

Swifts find new homes in Alyth

A RECENT building conversion in Alyth has resulted not only in new homes for humans, but also for swifts, writes Katy Gordon

Swift numbers in Scotland have seen a sharp drop in recent years, with a key reason for the decline being the lack of suitable nesting places.

Gaps in stonework or spaces under gutters are preferred spots for swifts, and as old buildings are demolished or gaps are filled in, these nest sites are lost.

New-build homes tend not to offer nesting opportunities, and as swifts mate for life and return to the same place every year to breed, if their nest site is lost they are unlikely to rear any chicks.

In a bid to halt this decline, Perth and Kinross Council's Countryside Ranger Service has been working with businesses and schools in East Perthshire to ensure there are new nestboxes in place in time for the swifts' return to Scotland at the beginning of May.

Hillcrest Housing Association has donated money to the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership to purchase six long-lasting woodcrete nestboxes. In addition, their apprentices are making a number of nestboxes for future use.

Two of the new nestboxes are now to be found on the old auction hall in Alyth, which has been converted into apartments by Errol-based PJ Redford Construction. It is hoped that



SWIFT RESPONSE: Billy McGibbon, of PJ Redford Construction, and Countryside Ranger Daniele Muir with the swift nestboxes at the former auction hall in Alyth.

pairs of young swifts will find and occupy the new 'residences' this Spring.

Lorna Redford of PJ Redford Construction said: "I was impressed with the enthusiasm and interest of the Countryside Ranger and was delighted to be able to accommodate the swifts nesting boxes. Here's hoping they have occupants come May!"

The Countryside Rangers will be

carrying out the Tayside Swift Survey again during 2012 to pinpoint swift hotspots to help in their conservation. For further information about the survey, visit the council website at www.pkc.gov.uk and search for 'swift survey'.

Householders can also help swifts by installing a nestbox on their property, with a wide variety of designs on offer – see www.swift-conservation.org for installation advice.