

MAKING ROOM FOR SWIFTS

An Architect's Case Studies



Concern
for
Swifts



Concern for Swifts

CLOAN, near Auchterarder

The roof was replaced over a series of phases in the past 15 years. There was a large lead flat between the two wings which involved the replacement of the entire roof over an area of about 70m² and rebuilding it with a new ventilated lead roof. The edge of this roof can be seen just behind and above the two lower stone gables in the main photograph.





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At the time there were thriving populations of house martins, swallows and swifts. Unfortunately, because of the scale of the work and the need to erect a protecting scaffold over the whole roof area, there was no way to avoid running into the swift breeding season and their nest sites were all facing onto this section of roof. Furthermore, the holes in which the swifts had hitherto nested were not sufficiently weathered to prevent driven rain from getting into the building and remedial works to the immediate area of these nest sites were necessary.





Concern for Swifts



Fifteen years ago we didn't know that we could relocate a colony by providing new nest boxes so the swifts were disturbed and when the works were complete we left only one nest hole. The following May it is probable that swifts did return to the site but it is also probable that another bird had taken over the remaining hole and after that no swifts were seen at Cloan.

Our client was very sad about this turn of events as swifts had lived at Cloan as long as he could remember. He acquired some timber nest boxes from the Hirsel to try out but these did not work and eventually deteriorated. Over recent years discussed ways in which we might be able to try to restore the swifts to Cloan but it was only this year that we decided on some positive action, acquiring three nest boxes from Jacobi Jayne (Schwegler) and a call CD.



Concern for Swifts

We knew there is a busy population of swifts in Auchterarder which is plainly visible from the Cloan frontage.

We knew that the Schwegler triple box was almost exactly the same width as the attic window adjacent to where the swifts had nested previously (910mm), so our strategy was to firmly fix the nest box high up in the window reveal, without damaging the stone jambs, to coat the glass of the window with dust to prevent bright reflections and to play the CD through the east facing window below and also at a high window facing south to Auchterarder. The CDs were left to run almost constantly.





Concern for Swifts

Swifts were once again seen at Cloan, wheeling around the west wing roof and clearly responding to the calls they were hearing. It appeared that on more than one occasion they were inspecting the building, up close. This was borne out when a swift was found to have flown into the gap left in the window for the CD broadcast. The visitor was liberated before it came to any harm.

The call CD at one window was played all summer and the swifts were regularly seen flying around so we hope the extended period of visits has imprinted Cloan for next year. The nests will be blocked up over the winter and re-opened next spring. Even if there are no takers next May we will continue to try to establish Cloan as a nest site. When we have done this more permanent nest sites will be provided.





Concern for Swifts

GLENHEAD

This site exemplifies one of the most common swift nesting arrangements - it is an old stone-built building with a traditional eaves detail, i.e. a harled stone wall running straight up to a slate roof with cast iron rones. Because the wall is made of stone it inevitably has a slightly irregular top edge to the harling. The wall plate is inboard of the outside edge of the wall, so the bottom slate rests on the stone wallhead, creating a space underneath.

If the slate bridges two high points on the harling a small space is left where swifts can get in, which is so well protected by the slate and the rones that it rarely poses a real threat to the building for weathering. The birds are on the outside of the roof, under the slate, so this should not create any problems for the building occupants. However, those responsible for building maintenance seem to feel it is important to block up these gaps, which are only really accessible to swifts and bats.

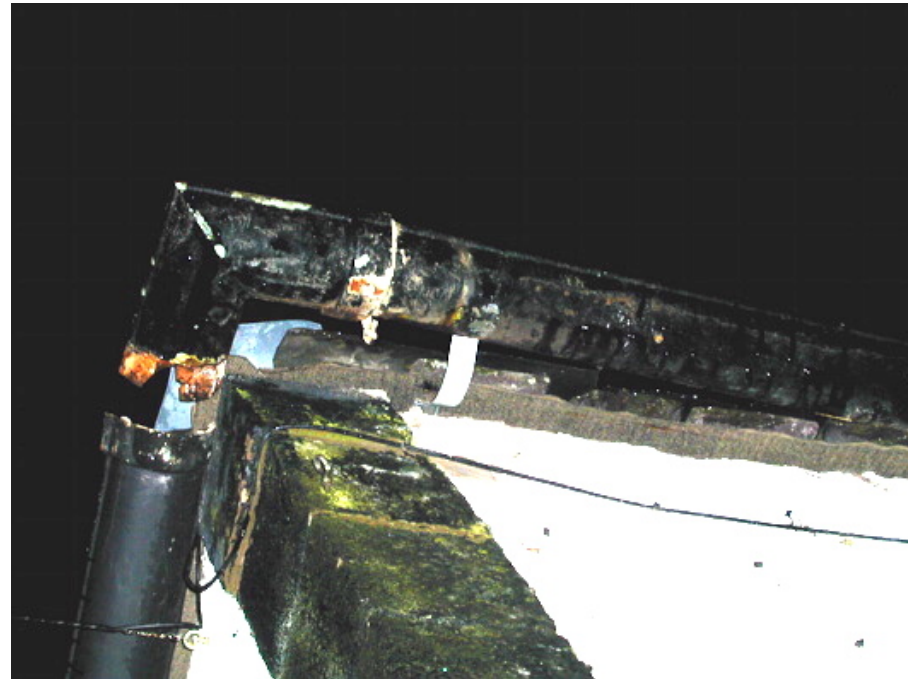


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The roof at Glenhead was replaced six years ago, programmed to begin mid-August. Strict instructions were given on how to maintain the nest sites.

The instructions were not followed and the following year six or seven pairs of swifts were unable to gain access. It was observed that they tried to gain access with some determination but they eventually gave up and left.

This picture shows one nest site between the quoin and the rone bracket and the offending felt





Concern for Swifts

The rones were taken down in the autumn, cutting out the blocked up openings where we could. The introduction of ordinary roofing felt created problems - it lay loose under the slates at the nesting gap so metal plates were made and thin slate acquired which were tapped into the wall head to raise the felt up from the opening. These "shims" rode on the same high points on the harling but were thin enough not to give the edge a noticeable "kick". The nest holes along the south and east wall heads were scraped out and left for the next May. Unfortunately no birds returned.

The following May a solitary bird arrived. It was probably a previously non-breeding juvenile in its second year unaware that the colony had decamped elsewhere. It found another swift and seemed to be established that year. It has followed a similar pattern each subsequent year with just one breeding pair in the same nest site.

We think there have been two young birds this year so there are plans to set up new nest sites this winter for occupation next May - there is a brick built gable on one of the barns and we plan to cut two or three boxes into this wall.





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NEW PROJECTS (1) DUNBLANE

We have been commissioned to take the roof off a dwelling at Dunblane and replace it with a taller room-in-the-roof construction. Our client has asked that we include a superficially mounted combined bat and swift box on the new north east gable and we are going to fit swift bricks into the south west gable. We would not contemplate fitting superficial nest boxes on this gable because of the exposure to sunshine but, as it is at elevation, exposed to a breeze, provides a good approach and will be built in, we think it is worth having a go. There is an established swift population locally.





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NEW PROJECTS (2) GILMERTON

A new house will be built next year at Gilmerton. The design includes swift boxes in two of the gables. Again there is already a swift population in the area which we hope may adopt these new sites.

When new boxes are built in and, for whatever reason, they are not adopted by swifts, we want to look at having an interchangeable face plate which might make the site adaptable for other species such as house sparrows.



Thanks to Andrew Rodger for sharing this information



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