

FAQs

What impact do swift boxes have on the building structure and insulation, and how do they fit into British standards for building?

Swift bricks have little impact on the structure or insulation of a building. Further information can be found out about them in the 'Facts about swift bricks' brochure, available at: tiny.cc/swiftbricks

Are swifts messy birds?

In comparison to other birds, swifts are clean birds as the adults eat the chicks' droppings and themselves defecate away from the nest.

What about noise?

Swifts are noisy when calling but are typically quiet at the nest site. In some instances, there can be noise from chicks calling to their parents when they are returning with food. This is an occasional chirping sound.

Will swifts use the boxes?

Yes but not immediately—they will typically be occupied by sparrows in their first year of use and starlings in the second year before becoming occupied by swifts. These are both included on the Red list of birds of Conservation Concern, so the inclusion of swift bricks will help these species too.

How affordable are swift bricks?

Swift boxes can cost as little as £25 each, and in bulk can be even cheaper so will have little impact on a budget, whilst promoting the biodiversity of an area.

How can I report sightings of swifts?

The RSPB is currently undertaking a survey of swift observations as part of the National Swift Inventory. You can find out how to get involved here:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/thingstodo/surveys/swifts/>

For further information please contact:

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Tyneside Urban Swifts Conservation Project

*Conservation and enhancement of
biodiversity through the planning system*



Pictures © Gavin Thomas



North Tyneside Council

Newcastle
City Council 

Why do swifts need our help?

As a species, swifts have now been placed on the Amber list of birds of Conservation Concern, meaning their numbers have declined dramatically over the last 10 years.

The reason is as yet unknown; however one of the possibilities is that human activity is destroying existing nest sites, and driving swifts away. Swifts typically use the same site year after year, so when a site is disturbed, swift colonies can be permanently displaced.

Like all wild birds, nesting swifts are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Planning obligations exist under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 for every public authority to have a duty to conserve biodiversity. Similarly, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines that the planning system should contribute to, and enhance, the natural and local environment by minimising its impacts on, and providing net gains for, biodiversity.

How can we help?

Together we can protect existing swift colonies and provide homes for swifts and other bird species within the urban environment. Surveying and reporting of potential swift colony nest sites and swift flocks (or 'screaming parties') will help to meet legal requirements for breeding birds and identify opportunities to conserve and enhance swift populations.

Swift populations can be enhanced by increasing the number of available nesting sites. This can be achieved through the inclusion of permanent nesting spaces, or more specifically, a 'swift brick', in buildings or development sites. Incorporating nesting space at the design stage addresses limitations of traditional bird boxes as swift bricks require no maintenance.

Therefore, North Tyneside and Newcastle councils are adopting an approach where development is encouraged to provide nest places or swift bricks as part of the planning process. This will help swifts, as well as helping to meet targets within the Newcastle and North Tyneside Biodiversity Action Plan.

Nesting requirements

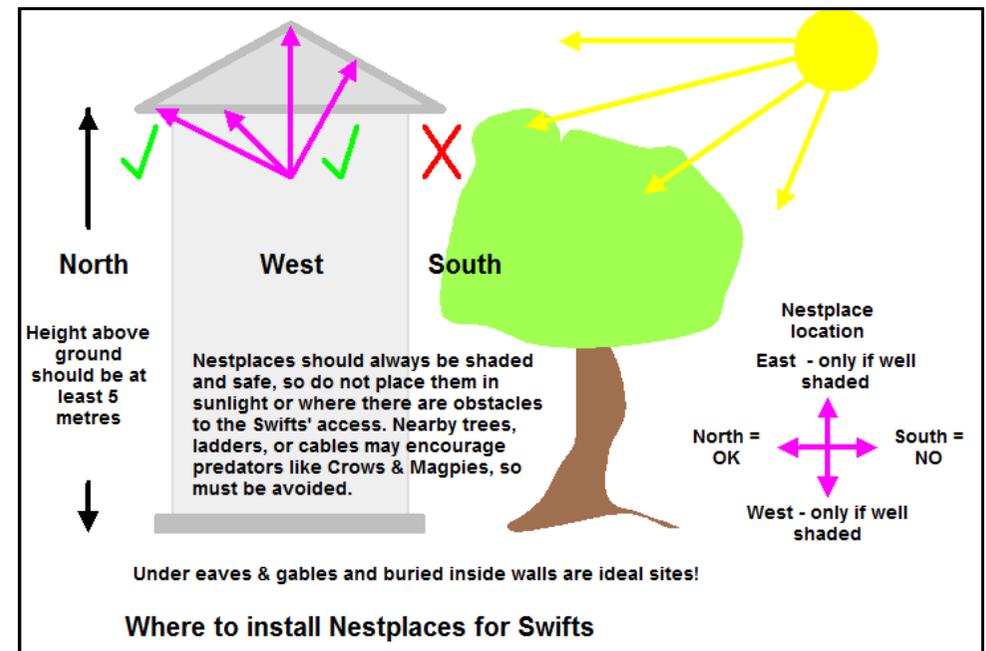
Ideally, a swift brick should be incorporated onto the walls, eaves or soffit of a building. The typical height is usually at least 5 metres or more above ground level.

The boxes should be located away from direct sunlight, not be obstructed visibly by trees or other structures, and typically more than one can be included into each building, typically one metre apart.

Additionally, it is important that work on roofs is not carried out when swifts are looking for suitable sites, or returning to a site from the previous year. This is typically the period between May and August.

Several designs can be incorporated with various manufacturers available, providing a range of facades to match the facade of a building. These are available to view in the 'Facts about swift bricks' brochure, available at: tiny.cc/swiftbricks

Where to install nestplaces for swifts



Further information regarding swifts and swift nesting requirements can be found at the Swift Conservation website: www.swift-conservation.org