

Report on Stanley Swift Project, October 2014

The idea of a Stanley Swift Project came about during an evening Wildlife Walk in Stanley on Wednesday 18 June 2014 organised by Fiona Lough and led by Daniele Muir. Swifts populations are in serious decline across the world including the UK, and action is desperately needed to prevent numbers dropping further or this amazing bird even becoming locally extinct in places. The wildlife walkers were delighted to hear that Stanley is still quite a hot spot for swifts in this part of Perthshire and thought wouldn't it be great to take swifts to our hearts in Stanley and do whatever we can as a community to protect them and ensure they continue to have a safe place to return to and breed each year after their 6000 mile migration back from Africa.

In July 2014, (although a bit later in the year than ideal), Katrina Marshall, Bob Ling and Elspeth Coutts started to do a survey of swift numbers and nest sites in Stanley, in the general area of Mill Street, Mill Brae, Store Street, Percy Street and King Street. We went out three times at weekly intervals (beautiful summer evenings) and counted as best we could, given the sweeping and swirling of ever-changing group sizes in the skies above us. As village residents, Katrina and Bob also added information from sightings in between times. There were frequently groups of about 40 swifts, and once or twice we think the number might have been 70-80 birds, which at that time of year is likely to have included late arriving non-breeding juveniles. We began to recognise when birds were gathering to roost, and by standing and watching carefully we located 15 nest sites as the birds whizzed in for the night, which would mean 30 breeding adults. Most of the nest sites were in eaves behind gutters or fascias, but we also confirmed that one of the nest boxes recently installed on the Tayside Hotel was occupied by a pair of swifts. The 15 sites have been recorded on street maps provided to us by Perth and Kinross Council and will contribute to the Tayside-wide survey work that is going on.

Our hope is that we can get more people involved in Stanley to build up a full picture of swift activity in the village, raise awareness, improve their protection, install nest boxes and aim to at least maintain or ideally increase numbers over the coming years.

Anybody interested in helping with this project, in whatever way they can, should speak to Katrina, Bob or Elspeth. (Contact details tbc.) As well as any families and individuals who live in or around Stanley, we would like someone who could be a link with the school and possibly people involved in building trades locally to get involved. What we really need is some folk now to look at awareness raising and nest box installation and lots of people looking for swifts and nest sites next May.

On 9 October, Elspeth attended the annual meeting of the Tayside Swifts Project at which she learned of all the other community, volunteer and professional effort that is going into helping swifts in our region. One very active and invaluable partner in this is Hillcrest Housing Association, who are of course also part of the Stanley community.

The swifts which have bred or been fledged in Stanley this year are still on the wing. They won't land until they get back here next year. Let's make sure they have a safe haven when they do and every year after that.

Elspeth Coutts
October 2014