



Tayside Guidance Note

Safeguarding Swifts in Development

Swifts are the sound of summer

They are migratory birds that travel 3,400 miles to spend three summer months in Scotland where they breed. Swifts form evening acrobatic 'screaming parties' and are found in many of our towns. They eat, sleep, drink, and even mate on the wing and rarely land other than to nest.

Why do Swifts need our help?

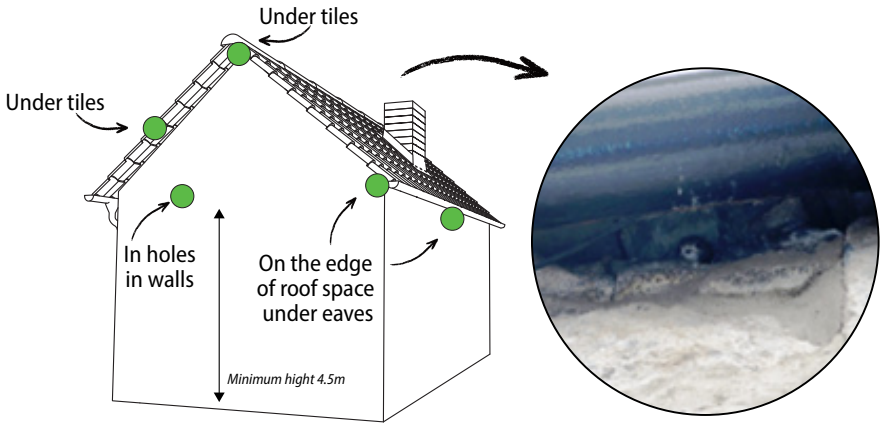
Swifts nest within small cavities in buildings across the UK. **Their numbers have fallen drastically, by 66%, over the past twenty-five years.** This is largely due to the holes where they nest being filled in when buildings undergo renovation or re-roofing, which greatly reduces places to nest. Swifts are at risk of extinction and have been 'Red listed'.

For every ten birds flying over our towns in 1999, there are now only three.

The Natural Environment Bill (Scotland) now **requires developments to make provision for swifts by installing nest boxes.** This is a simple solution to help Swift numbers recover, and this guidance has been produced to show how easy it is.

Where do Swifts nest?

Swifts are the cleanest of birds, making no mess at their nest site and leaving no droppings.



Example of integrated swift nestbox

Perth & Kinross Council's Standard Planning Condition led to 570 bird bricks and boxes being installed in Perth & Kinross in 2023 and 2024.

Installing Swift nestboxes

Installing nestboxes is an easy way to support swifts. They can be inexpensive, take up little space in walls, are discrete, provide a stable environment for nesting swifts, and are easy to install.

How many nestboxes to install

At least one swift brick/nestbox now needs to be installed in every new build home in Scotland.

Large buildings can accommodate many more nestboxes. Best practice would be:

- House 1-4 nestboxes
- Small block of flats 4-10 nestboxes
- Large building 10-20 nestboxes

Where to install Swift nestboxes

Nestboxes should be placed in suitable positions to ensure the best chance of success, for example, in a site that's not too hot, cold, windy, or wet.

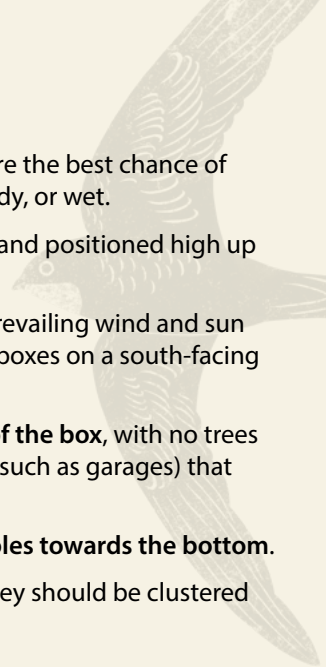
Height – Nestboxes should be a **minimum of 4.5m high** and positioned high up under the eaves.

Aspect – Preferably **northeast facing**. This is out of the prevailing wind and sun and providing a more stable temperature. Avoid putting boxes on a south-facing aspect as chicks can quickly over-heat on hot days.

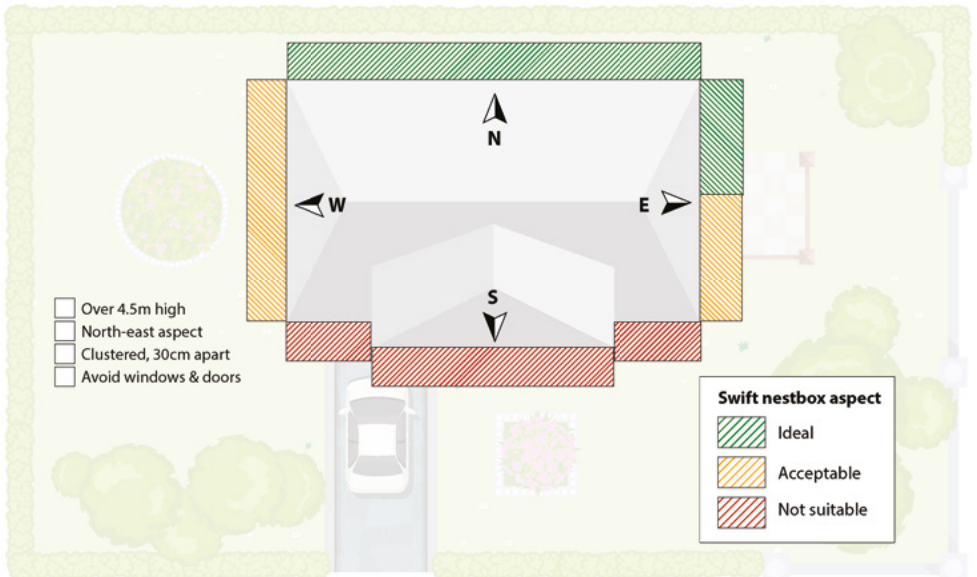
Flight path – Ensure there is a **clear flight path in front of the box**, with no trees or bushes, wires, windows, or other buildings in the way (such as garages) that fledging chicks could fly into.

Position – Ensure nestboxes are placed with **entrance holes towards the bottom**.

Multiple nestboxes – If using more than one nestbox, they should be clustered together, but ensure they are **30cm apart**.



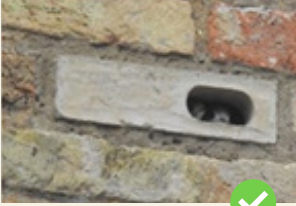
Nestbox aspect guide



Examples of Swift nestboxes

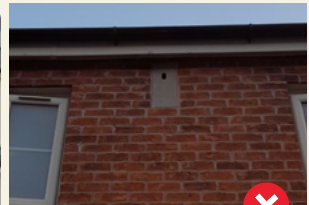
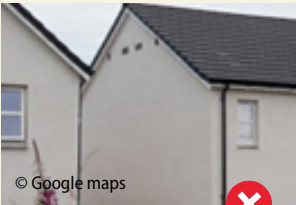
Well-located

These nestboxes are north-facing, 5m high, and close to the soffit. There is a clear flight path for easy fledging with no walls, wires, fences, trees, or garage roofs in the way.



Poorly located

Nestboxes here are too close to the house next door with a very limited flight path, or even positioned the wrong way up.



Further information and where to source Swift nestboxes:

Swift Conservation - www.swift-conservation.org

Action for Swifts - www.actionforswifts.com

Tayside Biodiversity Partnership - www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk

Swiftmapper - www.swiftmapper.org.uk



RSPB YouTube

Tayside Biodiversity Partnership



Image credits: Concern for Swifts Scotland, Daniele Muir, Action for Swifts, Elspeth Coutts, John Wilson & Swift Conservation