



BirdWatchIreland
Cork Branch

CORK CITY DEVELOPMENTAL PLAN SUBMISSION

BIODIVERSITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

24/09/2021

Common Swifts migrate from Africa every summer to breed in Ireland. The number of Swifts visiting our shores each year has been in steep decline over the last thirty years or so and the Swift is therefore a conservation concern. A major factor for this decline is that the vast majority of Swifts now nest in buildings e.g. in the eaves of old houses but these sites are only protected during the breeding season, from May to August. This means that, at all other times of the year, their nesting sites can be removed through repair/alteration to roofs. This has created a severe shortage of nest sites and this is considered the main factor in their decline across Europe.

As part of our Swift conservation Strategy we agreed an alliance with Save Our Swifts Cobh (SOSC) with a view to identifying and protecting existing habitats within the town. We also developed a plan to involve Primary School Students in the project, which in time, will increase the awareness of the many challenges the Swifts face in their efforts to successfully breed each year.

WHEN & WHO

This group was formed in 2019 between SOSC and Cork Branch Birdwatch Ireland

AIMS

1. The conservation of the Common Swift,
2. To grow the existing breeding population in Cobh,
3. To raise public awareness on all aspects of its life cycle including migration, nesting habits and requirements, especially amongst young students

To Date

Early in 2019 we bought five Swift nest boxes which were supplied by Genesis Nest boxes, Killarney, and these were installed on buildings within the town that we deemed suitable. One such building was St. Josephs Boys National School. We visited the school and gave a talk to the sixth class boys, as the nest box was mounted outside their classroom window. In May of that year we gave a public talk in Cobh Library which was very well attended and to which we got a great response. In June /July we carried out a survey to identify existing natural nest sites within the town, just six natural nest sites were found, a disappointing number for a town the size of Cobh. As the summer progressed we got reports that Swifts, or “bangers” as they are known at this stage, had been investigating two of our boxes, so things looked promising for the 2020 season.

The Covid-19 restrictions greatly curtailed our activities in 2020. However, a built in camera in one of our existing boxes revealed that a pair of Swifts had taken up residence and over the course of the summer they successfully reared and fledged two chicks.

Restrictions again hampered our efforts in 2021 but we did manage to erect one extra box in late May. The good news though was that the pair of Swifts returned and again successfully fledged another pair of chicks. With the easing of restrictions in July of this year we held a public Swift walk and talk which again was very well supported and to which we got a great response.

Our takings from the described project in Cobh, tells us that the Provision of artificial nest sites on buildings is one of the key conservation actions for Swifts, and as the only red listed species in The Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland that breeds in Cork City, we believe that Cork City Council should consider similar projects to take the following steps.

1. Protect and conserve existing natural habitat such as wetlands, freshwater habitats, semi-natural grasslands, woodland, hedgerows and mature trees which support and provide the critical food source (insects) for these insectivorous birds.
2. Include appropriate wording on Swift conservation measures in the Development Plan. This information should include links to detailed information on the provision of artificial nest sites for Swifts (e.g. Swift bricks, Swift nest boxes) into all new public building and renovation works and in large-scale commercial developments.
3. Incorporate measures for Swifts into future Biodiversity Action Plans which outlines their status, conservation measures and management practices needed. Architects and planners should be involved delivering these results.
4. Planners can include Swift specific planning conditions to protect existing swift nest sites as well as recommending mitigation for the loss of Swift nest sites and make provisions for Swifts (and other relevant wildlife, e.g. bats) in relevant planning applications, e.g. schools, commercial buildings, public buildings or any large development.
5. Large-scale projects such can include provision for nesting Swifts and take wider ecological considerations into account during the landscaping phase. For example, aquatic habitats can help in managing surface-water run-off while also providing excellent feeding habitat for Swifts and other insect-loving species.
6. Cork City Council should use all efforts to avoid the use of insecticides and herbicides which negatively impact upon the flora and invertebrate populations which in turn support bird species such as the Swift.

We also recommend that, through the regular planning process, all suitable new developments of large buildings such as schools, apartments, housing estates and offices to include provision for Swifts. This can be achieved by using specially designed inbuilt bricks which meet the requirements of Swifts nest and also the load bearing capacity of the

building or by using externally fitted nest boxes. This measure can be used to offset the environmental impact of such large-scale developments.

Suggested Policy Wording for Cork City Development Plan

“It is illegal under The Wildlife Act 1976 and amendments to intentionally kill or cause harm to nesting bird species. Therefore, to comply with Irish legislation and to follow best practice the following actions should be carried out within the respective situations outlined below.

When working on buildings where Swifts are nesting (during nesting season):

- Avoid working on the building while Swifts are nesting (end April – end August inclusive). If work must take place it must be limited to areas where Swifts will not be affected (internal work) or disturbed. Wholesale removal of roof structures and masonry is to be avoided always within the nesting season.
- Do not block nest access with scaffold and don't net or wrap areas where Swifts are nesting.

When working on buildings where Swifts are nesting (outside of nesting season):

- Preserve the Swifts' nest access holes or make new ones to match the old exactly.
- If existing nest entrances cannot be retained, mitigation by erection of externally fixed specialised Swift nest boxes should be made.
- Seek the advice of BirdWatch Ireland to ensure works are beneficial and not harmful to the Swift

When working on new builds or renovations to buildings that do not have Swifts nesting:

- At the planning stages for all new public buildings (over 5 metres) built-in Swift bricks (preferable) or externally fixed Swift nest boxes should be incorporated.
- At the planning stages of all new private buildings (over 5 metres) built in Swift bricks or externally fixed Swift nest boxes should be considered.

Some information on a Swift Conservation project in Limerick City is included below.

<https://www.limerickpost.ie/2021/05/27/swift-measures-new-multi-stakeholder-conservation-project-for-swifts-underway/>

Yours sincerely



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