Saving Bailieborough's Swifts
Updated August 2026

Projects carried out by local volunteer groups:
Friends of Castle Lake Catchment and Killann Parish Green Group

Autumn 2023

The Friends of Castle Lake group decided at a committee meeting that it would be a great idea to get involved in a swift conservation project. Being aware of their status as a red listed bird there was great support from the group to take on this project to help ensure that we can halt their decline in the town. Following this contact was made with Lynda Huxley from Swift Conservation Ireland who provided us with help and advice whenever needed.

Spring 2024

To help us get a project going we received a donation of a Schwegler swift box and caller to fit on a local school from OPW via Lynda Huxley. We then approached the Model Primary School to find out if they might be interested in getting involved in this project as the school building was ideal for swift box placement. Principal Myrtle Griffith and Rev Ian Horner were very interested in supporting this project along with Co Cavan Heritage Officer Ann Marie Ward. There was great excitement when the first swift box went up in early April and to celebrate this we visited the school to tell them all about swifts and the project.



Schwegler swift box and caller in place. (Peak boxes caller system used)

Summer 2024

BirdWatch Ireland East Cavan Swift Survey: We recorded swift activity around town throughout the summer months and met with Annie Birthwistle from BirdWatch Ireland when she visited the town to carry out the survey. The aim was to identify active nest sites on buildings in the town in order to protect them and to determine suitable locations for installing nest boxes to provide additional nesting opportunities. Encouragingly, a small but vulnerable breeding population was discovered in the town. 30 nests were recorded, scattered throughout the town mostly on private buildings. Annie followed up the survey work with a very informative swift presentation at Bailieborough Business Centre in August.



Annie Birtwistle BWI with members of Friends of Castle Lake (photo Liz Mc Kenna)

Spring 2025

With funding from Cavan Heritage, the group acquired eight Schwegler swift nest boxes and three caller systems. The boxes and sound systems were installed on three public buildings in Bailieborough. Thanks to Cavan Heritage, BirdWatch Ireland and Lynda Huxley of Swift Conservation Ireland for their help and support with this project.



Church of Ireland - 3 Schwegler boxes and caller fitted (Peak Boxes caller system used)



Model School – 2 additional Schwegler boxes fitted



Bailieborough Library – 3 Schwegler boxes and caller fitted (Peak Boxes caller system used)

Summer 2025

Swifts were observed checking out one of the boxes on the Model School. This was the first box put in place in 2024. Screaming parties were observed in the area and we were very pleased to see birds taking an interest in the boxes! We continued to monitor swift activity around town over the summer months.

Heritage Week August 2025

Minister for Nature, Heritage and Biodiversity Christopher O'Sullivan visited Co. Cavan during Heritage Week and took time out of his schedule to visit the Bailieborough Library and meet with members of the Friends of Castle Lake group to hear about our project. As a keen birder himself he took a great interest in the work we were doing in the town to save our swifts. We also hosted a swift awareness event in the library that evening. The plight of our house martins was also highlighted at this event. This event was well-attended and something we plan to continue to do year on year to increase awareness of these special summer visitors.



Heritage Officer Ann Marie Ward, Minister Niamh Smith and Brendan Jennings Cavan CoCo. accompany Minister O Sullivan on his visit.
Liz Mc Kenna and Fidel Hogan Walsh from Friends of Castle Lake meet the Minister. Photo Colette Gemmell

Library Manager Helen Kelly (photo Colette Gemmell)



Library Manager Helen Kelly (photo Colette Gemmell)

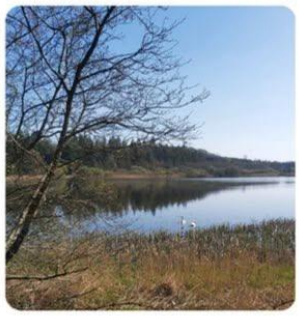
How to Identify a Swift

They are medium sized, dark brown in colour, bigger than a swallow. They have narrow boomerang shaped wings and a forked tail. They have a fast acrobatic flight and can be seen flying in the sky above over the summer months. Note their dark belly and cigar shaped body, this helps separate them from swallows and house martins who both have pale undersides. Swifts emit a screeching flight call, they fly in screaming parties over their territories on summer evenings. Swifts never perch on wires like swallows and house martins do. All of their toes point forward so that their small feet can cling to vertical surfaces rather than perch.



Friends of Castle Lake Catchment

Friends of Castle Lake Catchment is a voluntary environmental group established in 2022 whose main objectives are to educate, communicate and preserve the natural biodiversity of the Castle Lake Catchment and its wider community. The group meets monthly to discuss matters relating to the catchment and biodiversity issues, carries out research projects, fundraises, hosts informative talks and engages with the local community, organisations and schools with the aim of bettering the health and wellbeing of Bailieborough's ecosystem with a particular focus placed on the health of one of Bailieborough's most treasured natural resources – The Castle Lake.



Testimonials

As rector of Bailieborough Parish Church I am delighted that we are partnering with Friends of Castle Lake to provide a space for swift boxes. The first commandment that we read of in the Scriptures from God to humanity, is given to Adam and Eve. They were to look after the wonderful, beautiful planet he gifted them to live in.The same commandment is given to us.Needless to say, we haven't always done a great job of this, and the world is suffering because of our lack of care.Our prayer is that the swift boxes on the church make some small contribution to the preservation of these elegant birds, and to the fulfilment of God's mandate to us to care for his creation.

Rev Ian Horner

As a recent newcomer to Bailibeborough Library in my role as Branch Manager, it has been an absolute privilege to see our Library chosen to have three swift boxes installed on our building. The interest this has created between the Library and local Community is amazing.Children and adults are coming into our Library to ask all about the swifts and swift boxes. There is a building excitement as to when we will have our first family of swifts moving in. This is all thanks to Cavan Heritage who have supplied the funding through Ann-Marie Ward for the purchase of the Swift Boxes, to Emma Clancy, our County Librarian for allowing all this to go ahead and organising a crew to install the boxes, to Cavan County Council for giving us the experienced work crew who installed the boxes. Above all a huge Thank You to the Friends of Castle Lake for including Bailieborough Library in their epic struggle to maintain the future of the Swift population in Bailieborough for years to come and for your tireless work in keeping our environment safe and thriving for our future. Thank you Fidel and Elizabeth for doing all the hard work in organising all the relevant parties. It has been a pleasure.

Helen Kelly, Branch Manager, Bailieborough Library

Friends of Castle Lake

Thanks to Cavan Heritage, BirdWatch Ireland and Swift Conservation Ireland for their help and support with this project.
Also thanks to Myrtle Griffith Principal of the Model School, Rev Ian Horner Church of Ireland and Helen Kelly Manager of Bailieborough Library who all supported this very worthwhile project.

Testimonials about the swift conservation projects (designed by Niamh Clarke, Friends of castle Lake)

December 2025
Killann Parish's Green Group Swift Conservation Project:

At an event in Cavan town the Co. Cavan biodiversity officer presented us with Vivara GZ10 swift boxes and callers to place on St Anne's Church Killann and on St Anne's Church and School, Bailieborough. This swift project was supported by the local biodiversity action fund through Cavan County Council and NPWS.



Biodiversity Officer Cathal Flood presents vivara swift boxes to Co.Cavan Parish green groups outside the cathedral in Cavan town. Present in photo are members of Care of Creation,Cavan,Killann Parish Green Group, Bailieborough, Tara Adcock, Helen Taylor and Annie Birtwistle from BirdWatch Ireland.

January 2026

3 Vivara Swift boxes and a caller were fitted on St Anne's School Bailieborough, and an additional 3 swift boxes and caller were fitted on St Anne's Church, Bailieborough.



St Anne's School – Vivara boxes in place plus caller (Peak Boxes caller used)



St Anne's Church 3 Vivara boxes fitted plus caller
(Peak boxes caller system used)

March 2026

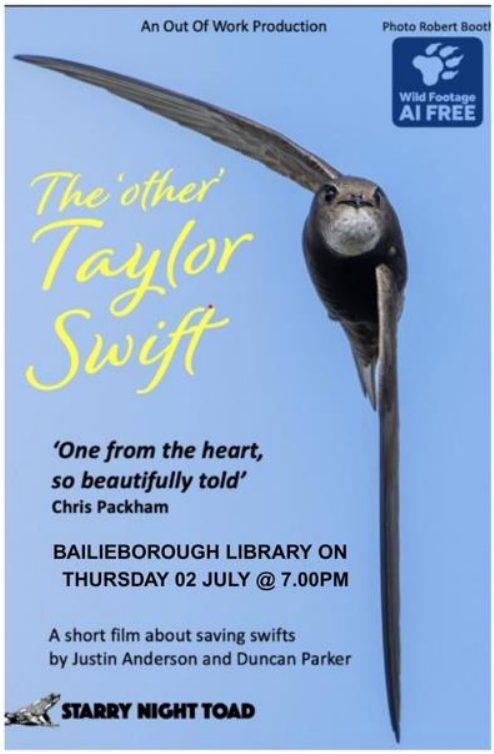
3 Vivara GZ10 boxes and a caller were fitted on St Anne's Church, Killann. In summer 2025 two natural nests had been discovered on this building, which is in a rural setting.



Killann Church,Photo Eilish Larkin - Vivara boxes and Peak Boxes caller system used

July 2026

Swift Awareness Week Event at Bailieborough Library: The “Other” Taylor Swift.
This beautiful short film was shown at Bailieborough Library during Swift Awareness Week. It was followed by a walk around town where we saw lots of swift activity. The film proved very popular and thanks to all who made donations on the night.




Watching a screaming party of swifts at the Model school nest box site
Photo Colette Gemmell

Summer 2026 Update

Birds were noticed entering some of the nesting boxes at dusk at two locations in Bailieborough: Church of Ireland and the Model School. Screaming parties are being regularly observed at these sites. Bangers have been observed checking out the newly fitted Vivara boxes at St Anne's School, Bailieborough. At Killann Church, breeding birds were present at natural nest sites on the building. One of the natural nest sites was taken over this year by starlings but thankfully the birds have discovered the newly fitted Vivara boxes. Bangers have been observed checking out the boxes and on a recent visit two birds were seen entering one of the boxes at dusk.

In total we now have 7 locations with swift boxes in place. This includes a 17A schwegler box and Peak Boxes caller donated to Bailieborough Courthouse. In the future we would love to see swift bricks being installed on suitable new buildings and will encourage this option where possible. Both Groups will continue to monitor the swifts over the summer months and to watch out for birds entering and leaving natural nest sites. We understand the importance of recording all active nests and will encourage the local community to get involved in saving this very special endangered bird.



Swifts in flight

Thanks to Cavan Heritage, Swift Conservation Ireland and BirdWatch Ireland for their invaluable help and support with this project.

We would also like to extend a special word of thanks to the following for supporting this very worthwhile project to save our towns swift population:

Rev Ian Horner, Church of Ireland,
Fr Ultan Mc Goohan, PP Bailieborough and Killann,
Myrtle Griffith, Model School Principal,
Paul Corcoran, Principal St Annes School
Helen Kelly,Bailieborough Library

Report by Elizabeth Mc Kenna (BirdWatch Ireland Cavan Branch)