

Swift Boxes

Objective

Provide specialised nest boxes and lure/callers to encourage swifts to nest from April to August.

Background

Swifts feed on flying insects. Swifts visit Ireland from Africa; they arrive in April and depart in August. Swifts are dark brown all over with a pale throat. Swifts spend most of their lives airborne, in contrast to Swallows and Martins which frequently spend time perching on telegraph wires and fences - a swift will never be seen perched. Swifts nest in small gaps in buildings; under eaves or in cavities in walls. Swifts have one brood per year of 2 or 3 eggs.

Swifts are endangered (red listed) because their population has declined by over 50% in the last 20 years. Swifts are difficult to monitor so it's unclear why their population is declining. Fewer flying insects due to habitat loss and climate change may be a factor. However, less nesting sites because of refurbishment of older building and modern building designs may also be contributing to their decline. Swifts use the same nest site every year. However, young Swifts or pairs displaced from nest sites will be seeking new nesting opportunities. Providing artificial nest boxes allows these young birds to find homes if natural nest sites are limited.

Swifts are faithful to their nest sites, if they occupy a nest box, they are likely to do so for life. Boxes installed during the scheme should be made of long-life durable material and should be maintained after the end of the scheme. It is essential to install and operate a lure/caller to attract swifts to a newly installed nest box. The lure should be played between April and August each year, until such times as the boxes are all occupied by nesting pairs.

Site Suitability

- This action can be selected on parcels with an Eligible hectare > or = 0.
- This action is available on CP and Non-CP LPIS parcels that will be claimed by the participant for the remainder of the ACRES contract.
- Swift nest boxes must be externally installed on outbuildings e.g. sheds, barns, stables in all parcels owned by CP participants.
- Swift boxes should not be located within 250m of a wind turbine.
- Swift boxes should not be located within 30m of major roads, such as motorways and busy national or regional roads due to risk of collision of birds with traffic.
- Boxes should not be installed close to opposing glass windows as there is an in-flight collision risk if the swifts can see through the building.
- Swift boxes must not be attached to historic archaeological structures, e.g. castles, churches, ringforts etc.

- Where Swift boxes are installed in the same parcel/farmyard as Barn Owl/Kestrel nest boxes, they should not be facing each other to reduce the risk of predation. Swift boxes should not be placed on the same building as a Barn Owl/ Kestrel box.

Requirements

1. Swift boxes must be new. They must not have been installed in a previous agricultural scheme (e.g. bird boxes in GLAS).
2. Swifts nest in colonies, so a minimum of three single-entry nest boxes or one triple entry nest box must be purchased and installed at each selected location.
3. Each point drawn on the GLAM map represents 3 Swift Boxes. Each group of swift boxes applied for are only eligible for one NPI payment and once claimed must be maintained for the remainder of the ACRES contract.
4. The nest boxes must be purchased new and be manufactured from wood concrete (woodcrete), woodstone or cellular magnesia cement board. Swift boxes must be purchased, and the receipt must be retained by the participant.
5. Boxes should be installed under the roof eaves and at least 5m high on a sheltered, non-south-facing wall, with a clear flight path from the entrance. Ensure boxes are at least 40cm apart.
6. A lure/caller (wall mounted speakers emitting a call to attract unpaired swifts to the box locations) is required when installing nest boxes. Callers can be integrated into the box or purchased separately but must be installed as close as possible to the installed box(es). The caller must be operational (i.e. emitting sound and connected to an electricity supply) between the 1st of April and the 31st of August. **A box and lure can be purchased on the following link [BirdWatch Ireland ACRES](#) but you are not limited to this supplier. Alternatively contact the CP Teams who can advise on sourcing nest boxes.**
7. Repair or replace damaged boxes as required throughout the remainder of the contract.

Additional Guidance

- Ensure proper safety procedures are adhered to during installation.
- There should be a clear flightpath in front of the nest box because the Swifts need to free-fall as they leave the nest.
- Situate swift nest boxes in shaded site away from full sun in Summer or artificial light.
- Swifts nest in colonies, so you need more than one nest box at your chosen location. You can purchase nest boxes with multiple cavities (that have a dividing wall between each nest area).
- The entrance hole should measure no larger than 29mm x 65mm, this is smaller than the standard European entry size (32mm x 65mm) due to the risk in Ireland, of Starlings gaining entry through the larger entrance.
- When operating the lure, the volume should be set to a normal bird call level. It should not cause disturbance to people or other wildlife in the area.
- Calls should be set on a timer or played at certain times of the day and not played on a 24hour loop. Recommended playing times are from dawn for approximately 3 to 6 hours and from 6pm to dark.

- BirdWatch Ireland’s booklet on saving swifts with advice on installation of boxes can be accessed on the BirdWatch Ireland website, <https://birdwatchireland.ie/publications/saving-swifts-guide/>.
- Contact your local CP team for further information on ordering a nest box and caller. You can also find more information on <https://www.swiftconservation.ie> and contact Swift Conservation Ireland for further advice on nest boxes, lures and installation.
- Farmers can participate in recording sightings of swifts here at [Ireland-Spring Alive](#)
- A video on the importance of buildings for supporting wildlife can be found on [BirdWatch Ireland](#).



Picture 3: [Swift Conservation Ireland](#) Two swifts at nest box site – Copyright © Martin Leak