



Action to Halt the Decline of Swifts in Scotland

Report

John S. Wilson – 2012

An account describing how past and ongoing action across Scotland is helping both to protect swift nesting sites and to provide new sites to compensate for loss of nesting habitat



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Photographs (front cover) – top left: Culzean Castle swift external nestbox © John S Wilson; top right: Holytown integral swift nestboxes © Concern for Swifts Scotland; bottom left: fitting external swift nestboxes to Perth & Kinross Council offices, Crieff © Daniele Muir; bottom right: Swift (*Apus apus*) © David Moreton, courtesy of Swift Conservation

Introduction and overview

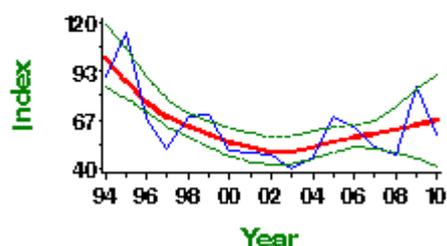
This account describes how action has been taken up to 2012 in various areas of Scotland to protect Common Swift (*Apus apus*) nesting sites and provide new sites to compensate for loss of nesting habitat.

As the Concern for Swifts (Scotland) website explains, Swifts are usually to be found nesting under roof tiles, just inside the roof space of a building or in holes in a wall, generally dependent on small holes on the outside of a building giving access to a larger space within.

As long ago as 1991 Concern for Swifts (Scotland) observed: “There is increasing international concern about loss of swift nest sites, and thus swift colonies. This is largely due to modern methods of renovating old buildings, modern building styles and new types of materials used for new buildings. There are both documented and anecdotal reports of loss or severe decrease of swifts in places due to renovation or demolition of colonial sites.” Most modern building methods take “every precaution to ensure that there are no small holes or gaps and many modern materials (like plastics, metals and reinforced concrete) do not deteriorate to form suitable holes and gaps”. Threats take the form of scaffolding or disturbance during the nesting season – and range from the complete destruction of the building where Swifts have nested to minor repair work like repointing stonework or repairing loose tiles.

In Scotland, the Common Swift is on the north-west edge of its summer habitat. National survey work has reported a decline in Swift numbers in Scotland; statements of percentage decline depend on the period over which measured. British Birds Survey trends information for Scotland as published in 2012 reports a 27% decline in Swifts in Scotland from 1995 to 2009 and a 31% decline from 2009-10. The Swift is on the list of Scottish priority species.

**BBS index for Scotland 1994–2010
Swift**



Note: The red line is the smoothed trend, the blue line is the unsmoothed trend, and the green lines are the upper and lower 95% confidence limits of the smoothed trend. Graph reproduced with acknowledgement to the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey.

In 2009, Swifts joined the Amber list¹ of Birds of Conservation Concern, because of serious population declines in the UK. Although not accepted on to the “red list” of birds of highest conservation concern, it is possible that the RSPB’s recognition of the significance of the decline may change this at the next review. Updated assessment of trends since the start of survey work will provide a clearer view of the extent of the decline in Scotland compared, for example, with England.²

¹ The amber list is an RSPB indication used where the breeding bird survey records a decline of 25-50% over a period of 25 years.

² British Bird Survey information on Scotland trends is at: www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs/latest-results/population-trends/scotland-trends

As part of its commitment made at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the UK Government published a Biodiversity Action Plan in 1994. A Scottish Biodiversity Group was established in 1996 to guide Scottish implementation. Local Biodiversity Action Plans are a crucial method for implementing the Scottish and UK Biodiversity Action Plans at the local level. Local action depends on the enthusiasm and interest of local people, and on effective partnerships between local communities, landowners, businesses, a range of voluntary and public organisations, and the local authority.

Over 20 years Concern for Swifts (Scotland) (CfS) has had a significant positive impact on Swift conservation action in Scotland. With Clare Darlaston as co-ordinator in Glasgow, reaching out to individuals in other parts of Scotland, e.g. Fife, Tayside, the Cairngorms and Edinburgh, the project aims to have Swift nest site conservation incorporated into building specifications for new buildings and refurbished buildings where appropriate; collects records of Swift populations and nest sites; and supports the inclusion of the Swift in Local Biodiversity Action Plans as an important indicator of a sustainable built environment and accessible wildlife. Actions have included producing a generic Concern for Swifts Leaflet (funded by a major house builder), a leaflet, “Swifts in historic buildings: how to protect them during essential repairs and maintenance,” working with various organisations, and making information available on the CfS website³ and on paper, providing examples of good practice for local authorities and conservation organisations to follow.



Swifts typically nest at the rear of older, stone-built tenements in e.g. Glasgow, Edinburgh, and in tenements built around 1930-60 in peripheral estates in Glasgow and Edinburgh (Photos: © author)

The Scottish Government’s Planning Advice Note 60, “Planning for Natural Heritage,” published in 2000,⁴ included as a case study Swift solutions at Culzean, the Gallowgate, Glasgow, and Stanley Mills, Perthshire, stating that CfS could provide design advice on making provision for Swifts in building restoration and new development.

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004⁵ amended the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, making it an offence recklessly – as well as intentionally - to take, damage or destroy or otherwise interfere with the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or to obstruct or prevent any wild bird from using its nest. This therefore applies to building demolition, repair and renovation when carried out during the Swift nesting season. It applies not only to the work itself however, but also to the erection of scaffolding if this stops a bird from getting to its nest. Ignorance of the

³ www.concernforswifts.com

⁴ Planning for Natural Heritage: Planning Advice Note 60, August 2000: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2000/08/pan60-root/pan60

⁵ Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004: www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2004/6/contents

law is not a defence and it is the responsibility of owners, factors and contractors to ascertain that no birds will be disturbed when works are carried out during the nesting season.

In November 2006 Swift activists attended a meeting hosted by Stirling Council. Chaired by Clare Darlaston of CfS, six Biodiversity Partnerships were represented - Tayside, Stirling, Edinburgh, Highland, North Lanarkshire and the Cairngorms, with support from the Planning Department and Ranger Service of Perth and Kinross Council and the Dundee Ranger Service.

This allowed information to be shared about the surveys already underway in different parts of Scotland and about the best way to record information. Catherine Lloyd described the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership's "Dots on Maps" method where paper maps are becoming a useful tool to take round local shows and festivals so that the public can help fill in the gaps.

There was discussion on how to involve the local community (by volunteer surveys, guided walks, press publicity, etc.) and Keith Morton from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Species Policy Unit spoke about the importance to all public bodies of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.

A further meeting took place in January 2009 at Stirling University. The meeting discussed the use of development control to conserve and create Swift nest sites, a possible guidance note that can be used by all development control areas, the role of development control officers, the criteria for accepting Swift nest site retention or Swift nest site provision as a condition of planning consent, and examples of use of planning conditions or refusal to use planning conditions.

The meeting noted enhanced protection for Swifts through RSPB orange listing and proposed enhanced protection for Swift nest sites, and considered survey results, progress on the Scottish National Swift Colony Database and its inclusion into the British RSPB data - the RSPB agreeing to promote and to collect all Swift "screaming party" and nest site data for the whole of Britain - and plans for a 2009 survey and consistency of fields for a database, and also decided to compile the available evidence about the efficacy of artificial Swift nesting habitat.

A feature of action across local authority areas, as described below, has been surveys - for the purpose of conservation action - to acquire information on Swift nesting colony numbers. In Dumfries and Galloway and Ayrshire, records submitted by various groups and individuals are incorporated into the CfS data. CfS contributed to the content of the action plan policy of some Councils, e.g. Glasgow, and Stirling⁶. Falkirk provides another action plan example, prepared with Scottish Ornithologists' Club assistance.⁷

Ayrshire

At Culzean Castle in Ayrshire, in the 1990s, restoration of the masonry resulted in the filling of a lot of the nooks and crannies which had previously been used as nesting sites by Swifts. At the instigation of the ranger, Gordon Riddle, the National Trust for Scotland retained holes in the building known to be used by Swifts for nesting as well as installing purpose-built Swift boxes. As the castle is an A-listed

⁶ Stirling Council Swift Species Action Plan, 2001: www.stirling.gov.uk/swift_ap-2.pdf

⁷ Falkirk Area Biodiversity Action Plan: Swift Action Plan, 2001: www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/development/planning_and_environment/biodiversity/biodiversity%20pdfs/species%20pdfs/swift%20action%20plan.pdf

building, the project involved close consultation with Historic Scotland which has subsequently issued its own advice to architects on Swift conservation.



Swift nest box on stables block at Culzean Castle (Photo: © author)

Glasgow

In 1997, the City of Glasgow Council made history by agreeing to make provision for Swifts in its repair and building programmes. Scottish Wildlife Trust training teams assisted the project by making nest boxes. Swift boxes were installed as part of a housing improvement scheme in Ruchazie. At a housing renewal scheme in Glasgow's Gallowgate, Swift nest boxes were incorporated into the roof space.



Roebank Street, Glasgow: fascia board placed so that Swifts will still be able to gain access; and installing a nest box in Ruchazie, on Glasgow City Council Housing property (Photos: © Concern for Swifts (Scotland)). The nest boxes in Ruchazie have been seen in use.

In Glasgow a local Steering Group, comprising some 18 partner organisations and council services, has guided the development of the city's Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Glasgow's LBAP was launched in September 2001 along with Species and Habitat Action Plans. Each individual Species or Habitat Action Plan has a number of objectives, and details actions to be carried out in order to conserve and enhance populations of particular animal and plant species, or to protect and enhance valuable habitats. A Lead Agency is identified for each plan whose duty it is to ensure that actions are delivered by co-ordinating the work of the delivery organisations. A Swift action plan was published in 2001, prepared with the assistance of CfS.⁸

In Glasgow CfS carried out detailed surveys in 2000 and 2001 and has collected and collated records from others. Data was added to Glasgow City Council's electronic mapping system for use by planners in 2001.

The City Council's Housing Department adopted a policy of Swift nest site protection in 2000; and Swift nest boxes were installed during housing improvement

⁸ Glasgow City Local Species Action Plan: Swift: www.glasgow.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/75E2D486-3E10-41C6-8ABC-8C51AD345550/0/LBDAPswift.pdf

schemes in several areas. Since 2002 a computerised system put in place alerts planners when Swifts are present.

The Glasgow City Biodiversity Partnership progress report 2008-09 stated achievement, referring to RSPB survey co-ordination on behalf of CfS, and that “the public were also encouraged to send in records of swifts and their nests via Glasgow City Council website with a good number of records generated”.

The Glasgow Housing Association (an umbrella group for all the local housing associations) built Swift nest site conservation into its “Sustainability Strategy” published in 2006, committing it to “working with Concern for Swifts to ensure that swift nesting sites are preserved following GHA roofing programmes”. As a result, the demolition programme takes cognisance of noted Swift nesting areas in order to avoid the danger of demolition during the nesting season.

Working with CfS, nest sites have been retained or replaced in several of the housing estates where extensive re-roofing programmes have been or are being carried out. However, at the time of writing it is noted that where nest sites have been replaced – rather than retained – last summer’s survey showed an alarming loss of previously significant colonies, with so far no records of new colonies appearing elsewhere.

This bears out a growing awareness of the importance of preserving existing nest sites, or at least recreating them in *exactly* the same place as they were. This is an important example of a housing association adopting and pursuing a policy of Swift nest site conservation and GHA needs to be given all credit for the progressive stand they have taken.



Nest box on Glasgow Housing Association property (Photo: © Concern for Swifts (Scotland))

Work to save colonies in the east end of Glasgow continues with the help of local community groups and CfS. There is one project where ten nest boxes were funded by various community groups to be placed on a new community hall in an attempt to keep the local colony, displaced by housing renovation. Swift calls have been played for one season, with the success of this remaining to be seen. Following a proposal by the RSPB, Swift nest bricks were incorporated into a new block of flats in the West End of Glasgow; the RSPB has made other requests for incorporation of Swift nest sites in buildings in Glasgow.

North Lanarkshire

Swifts in North Lanarkshire are mainly concentrated in the lower-lying areas of the region, with smaller colonies in the Motherwell/ Clyde Valley area and the largest colonies in populations around Coatbridge, Airdrie and Kilsyth. Strathclyde Park is an important feeding area for local Swifts.

In North Lanarkshire the Council Housing Committee adopted a policy for the

protection of Swift nest sites in 1999. This incorporated an agreement to retain Swift nest sites in Council property during refurbishment and new developments in appropriate areas. The Council adopted a Swift Species Action Plan in 2000.

The objectives are to maintain and then increase the population of Swifts in North Lanarkshire, to keep the Swift breeding colony data up to date, and increase awareness of Swifts and their requirements.

Surveys were undertaken by CfS in 2001 and 2002 identifying Swift breeding and feeding sites. 2001 data was added to North Lanarkshire's Geographic Information System (GIS). Information from these surveys has been used by interested parties as part of the planning application process. Leaflets were produced and available from North Lanarkshire Council country parks or the Planning Department.

A re-roofing contract in Craigneuk, Airdrie, was delayed during the summer of 2005 to allow the young Swifts to fledge. Then an entrance was cut into the plastic of the new end capping tile. In 2006 the Swifts were back in the space below the ridge tile. In addition, 30 Swift boxes were erected on properties with the agreement of residents, by the contractor, paid for by the Council.



Site in Craigneuk, Airdrie, where - with the agreement of Property Services and the Clerk of Works for North Lanarkshire Council - the triangular fillet on the end of the new pvc fascia was left off to allow Swifts to gain access in 2005. The house in the background shows the usual way of finishing off the verges, with an infill (Photo: © Concern for Swifts (Scotland))

Updating the Swift Action Plan in 2008⁹ the Council noted the ongoing and future actions in place to ensure that suitable nesting provision is made for Swifts. At the instigation of the then Biodiversity Officer, Jonathan Willet, the incorporation of Swift nest sites was made a condition of planning consent for a large programme of new school building in the district. Although the suitability of the provision suffered from lack of consultation, an important principle was established.

Intended current and future actions, although some remain to be accomplished beyond target completion dates, include providing guidance notes for developers on relevant legislation at planning application stage; ensuring that Swift nest site conservation/provision is considered in all demolition licences; promoting the use of Swift nesting boxes as a tool for education and awareness, e.g. on schools

⁹ North Lanarkshire Swift Action Plan update, 2008:
www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=1812&p=0

and in country parks; making links with Eco-Schools or sustainable schools projects; involving Eco-Schools in Swift surveys and projects where possible; and erecting Swift nest boxes in the grounds of one public establishment per year, along with an associated talk or discussion.

A Concern for Swifts (Scotland) project in Holytown won a “Highly Commended” award in 2011 in the prestigious UK-wide Integrated Habitats Design competition organised jointly by several organisations: for creative, restorative developments by interdisciplinary design teams, responding to local, regional and national Biodiversity Action Plans, providing specific habitat types and supporting target species, as well as prioritising biodiversity generally, demonstrating that designing for nature will make cities better places to live and more resilient to climate change.

Working with local resident and countryside ranger, Jackie Gilliland, and Concern for Swifts (Scotland) co-ordinator Clare Darlaston, North Lanarkshire Council architect Graeme Muir introduced an elegant design detail which incorporated nest sites for Swifts to the gable end of renovated Holytown flats. The nest sites were created as the works removed nest sites which had been used previously by several pairs of Swifts.



Holytown flats with Swift nest boxes installed. (Photos: © Concern for Swifts (Scotland))

The IHDC judges commented: “Straight to the point, this simple, real world scheme involves the installation of swift nesting boxes on an apartment block. Although this project tackles a single issue and was therefore ineligible for a main award, it was selected for a commendation because it is a practical small-scale demonstration of what can be achieved for species of conservation concern through simple interventions on buildings.”

Integrating the design into the building, the project took the basic requirements for Swift nest sites and developed this to fit into the shape and size of the eaves at the gable end of the building – where the original nest had been, prior to refurbishment – and using the same materials as the new cladding for the soffits. Placing the entrance at one end and below the space allows maximum space inside the cavity and allows for Swifts’ ability to zoom directly into the nest from below without a pause.

Once installed these nest sites appear as an elegant decoration to the eaves of the building and there is no indication that they might be bird boxes. This shows how many decorative elements on buildings could be adapted for biodiversity. Real success will of course only be achieved if Swifts occupy the nest sites; but the recognition given to the quality and simplicity of the easily replicated design by the judging panel will hopefully encourage others to act similarly.

Edinburgh

Edinburgh City Council drafted a Biodiversity Action Plan in 1997-99. There was agreement in 1999 that a survey of breeding Swifts would be undertaken under the auspices of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) in co-operation with the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership. In 2001 Ian J Andrews of the SOC prepared a paper assessing historic and current knowledge of swift populations in Edinburgh. He concluded that - from the number of nests found and the number of birds in each screaming party - small colony sizes are prevalent in Edinburgh and, though related to observer location, observations indicated a strong link between Swifts and tenements, i.e. older residential buildings typically of four storeys. He stated that most observers expressed a view that numbers had declined in the previous two decades, adding that the 1999-2000 survey had highlighted how little we knew about Swifts breeding in Edinburgh.

The SOC carried out further survey work from 2004 to 2006, co-ordinated by Andrew Sandeman. There was some Council funding for GIS mapping. The survey identified 70 definite and 61 probable nest sites. Andrew concluded: "Given the slight shortfall in coverage, and the difficulties involved in such a survey, an element of under recording can safely be assumed. It would probably be reasonable to make an estimate of between 120 and 150 pairs of swifts in Edinburgh during the summer of 2006, although that estimate must be taken as no more than a rough indication. Even within the 'good' swift areas, it is a matter of great concern that birds are concentrated in very few sites. The repair of just a few tenements could lead to the demise of swifts in that part of the city, and Edinburgh's swift population remains very vulnerable."¹⁰ The same would apply in other urban areas.

The Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan of 2000 had three actions related to Swifts:

- Draw up a code of practice for Council housing and building maintenance officers by autumn 2000 to ensure the conservation of Swifts and Swift nesting locations in local authority managed buildings.
- Draw up a development control policy by autumn 2000 stipulating the provision of nesting spaces in appropriate new build developments. *In 2000, planning policy strongly encourages the incorporation of Swift nest boxes or access holes in new developments.*
- Work with school children to construct and fit 20 Swift nest boxes on key school buildings from autumn 1999. *In 2000, liaison with the Council Education Department resulted in an arrangement to include installation of Swift nest boxes on suitable elevations of schools undergoing maintenance.*

Edinburgh City Council was the first to include the Swift in its Biodiversity Action Plan. A Swift Action Plan for 2004-09 continued the previous objective of stabilising and then increasing Edinburgh's Swift population.

The current Action Plan 2010-15¹¹ objectives for Swifts are to prevent further declines in Swift numbers in Edinburgh; to continue to survey for Swift populations and nest sites around Edinburgh; and to promote the incorporation of artificial nest sites in suitable new buildings and during building repair work. Further survey work will determine which areas in the city are priorities for Swift bricks and other

¹⁰ Edinburgh Swift Survey 2005-06: www.the-soc.org.uk/docs/edinburgh-swift-survey.pdf

¹¹ Edinburgh Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2010-15: Swift: www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/file/1956/edinburgh_biodiversity_action_plan

measures.

Action Plan aims include: to design and distribute a tool which will allow members of the public to record Swift sightings and post to the Biodiversity Officers, by the end of 2011; raise awareness of the declining numbers of Swifts in urban areas and their needs to architects, planners and the public; host a Swifts seminar for planning officers and others before 2015; promote awareness of Swifts at appropriate public events until 2015; produce an information resource which can be provided to developers and architects by the end of 2012; promote the inclusion of Swift nesting spaces in appropriate new developments by liaising with Council planning officers, and developers when appropriate; monitor new planning applications for proposals which are suitable for Swift bricks and advise planning officers on incorporating Swift bricks into suitable developments; and to promote the inclusion of artificial nest sites in any programme of new building or restoration of Council-owned properties.

Since 2004, relevant planning consents have sought the incorporation of Swift bricks into new residential developments. This is discussed with the applicant during the application process and is generally carried out on the basis of goodwill.



Examples of nest site provision in residential developments, Edinburgh: Slateford Road, and Springside, Fountainbridge (Photos: © author)



Swift bricks installed in Craigmillar by the regeneration agency PARC (Photos: © author)

The Council approved in 2005 a Planning Biodiversity Handbook¹² with design guidance on action which should be taken both in the case of old buildings - saying “contractors should take care not to obstruct access to existing swift nesting sites when undertaking external repairs” (“Nest sites should be retained or recreated wherever possible. Suitable nesting accommodation can be installed easily when repair work is taking place to roofs, render, brick and stonework.”) - and in the case of new buildings (“As new buildings are generally well sealed, the use of swift bricks or purpose built internal cavities or nest boxes can provide ideal nest accommodation.”).

¹² Edinburgh City Council, “City Development Planning Development Quality Handbook - Biodiversity,” approved November 2005

In 2010 liaison between Edinburgh Council biodiversity staff and property conservation officers (who issue statutory notices for repair work, carry out some repairs themselves and contract out other work) found property staff reluctant to retain nest entrance holes, cracks, gaps, etc, in the fabric of buildings - in conflict with the idea of repairing and maintaining property in good condition – but willing to provide new nest sites using internal or external Swift boxes, and to do this when notified of relevant buildings. Some funding difficulty remained, however, in sourcing a supply of nest boxes or bricks.

Tayside

Historic Scotland began, before 2000, restoration of Stanley Mills, Perthshire, an 18th-century cotton mill built at a hairpin bend in the River Tay, some buildings being converted to residential properties - other parts of the complex opening as a visitor attraction in 2008. As part of the restoration, gaps and small holes have been left in the top level of stonework in order to preserve access for Swifts. Liaison between Historic Scotland, its project architect and CfS led to the “Swifts in Historic Buildings” Advice Note being written. Stanley Mills now features as a case study in the Tayside Biodiversity Action Plan as well as the Scottish Government’s Planning Advice Note No 60. During 2012 renewed interest by Historic Scotland staff has led to increased survey participation which will hopefully lead to work to help safeguard Swifts in a number of Tayside properties in the future.

The Tayside Biodiversity Partnership covers the local authority areas of Angus and Perth and Kinross. The Partnership has a Swift Action Plan with the prime objective of safeguarding Swift nest sites.¹³

Tayside Biodiversity Partnership has identified stakeholders as including architects, developers and builders; universities, colleges and schools; sheltered housing, nursing homes and hospitals; landscape architects, designers and contractors; retail, businesses and industry; tourist boards, visitors and local users; home owners; and community groups and charitable organisations. Both Clare Darlaston of CfS and Edward Mayer of Swift Conservation have spoken at seminars and workshops in Tayside on Swift nest site conservation for council staff in Housing, Architects and Planning departments and others in partnership organisations, about some of the ways to protect Swift colonies under threat from the demolition or renovation of buildings. Daniele Muir of the Perth and Kinross Ranger Service attended the International Common Swift Conference in Berlin in April 2012, enabling her to offer up-to-date talks and presentations to a wide audience.

The Tayside Swift Survey collects details on where Swifts are found. In Tayside recruited volunteers have kept records for the past decade, with information received passed to the planning departments in Angus and Perth and Kinross to add to their Geographic Information System (GIS) maps. The Tayside Swift Interest Group meets every autumn to update the maps of the region with the survey work findings and to discuss plans (both survey work and projects) for the following year. It also liaises with Tayside Police to help publicise the legislation pertaining to birds, specifically Swifts.

Perth and Kinross Council Ranger Service and Angus Ranger Service have led the Tayside Swift Survey.

¹³ Tayside Species Action Plan: Swifts, in www.angus.gov.uk/biodiversity/pdf/Section%203/Sel%20Species%20Action%20Plan.pdf

Press releases were used in local newspapers and the survey has been given prominence on Radio Tay, bringing in a large response. Reports from members of the public flooded in - from as far afield as Blackford in west Perthshire, Kenmore in the north, Blairgowrie in the east and Crook of Devon, in Kinross-shire, in the south. The results are shared each year with the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership's Swift Interest Group and the RSPB.

The survey has been run every year since 2006 with new sightings and nest sites recorded. New locations included Kinross, Madderty and Pitlochry. The Ranger Service held a guided walk in Comrie, where attendees were treated to excellent sightings of Swifts and were shown examples of nest sites. A similar event took place in Auchterarder which helped raise awareness of Swifts and their needs.

Further work has included press releases to raise the profile of concerns for Swifts, promotion at local shows and events, annual guided walks looking and listening for Swifts and nest sites, details in community newsletters, involvement in Swift nest box trials, work with schools and residential homes, and firing up enthusiasm for the public to carry out surveys themselves. The Tayside Biodiversity Facebook page has been helpful in regularly publicising the need to survey for Swifts; it links to the online survey form and further information available on www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk. The original Swift Newsletter¹⁴ published by the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership has had a long distribution life, but funds are now being sought to publish a new Newsletter, together with an advisory note on Swifts for businesses and developers.

Two sets of Swift banners were produced in early 2011 to raise the profile of the Tayside Swift survey and the plight of Swifts. These banners have been on display across libraries and community centres leading to a good uptake of the survey.

A successful talk and walk in Errol during 2012 encouraged the Braes of the Carse Conservation Group to discuss how they could get involved locally. The Interest Group is keen to consider running a Church Swift Project, perhaps being piloted in the Carse of Gowrie and then being rolled out elsewhere in Perthshire for 2013, subject to funding.

Local architects Muir Associates have designed an eco-house near Balbeggie, Perthshire, incorporating two Ibstock terracotta fronted Swift bricks.

In 2006 Angus Council's Housing Department received a grant of £1,600 from the SITA Tayside Biodiversity Action Fund to erect a mixture of 36 Swift and bat boxes on their new William Wallace House in Orchardbank Business Park, Forfar. An active conservation group of local authority staff will monitor the use of the boxes. The project will contribute directly to the Tayside "Businesses with Land" Action Plan by raising awareness of the benefits of biodiversity to other businesses and organisations at Orchardbank, together with their staff and the public who visit the buildings. It will also demonstrate how best to protect existing wildlife areas associated with businesses and the opportunities to create new areas.

In 2007 two nest boxes were provided at Crieff Hospital and two at council offices in Crieff and in 2010 three were erected by the staff at Kincarrathie residential care home in Perth. In Perthshire villages, Kirkmichael School put up a nest box and Burrelton School made their own nest boxes and erected them on the school as well as carrying out the Swift Survey.

¹⁴ Swifts in Tayside, Newsletter Issue 01, February 2007:
www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk/Projects/Swifts/PDFs/Swift_Newletter_2007.pdf



Erecting nest boxes at council offices in Crieff (Photo: © Perth and Kinross Council Ranger Service)



Launch of Swift banners at Blairgowrie Library (© Perth and Kinross Ranger Service)



Nest box being put on Rattray primary school, April 2012 (© Perth and Kinross Ranger Service)

In **Dundee**, Hillcrest Housing Association worked with the Dundee Ranger Service to erect two multi-storey Swift boxes, each with four apartments; these were constructed by apprentices for the Burnside Mill Renovation Project.



Hillcrest Housing Association, Burnside Mill, Dundee (Photo: © D Shepherd)

The Association produced a brochure for the opening of the development in which Swifts had a double page spread and the birds were also mentioned in Hillcrest's Newsletter and in the opening ceremony speech by the Chief Executive of Communities Scotland. The Dundee Ranger Service provided children's activities at the Hillcrest Tenants' Day and took the opportunity to promote Swifts. There has since been excellent ongoing liaison with Hillcrest Housing Association in projects throughout Tayside, particularly in eastern Perthshire where 12 hand-made nest boxes were provided in early 2012 by Hillcrest for a community project.

The sharp eye of a Dundee Ranger also located an important colony in one of Dundee's 1960s housing schemes. During roof renovation works agreement was reached with Dundee City Council for the replacement with internal Swift nest boxes at the exact locations of noted existing Swift nest sites. This would have been an important project but regrettably, with the Ranger moving on, it was not possible to monitor the progress of the project, which lapsed due to lack of local initiative.

A Dundee Swift Project started in 2001 as part of the Naturebase Project run by the McManus Galleries. It was then taken over by the Ranger Service and in the first few years focused on the Dundee Swift Survey. In 2006 a team of ten surveyors brought the total number of known nests up to thirty and the number of colonies to forty. Swift activity was discovered in the west of Dundee and in the east, in Broughty Ferry. Simon Morgan, an Open University student, carried out a study on Swifts in Invergowrie. Although the Dundee project lapsed due to lack of a local co-ordinator, there was, in 2012, hope of reviving it.

Stirling, Falkirk

Stirling and Falkirk Councils provide further examples of the formulation of Swift action plans. As in the case of Glasgow or North Lanarkshire, these have drawn on advice from CfS.

In Stirling, 200 Swift nest boxes have been provided in known Swift breeding areas. Articles in community council newsletters and other local media highlighted the nest box scheme and asked for new records of Swifts.

East Lothian

CfS identified existing Swift nest sites in Haddington. In January 2009, the

community group Sustainable Haddington acquired funding to have Swift boxes made by a local joiner. In conjunction with East Lothian Council, four boxes providing 10 nest sites were erected by council maintenance staff at three locations at the Council headquarters, John Muir House in Haddington. There are Swifts in the area around the building. In Gifford, the concern of a local resident led to potential Swift nest sites in the church being retained during renovation work.

Swift nest sites have even been designed into a new toilet block to be built at one of the Council's countryside sites.

These initiatives received some local publicity which meant that people were more aware of issues surrounding swifts. A number of temporary blockages of Swift nest sites (e.g. scaffolding) have been reported, investigated and unblocked.

Highland

Highland Council organised the Highland Swift Survey 2006¹⁵ to gain information on important breeding areas in the Highlands and to protect and promote these locations as Swift breeding sites. Overall, a total of 137 records (including flying/feeding sightings) were reported for 48 distinct Highland towns or areas. From these records, a total of 115 individual Swift nest sites were located in 45 distinct towns or locations.

There was recognition that to help ensure Swifts continue to return to the Highlands to breed, the protection and promotion of Swift breeding sites in the regional 'hot spots' identified needed to be carried out. This would primarily involve awareness-raising exercises targeting homeowners, builders and architects in the local vicinity of these Swift-nesting areas, to ensure building renovations and new builds do not adversely affect Swifts, but instead conserve their nesting habitat.

A Buildings and Biodiversity Conference in 2006, funded by the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan Implementation Project, and part of the Highland Swift Survey, was attended by those involved in the construction industry and those in biodiversity conservation. Subsequently, Pentland Housing Association in 2007 installed 20 Swift bricks in a new development in Thurso built on the site of a demolished building that had Swift nest sites.¹⁶ Swifts are using these nest bricks.

In 2012 there was observation of Swifts nesting in the Glenfinnan railway viaduct – showing the ability of Swifts to find a new nesting location.

Cairngorms

The Cairngorms National Park Authority's Local Biodiversity Action Plan is a long-term initiative, covering habitats and species in the Angus Glens, Badenoch and Strathspey, Atholl and Glenshee, Upper Deeside, Strathdon and Glenlivet. The Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan¹⁷ is focused on habitat action plans and does not include any Species Action Plans. Action on species is taken through the local Habitat Action Plans or individual projects.

The first ever Swifts nest survey in the Cairngorms was undertaken in 2005 following the publication of a "Swifts Nest Survey" leaflet, and a small number of

¹⁵ Highland Swift Survey 2006 Summary Report: www.highlandbiodiversity.com/htm/swifts/swifts.php

¹⁶ www.highlandbiodiversity.com/htm/buildings/buildings.php

¹⁷ Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan project: www.cairngorms.co.uk/learning/LBAP

records are received each year. Some of the survey data is available on GIS for use by the Park Authority's Ecologist on planning applications (though the Authority does not have full planning powers) and recommendations are made on nearly all new builds for the incorporation of Swift nest boxes. The Cairngorms leaflet invites submission of information on Swift nest sites, and provides information on Swift ecology, nest sites, how to "make your home swift-friendly" and putting up boxes, and a tear-off slip for recording Swifts and their nest sites.

The owner of the Mountview Hotel in Nethy Bridge, which is home to Heatherlea (Scotland) Ltd, one of Britain's leading wildlife holiday providers, installed two nest boxes, provided through the Cairngorms LBAP.



Strathspey: Erecting swift nest boxes on the Mountview Hotel in Nethy Bridge (Photo: © Cairngorms National Park Authority)

In the Caledonian pine forest of Abernethy, RSPB management of the forest ensures that dead trees remain as a resource, with holes made by Great Spotted Woodpeckers later used by Swifts. There are five or six such areas on the edge of the forest. These are the only known tree-nesting Swifts in Britain.



Strathspey: Abernethy forest (Photos: © author)

Conclusion

Intentions enshrined in policy have led to impressive action in significant parts of Scotland. With greater knowledge and resources it would nevertheless undoubtedly have been possible to achieve more. While there is evidence of favourable organizational and public responses having been forthcoming, there have - through indifference and lack of knowledge - been persisting building changes

resulting in action hostile to swifts.

It is not possible to ignore that there are examples, even when there has been the intention of positive action, of ineffective results such as incorrect installation of Swift bricks rendering them useless. The Concern for Swifts (Scotland) website says that saving Swift nest sites “may require persistence and a willingness to check that agreed work is actually carried out”.

It is difficult to foresee significant major change in the level of action being taken. However, favourable press publicity about action taken by an individual or organisation can make more people aware of action which they could similarly take.¹⁸ Some action is being taken in urban areas in Scotland to improve or create areas of green space and enhance biodiversity, and consequential increased insect life potentially benefitting Swifts will complement action on nest site conservation and provision. Continuing action to monitor Swift numbers will assist in assessing any success in stabilising or increasing the population through conservation measures.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the creation of alternative Swift nest sites to replace those destroyed is rarely successful in saving a local colony unless sites are located in exactly the same location and position as the pre-existing sites. While playing recordings of Swift calls has been successful in some cases, this is only appropriate where there are highly committed individuals managing the process. It is also the case that – as in Dundee – a good project with willing agencies may fail due to lack of a committed local individual to keep an eye on projects.

Concern for Swifts (Scotland) was shortlisted in the Species Champion category in the first RSPB Nature of Scotland Awards, 2011-12.

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¹⁸ An example is an article in the Edinburgh “Evening News,” 5 October 2010:
<http://edinburghnews.scotsman.com/edinburgh/Birdwatching-Jenny-boxes-clever-with.6565592.jp>