



Creating Swift Nest Places in Old & New Soffits, Eaves, Walls & Gables



Swifts are a bird in trouble; they used to nest in holes in ancient trees, but we have removed nearly all the ancient trees, not only from Europe, but from the world too.

Then they moved into our buildings, which used to have open eaves and plenty of holes in them. They did us a favour in return, by eating flies, gnats and aphids in truly vast quantities.

But now we build sealed buildings, without any holes where Swifts can nest. So their populations are falling fast right across Europe and even in Central Asia too. By some counts, we have lost nearly half the Swifts in England and Scotland in the past 15 years, even more in Wales.

But you can help Swifts survive and thrive easily by making small alterations and additions to the buildings you are working on.

This leaflet shows you the basic principles, and some useful examples of how nest places have been created this way, in many different types of buildings.



A specially trained workman cuts the right size hole in the right place to let Swifts back into these eaves, where they have been nesting already for many years, after the fitting of new soffits and gutters.

The Basics:

It is easy to help Swifts to breed in buildings, without any adverse effects and without their compromising the building's interior. All that is needed is a box or a hole, with suitably sized living space, and these can easily be created on both existing and new structures with a little creativity. If well built and installed the boxes need no maintenance, nor do they ever need to be cleaned out, as Swifts are probably the cleanest of birds, making minimal nests that disappear over Winter.

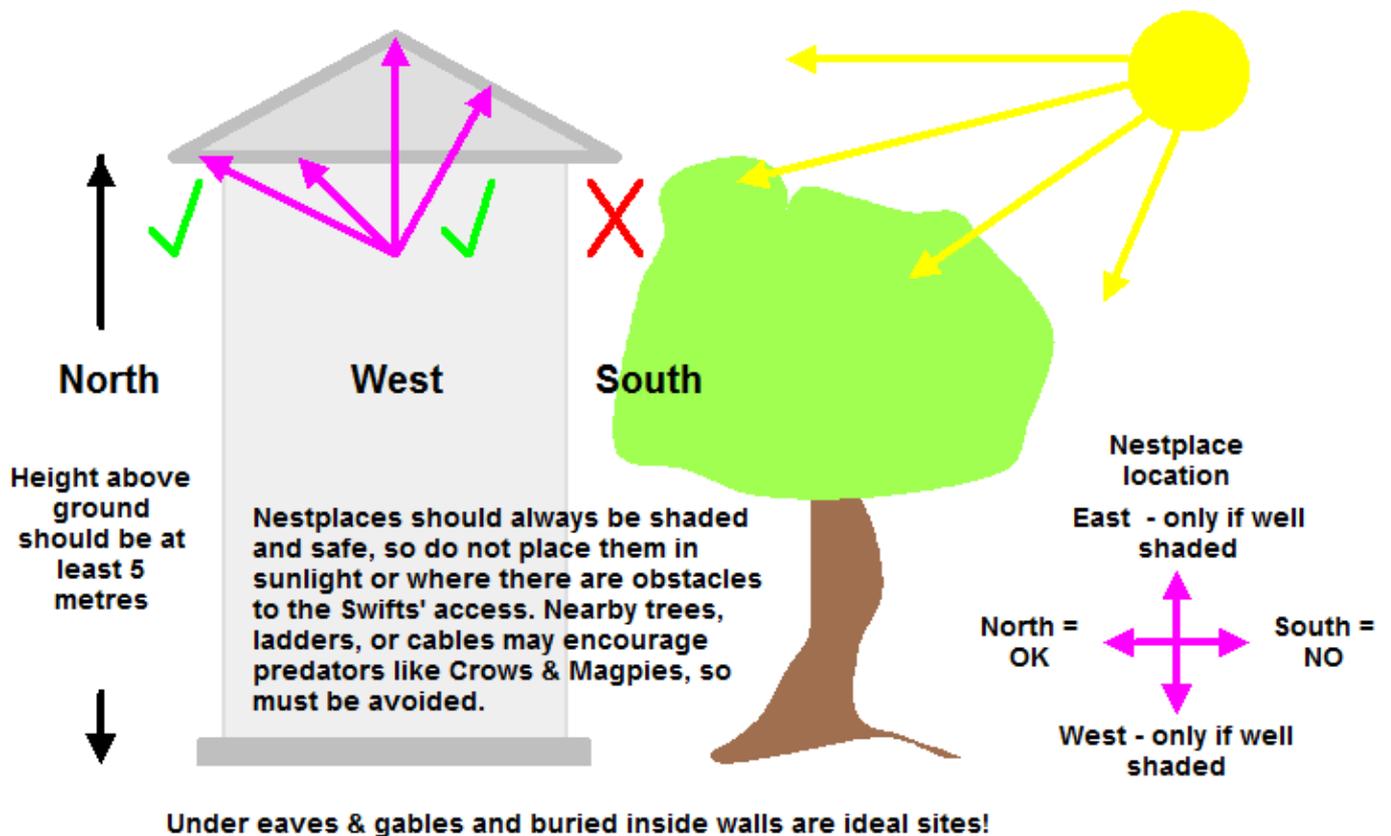
Box sizes, entrance hole dimensions, partitions, and location:

Swifts need a minimum breeding space at least **300mm wide x 200mm deep x 150mm high**. Bigger is probably better. The entrance hole can be in the front, or side, or base, placed towards the end. If in the front or side it should be about 20 to 30mm from the floor. The hole itself should be **30mm high x 65mm wide**. The space should be cosy, not draughty. It should not be in direct sunlight, unless sunk deep into a wall or roof to give it some protection from excessive heating and cooling.

Each nest space should be individual, separated by walls from others, as Swifts compete for nests and partners and fight viciously when confronted by competitors.

The nest place should be at least 5 metres above the ground (or any large surface beneath like a flat roof), and away from obstructions like trees and creepers, and also away from possibilities for human disturbance such as access ladders, doors and windows.

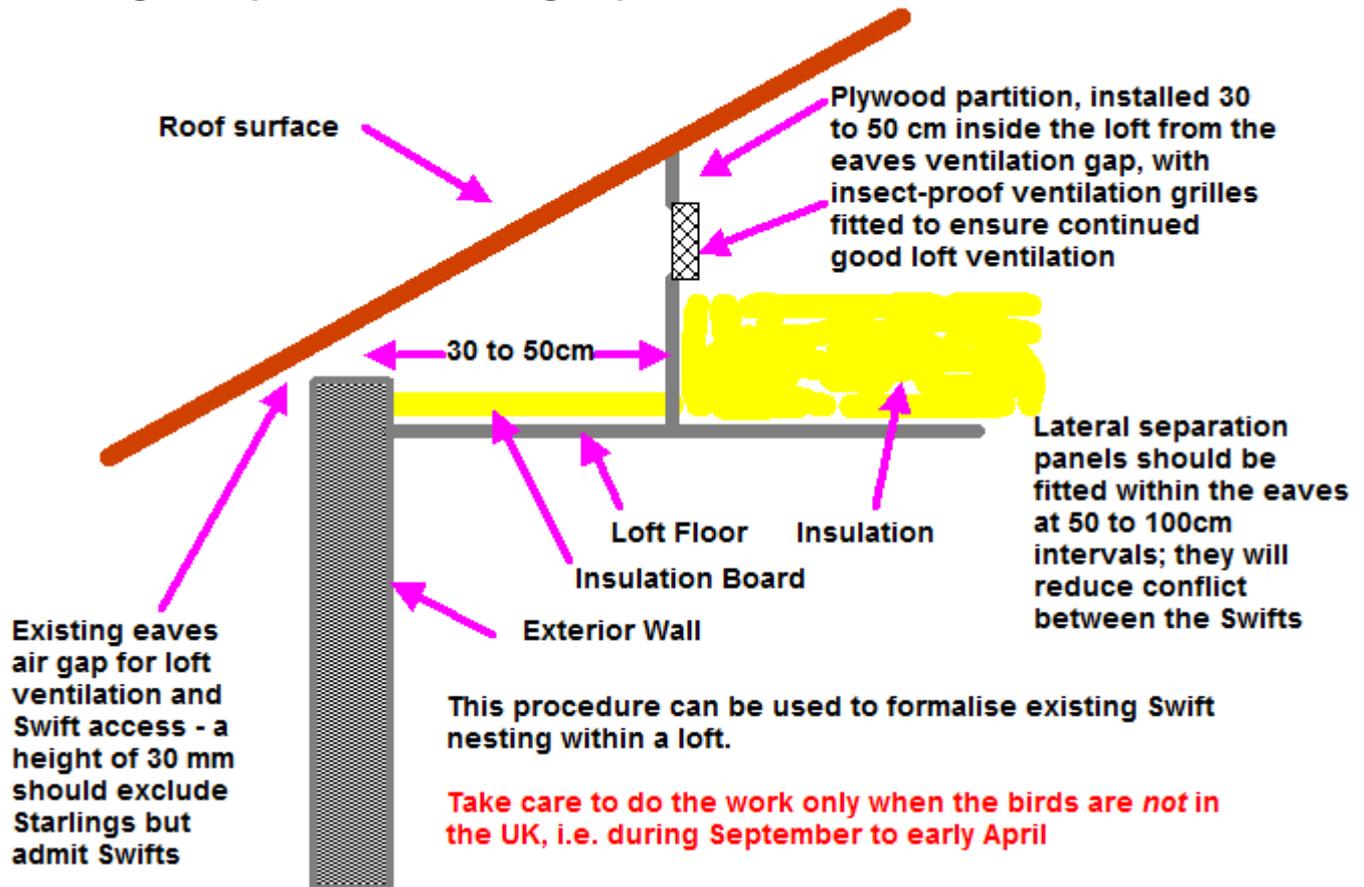
Where to install nestplaces for Swifts:



Existing “open” eaves:

Open eaves where Swifts are already nesting, or where they might one day choose to nest, can either just be left exactly as they are, or if need be, formalised as shown below. A simple plywood partition can be set up inside the eaves to separate the Swifts from the loft space. It should be ventilated to maintain good airflows through the loft space. Insulation where used should be of the board type, as Swifts get entangled in loose fibreglass, and suffer severe nostril and eye damage from particulate insulation.

Creating nest places in existing "open" eaves



On the left; a simple timber box, with internal partitions, that has been fitted under and behind the gutter to form a continuous array of Swift nest places. The entrance holes are sized to resist access by Starlings.

Boxed eaves, plastic or timber, old or new:

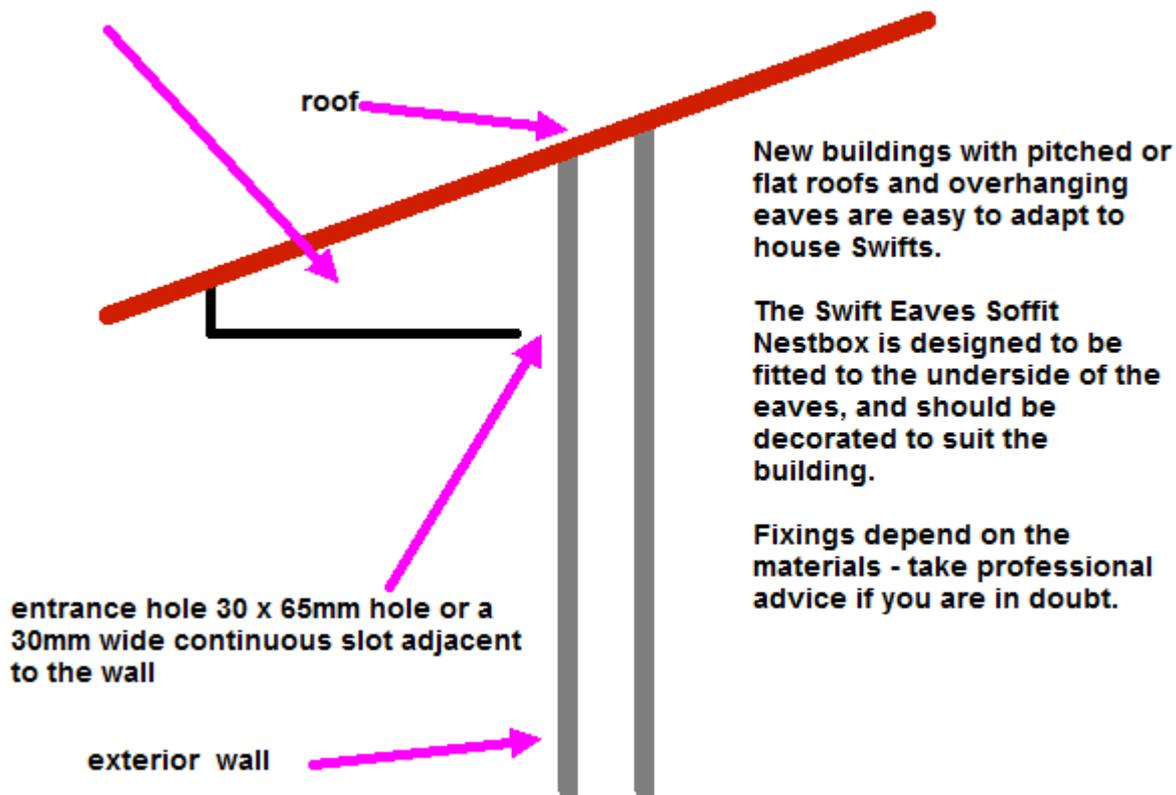
Boxed eaves, whether old or new, timber metal or plastic, may all be converted easily and cost-effectively for use by Swifts. This should always be a much cheaper and better option than fitting commercial nest boxes, where it is practical to do.

Minor additions, or simple hole drilling, should be all that is needed to create some nest places in existing structures, while making up a simple box and fitting it up under the eaves will do nicely where there is no existing box structure to exploit.

The drawing on the next page gives an idea of what needs to be done. Each individual nest space needs to be partitioned off from the others to prevent the Swifts fighting.

Creating a new Swift eaves soffit box:

The box can run the full length of the eaves, or just for part. It can be made from 12mm Exterior Quality Plywood. Each nest space is a minimum size of 30cm wide x 50cm long x 20cm high (at wall), with internal partitions at 50 to 100cm intervals. The Swifts' entrance holes are 30 x 65 mm or a 30mm wide continuous slot adjacent to the wall



On the left; plastic soffits that have been fitted with internal partitions and drilled with Starling-proof entrance holes for the Swifts to gain access and make their nests inside. These soffits are isolated totally from the roof interior.

It's easy and cost-effective:

Setting up or preserving Swift nest places in eaves, soffits and gables is easy and economical, if you follow the advice above and plan the work in conjunction with other works taking place on the building at the same time, like re-roofing. If you need advice please see our web site www.swift-conservation.org, or e-mail us at mail@swift-conservation.org . Thank you for helping Swifts!

Edward Mayer

Founder, Swift Conservation