

SWIFT

Apus apus



SIZE: 16-17cm in length with a wingspan of 42-48cm

HABITAT: Farmland, parks, towns, cities and wetlands

FOOD: Flying insects and airborne spiders

FAST FACTS

- Swifts spend most of their lives flying, even sleeping, eating and drinking on the wing and only ever landing to nest. You can see swifts in April to September, high in the sky as they feed above 50m, often in groups.
- Swifts are very dark all over apart from a small pale patch on their throats. They have long, scythe-like wings and a short, forked tail.
- Swifts come to the UK in summer to breed, and spend their winters in Africa – traveling thousands of miles during their migration.
- Swifts like to nest high up in buildings in small holes in roof spaces. Swifts pair for life, meeting up in the spring at the same nest site and sharing parenting duties. They normally lay 2 or 3 eggs and incubate them for about 3 weeks. To feed their chicks, the parents collect insects in a special pouch in the back of their throats. The young are ready to fly by about 6 weeks old.
- Swifts have tiny feet ('Apus' actually means 'without feet') and legs, which means they can hardly walk and can't perch on trees or telephone lines.

ENDANGERED IN WANSTEAD

Swifts are on the Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern. More than half of British swifts have been lost since 1995, probably because of a number of factors. We know from scientific evidence and the absence of bugs on our car windscreens that there have been very significant declines in flying insects, their food source. As migratory birds, weather events associated with climate change will also impact them. But one very obvious issue in the UK is the loss of nesting sites in recent decades because of the modernisation of buildings, because swifts require suitable hollows and crevices in the eaves. In Wanstead, locals certainly report heavy falls in the number of swifts we see and hear in our skies over the summer.

HELP PREVENT THEIR EXTINCTION

- If you're lucky enough to have swifts nesting in your building, protect them by ensuring any building work near their nests is carefully managed.
- Put a special swift nest box under the eaves of your roof – or if you are having new building or renovation work done, incorporate 'swift bricks', which create nest holes integrated into the masonry. Find out more at www.swift-conservation.org/OurLeaflets.htm
- Email your local Councillors asking them to demand that any new developments in Redbridge incorporate swift bricks.
- Make your garden an oasis for flying insects. Fill it with dense foliage and pollinator-friendly plants (find ideas at www.wildwanstead.org/star-plants).
- Install a wildlife pond and create a long grass area.
- Never use pesticides and lobby the council to stop using them.



More information: www.swift-conservation.org/

Help scientists track swift populations. Report sightings at www.gigl.org.uk/submit-a-record/

