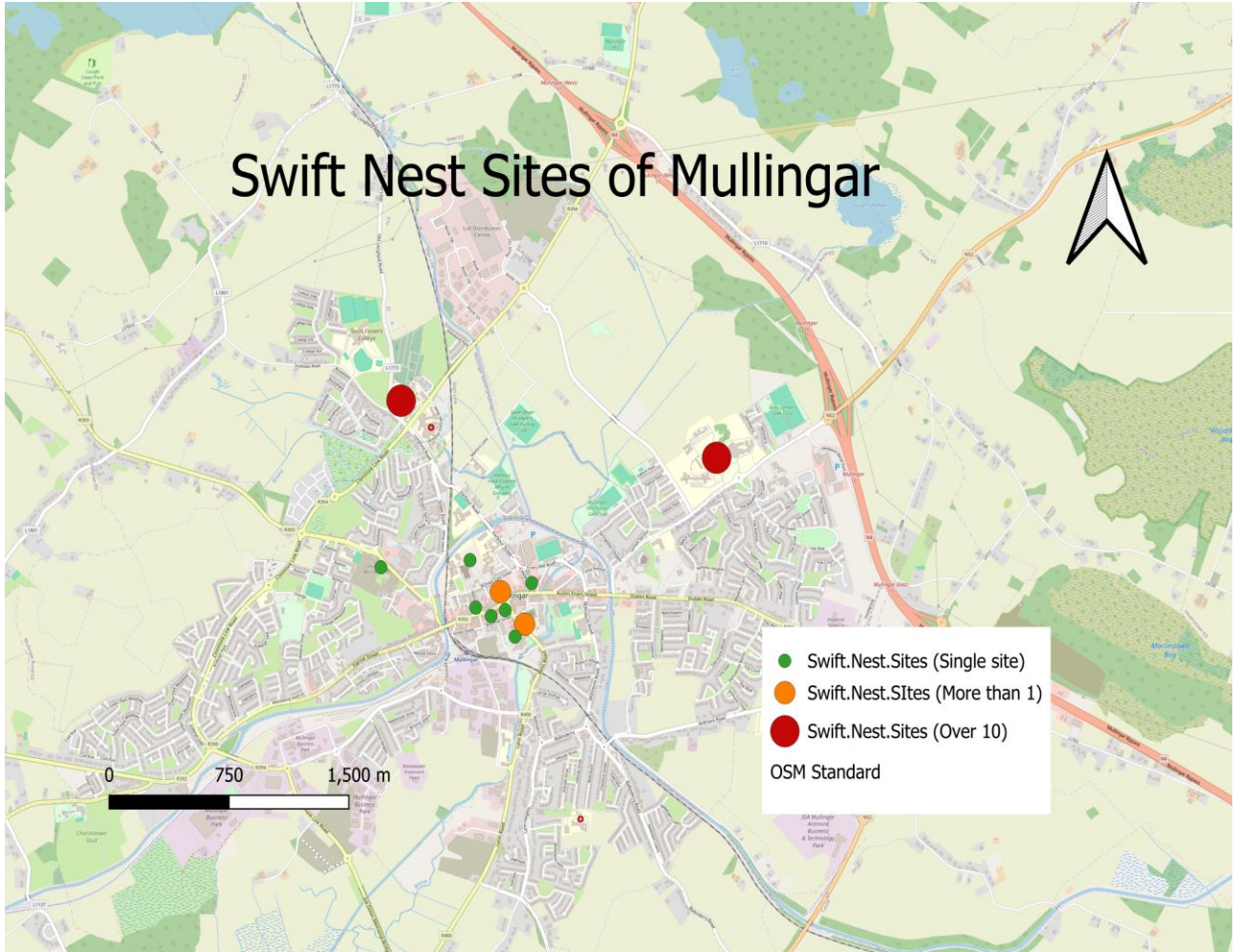


Figure 1.1: Map showing Swift nest sites in Mullingar (Residential sites excluded). Map generated using QGIS 3.4.0.10

## St. Loman's Hospital



1a: Front of building, right hand side of main entrance. (2 nests)



1b: Front of building, left hand side of main entrance. (1 nest)



1c: Left side of building (1 nest)



1d: Left side of building (6 nests)



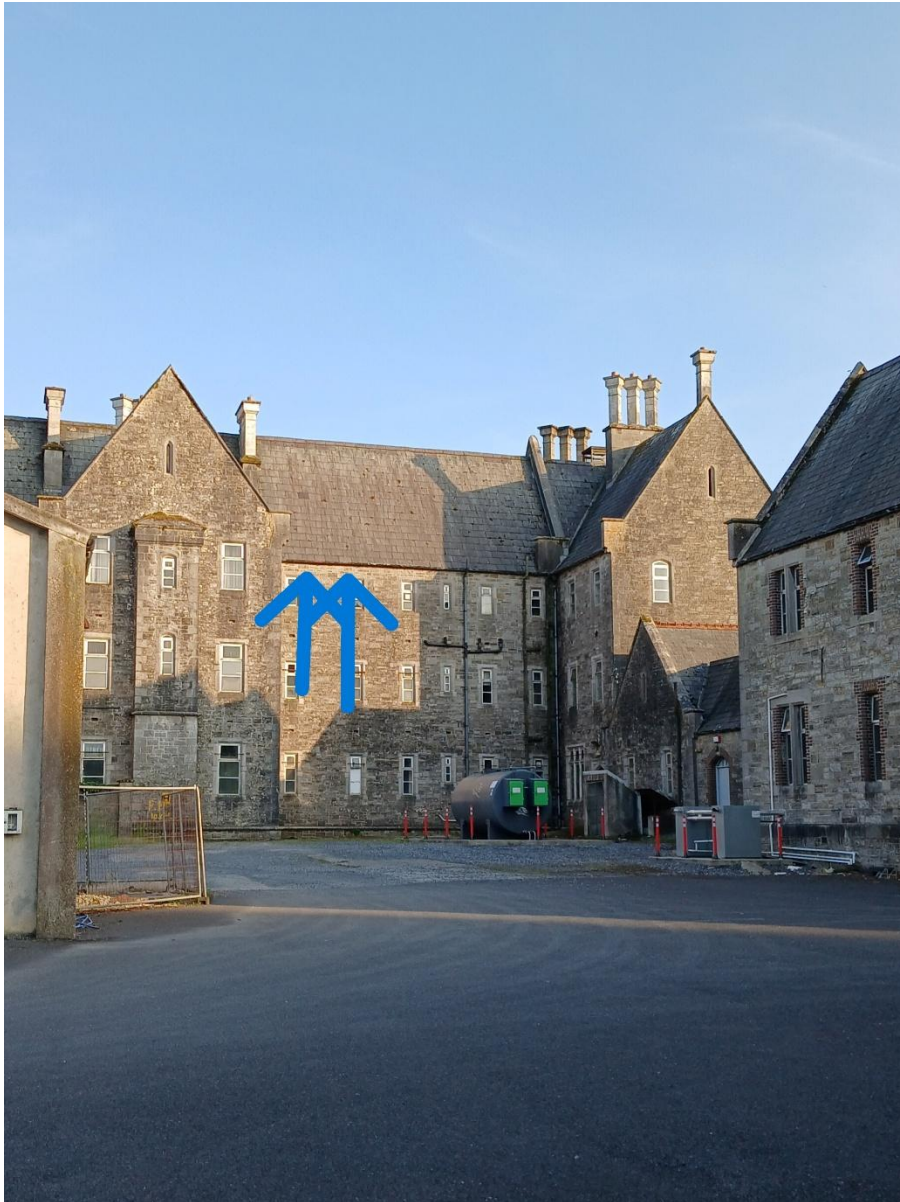
1e: Rear of building (10 nests)



1f: Rear of building (5 nests)



1g: Rear of building (2 nests)



1h: Rear of building (2 nests)



1i: Rear of building (1 nest)



1j: Rear of building (2 nests)



1k: Rear of building (9 nests)

### St. Mary's Care Centre



2a: Front of building (8 nests)



2b: Inner courtyard (3 nests)



2c: Left side of building (7 nests)

## Martin's Lane



3a: Viewed from lane (3 nests)

## Courthouse Nestboxes



4a: Entrance holes 2 and 5 from the left (2 nests)

**MABS Building**



5a: 3<sup>rd</sup> nest entrance from the left (1 nest)

**Permanent TSB**



6a: Rear of the building (1 nest)

## Mullingar Army Barracks



7a: Outside of barracks opposite Tesco's (1 nest)

## Meeting House Lane



8a: From Meeting House Lane (1 nest)

## Cathedral Parochial House



9a: Cathedral Parochial House (1 nest)

## Castle House, Castle Street (Rear)



10a: Rear of building (1 nest)

**No. 4 Dominick's Street**



11a: Rear of Building

## Discussion

The 2018 Swift Survey of Mullingar accounted for 96 probable nest sites within the town (Birdwatch Ireland, 2018). Our survey in 2025 confirmed 73, a few of which being newly discovered sites. This is a roughly 24% decline from the year 2018. This number is only intended to provide a marker and is not an accurate figure on the population fluctuations of Swifts in Mullingar.

What can be said for certain is that 8 nest sites were lost due to renovations or the purposeful blocking up of nest sites. A further 20 nest sites could not be confirmed for unknown reasons. One hypothesis for this site loss may be the deterioration or crumbling of the historic buildings in which Swifts tend to nest. It could also be due to bird inactivity at the times of survey, leading to nests not being recorded. Although these nest sites could not be confirmed, it is important to note that this does not mean that they are no longer active. One site was believed to have been lost due to vegetative growth on the building, but this is a hypothesis.

Due to time and access constraints, 4 nest sites could not be surveyed during the season. A previous Swift nest box scheme on the back of the 2018 survey led to the construction of 18 nest sites, three of which are now occupied. It is hoped that numbers will increase in these boxes as they become more established with time. A further two nest boxes were found to be in use on a residential property in the town. Along with the nest boxes, four new nest sites were found, 2 at St. Loman's, 1 at the Army Barracks and 1 at the Cathedral Parochial House.

St. Loman's Hospital and St. Mary's Care centre were found to be of crucial importance to the Swifts in Mullingar. The numbers recorded at these sites were 41 and 18 respectively. These account for over 80% of the sites recorded during the 2025 surveys.

## Recommendations

The current conservation outlook for the Swift in Mullingar is of concern. There needs to be a concerted effort to protect this species in the coming years.

Further Swift nest box schemes will be necessary and Swift brick schemes will need to become a common feature in large-scale public developments.

In the short-term it is advised to establish a new Swift nest box scheme that incorporates more nest boxes and utilises specialised caller systems. It is recommended that a colony of at least 20 boxes is established on a suitable building. Swifts are colonial nesters, and it is hoped that a scheme like this may be more attractive and generate more nesting potential. In all Swift box and brick schemes it is vital that suitable caller systems are incorporated to attract the Swifts.

In the long-term, it is likely that all natural nest sites within buildings will be lost to renovations, building deterioration, etc. Therefore, swift bricks must be utilised to ensure the continuation of this species in Mullingar. St. Loman's Hospital and St. Mary's Care Centre are crucial sites, and any potential future developments or renovations must have stringent mitigation measures in place for the breeding Swift colonies. These measures should be developed in coordination with professional ecologists and environmental NGOs such as Birdwatch Ireland and Swift Conservation Ireland.

Due to the relatively poor uptake of nest boxes to date, in-situ conservation of nest sites should be strongly emphasised. It is recommended that swift bricks are installed at current nest site strongholds in Mullingar to bolster these populations where possible.

All conservation work should be undertaken in accordance with the relevant guidelines from bodies such as the National Parks and Wildlife Services, Swift Conservation Ireland and Birdwatch Ireland. One example of a relevant reference document is the Birdwatch Ireland 'Saving Swifts' manual (Birdwatch Ireland, 2019). Other documents include 'Which Swift Nest Box' (Swift Conservation Ireland, 2025) and 'Attraction Call System for Swifts as per System used by Swift Conservation Ireland' (Huxley, 2022).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Swifts are a species that has been inextricably linked to the town of Mullingar for centuries. They are a crucial part of the biodiversity and cultural heritage within our town. The arrival of Swifts is the true harbinger of summer, and the loss of this enigmatic bird would deprive future generations living in Mullingar of this part of our heritage.

Currently, Swifts are declining in Mullingar and across the country, but with continuous engagement from Westmeath County Council, community groups, environmental NGO's and the National Parks and Wildlife Services, this does not need be the case in the future.

It is recommended that another survey is undertaken in the coming years to continue the assessment of this species' conservation outlook in Mullingar.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our dedicated volunteer base in the Birdwatch Ireland Westmeath Branch that got out during this busy time of year. It is through their continuous support and passion for the Swifts of Mullingar that this survey was possible. A big thank you to Conor Henry, who allowed us to use his photographs of Swifts in this report. We would also like to thank Mullingar Tidy Towns and the Westmeath County Council Biodiversity Office for their continued support in this endeavour.

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