

Bid to halt swifts' decline

by Sandra Gray

MAJOR EFFORTS are being made in Perth and Kinross to halt the decline in swift numbers.

As part of work to boost the bird population, new nest boxes were installed across Eastern Perthshire yesterday.

Organisations and business have joined together to support Perth and Kinross Council's countryside ranger service as it ensures there are plenty of places for swifts to nest when they return to Scotland next month.

The nest boxes have been provided by Hillcrest Housing Association, while the use of a cherry picker to help with installation has been funded by Tayside Biodiversity Partnership and local businesses.

Yesterday saw the nest boxes being put up at locations in Coupar Angus and Blairgowrie, including primary schools, hotels and village halls.

Countryside ranger Daniele Muir said: "The new nest boxes will help to increase the opportunities for swifts to breed locally and residents of all ages will, we hope, have the chance to see these fascinating little birds out collecting insects for their young in the early summer."

In recent years, the swift population in Scotland has seen a sharp drop, largely due to the lack of suitable nesting locations.

As many prefer to use gaps in stonework or spaces under gutters, these sites disappear as old buildings are demolished or home improvements made.

Swifts tend to mate for life and return to the same breeding ground each year, so the loss of their favoured nesting place often means they will not raise any chicks.

Hillcrest has decided to make provision for swifts in its maintenance and development programmes and supports a number of initiatives, including this one.

Group sustainability co-ordinator Janice Fraser added: "The swift boxes were made by young people who we work with through our Toolbox project, which is aimed at helping young people get experience and skills to assist them with securing employment."

The countryside rangers are carrying out the Tayside Swift Survey again this year, to identify swift "hotspots" in Perth and Kinross and collect information that can help in their conservation.

For further information, visit pkc.gov.uk and search for "swift survey".



At Coupar Angus Primary are (from left) back – Charlie Smart (Tayside Contracts), teacher Stewart Dallas and Daniele Muir. Front – Aidan Foote, Neave Foster, Moray Robertson and Anna Wilkie. Picture: Kim Cessford.