

# Kirriemuir Swift Conservation Project Report 2014 – 2017.



Tayside Biodiversity Partnership  
**BIODIVERSITY**  
THE VARIETY OF LIFE

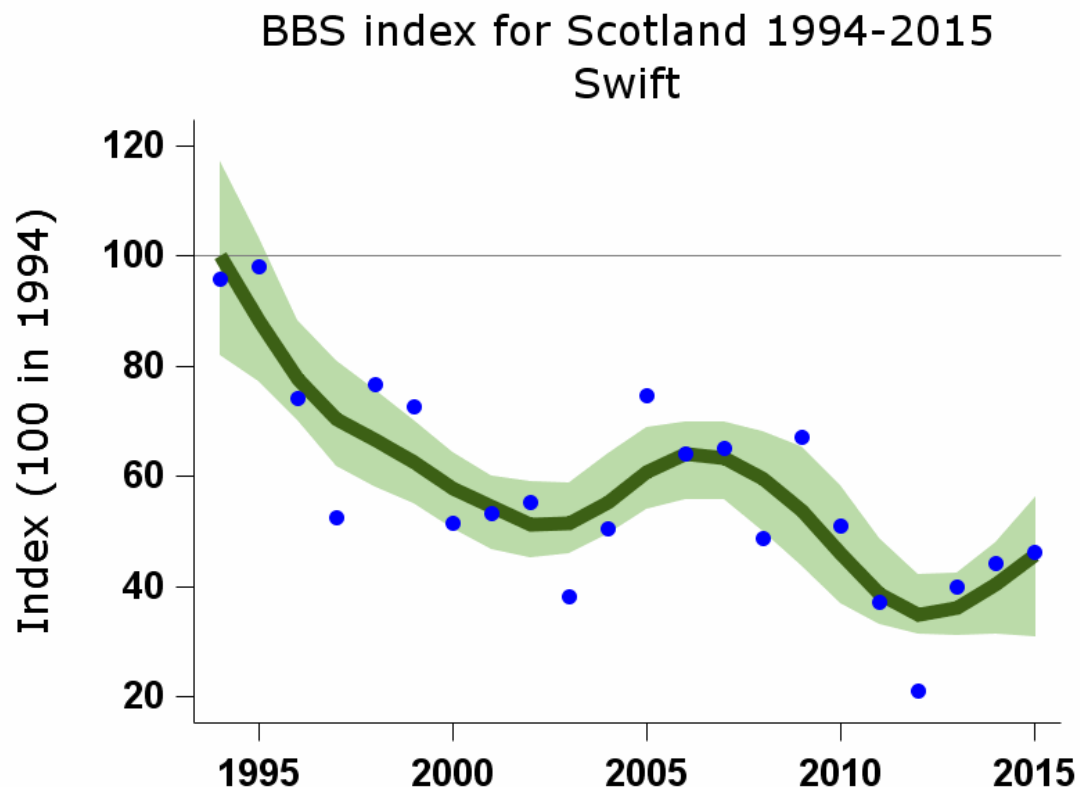


### Swifts in Scotland.

The Common swift (*Apus apus*) is a summer visitor to Scotland, arriving in early May and leaving in early August for its wintering areas in southern and central Africa. They are superbly adapted aerial birds which live their entire life on the wing, landing only to breed. Originally using cliffs, crags and occasional trees for breeding, they have adapted well to using man-made buildings.

Surveys carried out by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) show that there has been a decline of 60% in the population of swifts in Scotland between 1995 and 2013 (Breeding Bird Survey Report for 2014). In 2009 this led to swifts receiving an Amber listing, showing that they are now a UK Species of Conservation Concern. They are also included in the Scottish Government's Biodiversity List of Priority Species.

**Figure 1 – graph showing the Breeding Bird Survey index for the Swift in Scotland.**



This graph may be reproduced, subject to the appropriate acknowledgement of the BTO/ JNCC/ RSPB Breeding Bird Survey.

A major contribution to the decline in population is the ever-increasing loss of nesting sites. Swifts are predominately associated with older buildings where they use the gaps under eaves, gaps in pointing and cracks in stonework to nest. As these buildings are renovated, these gaps and cracks are filled in, resulting in the loss of nest sites. As swifts return to the same site year after year, it is increasingly difficult for them to find a new nest site in which to breed. It is likely that one of the limiting factors in the size of swift populations is the availability of nest sites.

Swifts will also nest in newer buildings where there are suitable gaps and spaces. However, modern building practices tend to exclude swifts from their traditional sites by using materials which seal all gaps and cover ventilation spaces. Wire mesh plates or grids are now used to cover ventilation gaps, and new building materials and techniques do not offer alternative possibilities.

### **The Kirriemuir Conservation Area Scheme (CARS).**

The Kirriemuir Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme started in 2013 with the following aims:

- To repair and reinstate the character and appearance of historic buildings within the conservation area;
- To restore or enhance the features which give the buildings their historical or architectural importance;
- To encourage or facilitate the re-use of vacant or partially vacant buildings;
- To promote greater public awareness and appreciation of the built heritage;
- To contribute to the economic and social regeneration of Kirriemuir.

Some of these repairs would be likely to affect swift colonies so a baseline swift nest site survey was carried out in the summer of 2013 to ascertain whether swifts were present in the area. A total of nine definite and forty four probable nest sites were found in the Conservation Area, confirming that Kirriemuir is an extremely important town for nesting swifts.

### **The Kirriemuir Swift Conservation Project.**

Following on from a successful Pilot Swift Conservation Project in the Carse of Gowrie in 2013, the Kirriemuir Swift Conservation Project was initiated in spring 2014 to run alongside the CARS project.

The project had the following main aims:

- Undertake citizen science survey work across Kirriemuir, raising awareness of swifts amongst the general public;
- Update the Swift Priority Area map to check the baseline data from which future changes can be measured;
- Provision of nestboxes to all those property holders successfully achieving a grant to renovate their property frontage, as well as providing nestboxes for anyone in and around Kirriemuir keen to help;
- Publication of a Kirriemuir Swift Conservation leaflet to raise awareness of the project;
- Run a technical training workshop by international expert from UK Swift Conservation.

### **Project achievements.**

#### **Awareness raising:**

A substantial part of the project was to raise awareness of what is happening to swift numbers, and to involve as many people as possible in a survey of the town and its environs.

This was achieved through various walks, talks and press releases, details as follows:

**Table 1 – Awareness raising events:**

Date	Event
Throughout project	Swift banners and leaflets were on display at Gateway to the Glens Museum, Kirriemuir library, Northmuir primary, Southmuir primary, Websters High School, Kirriemuir Connections & Fairlie House Community Learning & Development Centre. Leaflets were also available in the Kirriemuir ACCESS and Community Police Office where a triple nestbox was erected.
Spring 2014	Talks to Northmuir primary, Southmuir primary & Websters High School. Two nestboxes were put up on Websters High School and monitored by the pupils.
July 2014	2 guided walks
May 2015	Illustrated talk at Gateway to the Glens Museum
July 2015	Guided walk
May 2016	Talk to Linden care home residents
June 2016	Library drop in information session
June 2016	Guided walk
Aug 2016	Talk at Kirriemuir Charrette
Sep 2016	Talk at CARS workshop Traditional Roofing & Repair
Nov 2016	Talk to Kirriemuir Day Care Group
Nov 2016	Talk to Kirriemuir Scouts

Press releases in the Courier and Kirriemuir Herald were issued on a regular basis and there was also an appeal for sightings on the radio station Tay FM.

**Photo 1 – Talk at Kirriemuir Charrette.**





**Swift records:**

Records received and nestbox addresses were passed on to Perth and Kinross Council's Biodiversity Officer and Angus Council to be put onto their Geographical Information System to help with future swift conservation.

**New nestboxes:**

Ninety five new swift nestboxes were given to householders, churches and businesses in the Kirriemuir area. As some of these were triple boxes it means that there are now one hundred and fifteen new nesting locations for swifts, which means the Kirriemuir population can greatly increase over the next few years.

The majority of these were put up with a cherry picker hired from Tayside Contracts. All box recipients have been encouraged to play the swift call CD to help birds find the nest boxes. They will monitor their nestboxes and report to Tayside Swifts about uptake and usage.

Planning lists were checked weekly, with householders planning works in the Kirriemuir area contacted with the offer of a nestbox. Liaison with Angus Council's Planning Officers was an important part of working in the Conservation Area. Nestboxes were painted to blend in with the red sandstone and locations which were unobtrusive were chosen in conjunction with the officers.

Developers building houses in the area were contacted to ask if they would like free inbuilt nestboxes, but did not respond. It is important that new build properties in areas with swift populations should contain in-built nestboxes to help swift populations expand. This needs to be addressed at a national and international level.

**Photo 2 – Nestbox at Kirrie Day Care.**

## Kirriemuir Swift Conservation Project leaflet:

This leaflet was produced to give information about what was happening to swift populations, what the project hoped to achieve and let people know how they could help. It was very useful and given to everybody who attended walks, talks and received a nestbox.

## Photos 3 and 4 – Kirriemuir Swift leaflet.



**Did you know?**  
Young swifts do press  
ups on their wingtips to  
strengthen their muscles  
before leaving  
the nest.

### The swifts' amazing lifestyle

Swifts usually nest over five metres high so they can get airborne easily – when a young swift leaves the nest it won't stop flying until it starts to breed, which could be in three or four years' time! Swifts are unique among birds as the chicks can go into a period of torpor when the weather is poor and the adults can't find enough food. This helps them to survive periods of low food availability.

Swifts are so well adapted to their aerial lifestyle that they resemble a boomerang in flight – they have long, thin wings and a short forked tail. They can sleep whilst flying and reach altitudes of ten thousand feet, the same height as small planes.

For more information about swifts, see the following websites:

- [www.facebook.com/taysideswifts](http://www.facebook.com/taysideswifts) - 'like' us for updates about swift guided walks and other local information.
- [www.swiftconservation.org](http://www.swiftconservation.org)
- [www.concernforswifts.com](http://www.concernforswifts.com)
- [www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk](http://www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk) - swift advisory notes can be downloaded from the Developers & Householders section.

#### Please contact us

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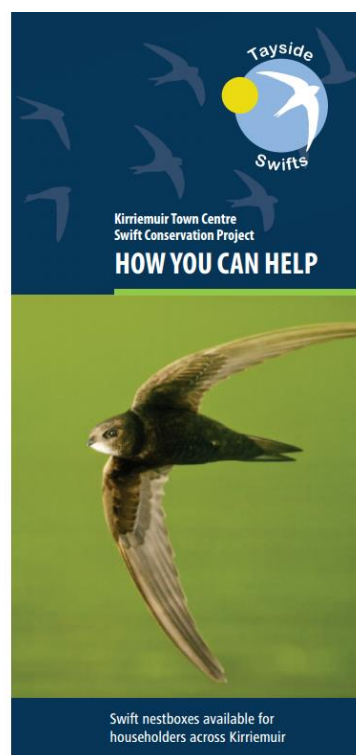


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**Did you know?**  
Swifts can travel  
hundreds of miles per  
day to find food.

The Common Swift (*apus apus*) is a summer visitor to Scotland, arriving in early May and leaving in early August for its wintering grounds in central and southern Africa. According to BTO surveys, their numbers have dropped by over 60% over the last 15 years and the main reason for this is thought to be loss of nest sites.

Kirriemuir has a good population of swifts and The Kirriemuir Town Centre Swift Conservation Project will help householders conserve their existing swift nest sites and find the best locations for new swift nest boxes.

Would you like a swift nestbox for your house or business? We offer free advice, free nestboxes and we can even help you erect it on your property!

Loch of Kinnordy is a great place to watch them feeding.

### Where do swifts nest?

Swifts mate for life and are faithful to one nest site, returning there year after year. They are associated with older buildings where they use gaps under eaves and cracks in stonework to nest. Swifts make next to no mess and often you won't know that they are there. As old buildings are renovated or demolished, whole colonies of swifts can be lost.

New buildings tend not to offer nesting opportunities for swifts which is why it is so important to conserve existing nest sites. We are working with local craftspeople to design nest boxes that blend in with the local stone used in the town centre.

All birds' nests are protected by law and it is an offence to disturb or prevent access to a nest. The erection of scaffolding and nets must be timed to ensure they do not interfere with the nesting season which runs from May to August.



### Did you know?

On fine summer evenings, swifts gather in 'screaming parties' chasing each other around the buildings where they nest.

### What can you do to help swifts?

Everyone in the Kirriemuir area can take part in the project and help swifts.

- Tell us if you see a screaming party - how many birds there were and the address of the buildings.
- Swift Survey forms can be collected from the library and Information Centre, or add your sightings online at [www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk](http://www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk)
- Tell us if you know of a swift nest site in use.
- Tell us if you would like a swift nestbox for your property. It is free and we can even put it up for you.
- We offer swift talks and guided walks to community groups and schools - please contact us (contact details are on the back of this leaflet).

Swifts feed exclusively on insects and other small invertebrates which they catch whilst flying. They also sleep and mate on the wing and only ever stop to nest and raise their young. They don't perch on wires like swallows or martins do.

Following publication of the Kirriemuir Swift leaflet it was realised that a similar generic leaflet was needed for use across Tayside. This was achieved towards the end of the project with separate funding.

#### **Technical advice and training:**

A number of technical training events were run as part of the project. The first was part of the Angus Council and Tayside Biodiversity Partnership's 'Swifts & Bats in the Kirriemuir Conservation Area' Sharing Good Practice event, funded by the Kirriemuir CARS Project. On 25th February 2014, Karen West, the CARS Project Officer, welcomed Edward Mayer of Swift Conservation who gave a talk on 'Preserving Places for our Iconic Swift', and then a practical exercise on 'The Wildlife Attributes of Properties'. A short walk around the town with Edward and the Scottish Bat Officer, Anne Youngman, pointed out potential swift nest sites and bat roosting sites and discussed how best to safeguard them. The afternoon focussed on 'Bats and Development'.

#### **Photo 5 – poster for Swifts & Bats workshop.**



The second event was aimed at planners and involved carrying out training to recognise swift nest sites and identify good locations to erect swift nestboxes. Unfortunately this was a very wet day and only two people attended.



The project officer gave a talk about conserving swift nest sites at a CARS Traditional Roofing & Repair training workshop which was very relevant to the project, as well as answering questions and handing out leaflets at another public CARS event.

Redford Construction has worked with Tayside Swifts for a number of years. In 2014 the company converted the empty Glengate Hall, where there was an active swift nest site, into eight flats.

Keen to conserve this swift nest site, the entrance hole on the outside of the building was maintained and the nest site on the head wall was boxed in so the swifts could not access the inside of the building. A triple nest box was also erected on the back of the Hall, in an area where there was a lot of swift activity. As the hall is in the Conservation Area, special paint was used on the nest box to ensure it blended in well with the surrounding stone.

**Photo 4 – Glengate Hall swift nest site.**



### **Conclusion.**

The Kirriemuir Swift Conservation Project has been a success, involving many people of various ages, from primary school pupils to retirees. It has raised awareness of swifts within the area and has led to new sightings of swifts being recorded and existing nest sites being conserved. Young swifts returning to breed in 2017 should be able to find a nesting location easily, with one hundred and fifteen new nest sites available.



The findings of the project will be shared with Tayside Biodiversity Partnership, Tayside Swifts and the Biodiversity Partnership's Urban Working Group to encourage similar projects to be rolled out across Tayside and beyond.

**Photo 5 – Coverage from The Courier 23/2/17**



Thanks to Angus Environmental Trust and Scottish Landfill Communities Fund for project funding.

**Project Officer work carried out by Daniele Muir, Perthshire Wildlife.**

