

# The swift – a special summer visitor



Photos courtesy of London Swifts – [www.londons-swifts.org.uk](http://www.londons-swifts.org.uk)

# Perth & Kinross Council Countryside Ranger Service



**Tayside Biodiversity**  
The Variety of Life



# Potential of our gardens, parks and BUILDINGS!

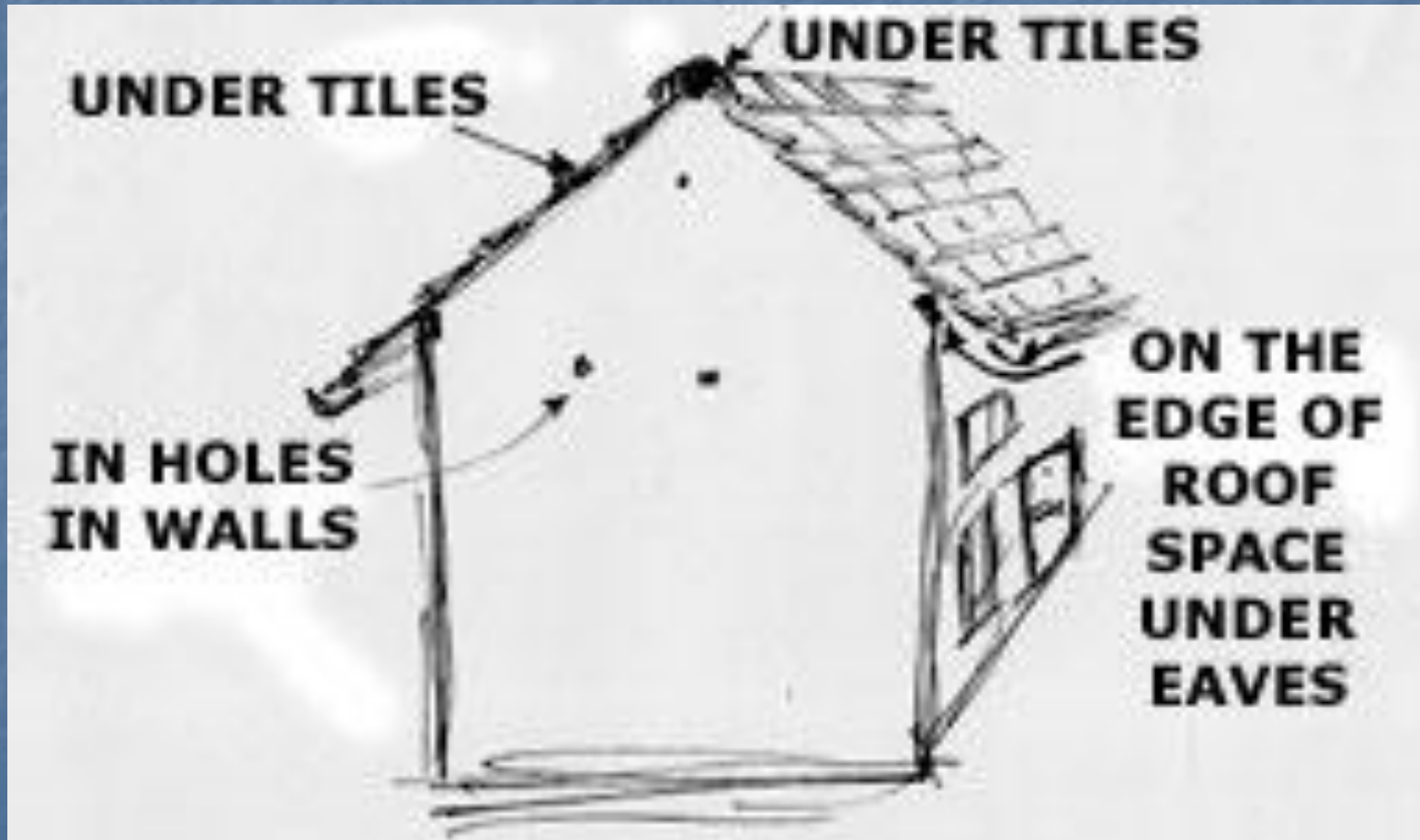




# Swifts rely on our buildings for nesting



# Where do swifts nest?



Can be difficult to spot a nest site!



# But you'll be able to hear them!





# Why should we try & help swifts?

- BTO surveys between 94 & 03 -> 62% decline in Scottish populations.
- A major contribution to this decline is thought to be loss of nesting & feeding sites.
- Climate change?



# What can the public do to help?

- If you have swifts nesting on your property & need to make essential repairs, do it outwith the nesting season & ensure the gaps the swifts need to access the nest site are left.
- If you don't have swifts nesting at your property but would like to attract them, you can try a swift nest box which can be attached to the outside of the building.

# Swift nest boxes







- New build houses can incorporate 'swift bricks'.
- Take part in the survey to help us map the distribution of swifts in Perth & Kinross – it's very simple!





# What we've done to help swifts..

- Press releases to raise the profile about the plight of swifts & the swift survey
- Posters advertising swift survey
- Promotion at local shows & events
- Guided walks looking (& listening!) for swifts and nest sites, and firing up enthusiasm for the public to carry out surveys themselves
- Details in community newsletters, CV newsletter
- Involvement in swift nestbox trials
- Work with schools
- Work with residential homes

# Nest boxes....





# School projects



# Residential homes



## Speedy action to bring back swifts

By Denis Brown

A GREEN team has hatched a plan to boost dwindling numbers of swifts nesting at Perth grounds.

Gardeners Tommy Dick, Susie Eisner and Stuart Alston, are using a SITA Tayside Biodiversity Action Fund grant to combat the plummeting Scottish bird population in the gardens of Kincarrathie House Residential Home.

According to the British Trust for Ornithology, there has been a 62 per cent decline in swifts visiting our shores between 1994 and 2003, mainly due to an increasing scarcity of nesting and feeding sites.

As a result, the spectacle of numerous swifts engaging in 'screaming parties' above Kincarrathie House and adjacent Doocot Park on summer nights, is no longer a guaranteed crowd pleaser.

Taking off from central and southern Africa, the high-flying birds arrive here in early May, then have just until August to raise up to three chicks before their return flight.

Swifts live their entire life on the wing, feeding, mating and even sleeping in flight, only landing to tend to chicks.

While the birds return to the same nesting site each year – typically under roof eaves or holes in walls – human activity has inadvertently made many homeless.

But four special nesting boxes constructed by gardener Stuart Alston may lift local numbers.

Ms Eisner said the swift plan was part of a wider biodiversity strategy targeting birds and bees developed in conjunction with PKC countryside ranger Daniele Muir and the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership.

The Kincarrathie project is in line with the Tayside local biodiversity action plan that aims to maximise wildlife diversity in the grounds of hospitals, sheltered housing and residential complexes.

Research shows environmental factors improve the well-being of residents and patient recovery.



**BOXED IN:** Countryside ranger Daniele Muir (centre), with Kincarrathie House gardeners Susie Eisner and Stuart Alston, prepares to install the swift nesting boxes.

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idents and patient recovery.

While the swifts remain a priority, Ms Eisner said a native wildflower meadow has also been established at the 14-acre gardens to attract bumblebees, now also less common due to shrinking habitat options.

"We had a beautiful 'wildflower circle' last year, really colourful and vibrant, which had a dozen different species like cornflowers, corn marigolds, ox eye daisies and poppies," she said.

"It attracted a huge amount of bumblebees and other insects like hover flies, ladybirds, and basically anything needing shelter or nectar."

The green-fingered crew have also

erected 12 bird boxes for blue tits, great tits, blackbirds, thrushes and robins, and an additional three boxes, two for tawny owls and one for "a barn owl, just in case".

Small cup-shaped, eave-mounted nests for housemartins and a hive for honey bees are also on the horizon.

"Our managers have been very supportive of the project and the 44 residents are loving it," she said.

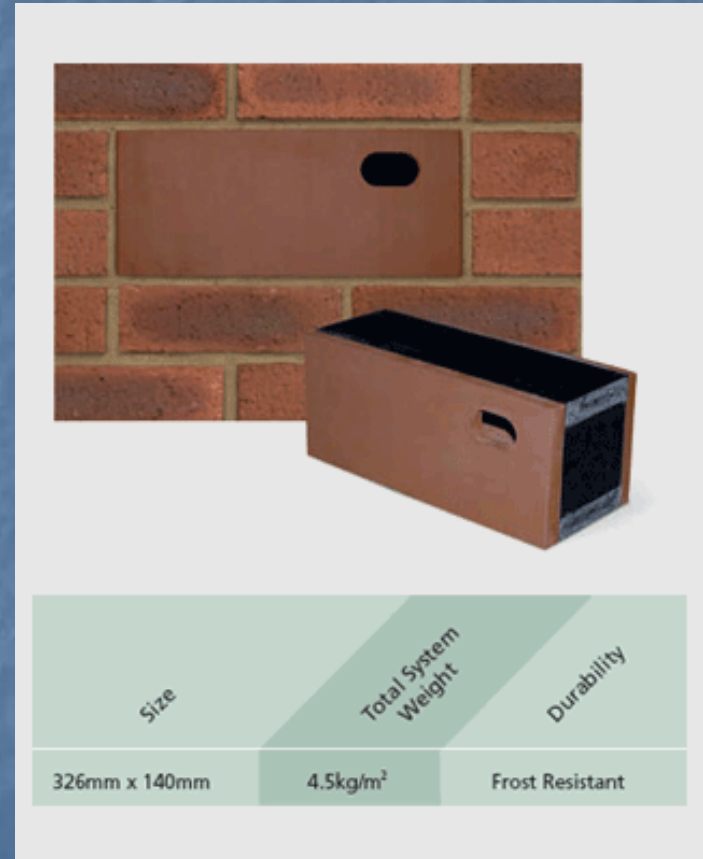
"It's becoming a real nature reserve – we even have roe deer in the gardens at the moment. They sit around the trees and graze, which is lovely to see, both for us and the residents."

Plus details in newsletter



# Local architects Muir Associates

- Designed an eco-house incorporating 2 Ibstock terracotta fronted swift bricks.
- Currently working on another eco-house with swift bricks, near Methven.



# Swift summary!

- Swift numbers have fallen dramatically in recent years.
- You can be of significant help!  
Internal nestboxes in new builds could make a huge difference.
- Try external nestboxes where internal not possible & record success.

