

The Carse of Gowrie Swift Conservation Pilot Project 2013



© Abernyte Primary School

**In conjunction with the Carse of Gowrie Sustainability Group,
Tayside Biodiversity Partnership and Tayside Swifts.**

Tayside Biodiversity Partnership



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Swifts in Scotland.

The Common swift (*apus apus*) is a summer visitor to Scotland, arriving in early May and leaving in early August for its wintering areas in southern and central Africa. They are superbly adapted aerial birds which live their entire life on the wing, and land only to breed. Originally using cliffs, crags and occasional trees for breeding, they have adapted well to using man-made buildings.

Surveys carried out by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) show that between 1994 and 2003 there was a 62% decline in the population of swifts in Scotland. In 2009 this led to swifts receiving an amber listing – showing they are now a UK Species of Conservation Concern. They are also featured on the Scottish Species List.

It is thought a major contribution to the decline in population is the ever-increasing loss of nesting sites. Swifts are predominately associated with older buildings where they use the gaps under eaves and cracks in stonework to nest. They will nest in newer buildings where there are suitable gaps and spaces. However, modern building practices tend to exclude swifts from their traditional sites by using materials and making repairs which seal all gaps and cover ventilation spaces. Wire mesh plates or grids are now used to cover ventilation gaps, and new building materials and techniques do not offer alternative possibilities. There is also a lack of understanding as to when the birds nest, so scaffolding and nets are often erected at the wrong time of year, either excluding the birds from nesting or entombing them on an existing nest.

The Tayside Swift Survey.

Concern for Swifts (Scotland) has been running a Swift Survey for over a decade. In 2005 the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership adopted it and has been sharing its findings ever since, particularly with the local authority planning departments who now add all swift sightings to their GIS planning maps. The Tayside Swift Interest Group is part of the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership's Urban Working Group and meets regularly to work with volunteer surveyors to run the annual Tayside Swift Survey.

The publication of a new Tayside Swifts Newsletter helped raise awareness of the wide range of issues concerning swifts in the area.

The Carse of Gowrie Swift Conservation Project.

The interest in swifts across the Carse of Gowrie came about after a successful event held in Errol during the rainy summer of 2012, when the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership's Swift Interest Group gave a very well attended talk in Errol's newly-reopened community hall, and then led over 20 people around the village to watch swifts. Discussion during this walk sparked an interest in those attending to offer to do more and to work proactively with installing nestboxes and safeguarding existing nests.

The project started in April 2013, and ended in October, though there are still a few training courses to be arranged for the winter, namely with Scottish Water volunteers and the Dundee Naturalists Group.

The project had the following main aims:

- With the local community, undertake a comprehensive Swift survey across the Carse of Gowrie area, passing the data to the Perth & Kinross Planning GIS and the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership's Swift Interest Group;
- Use this information to take forward the Tayside Swifts Nestbox Trial in conjunction with the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership and Perth & Kinross Council Conservation Department;
- Assisting in the establishment of a Tayside Swifts Twinning Schools Initiative – a school in Perth & Kinross with a school in Southern Africa.



Swift stand at the Glencarse Games. © Fiona Ross.

Project achievements.

The Survey: The initial phase of the project was to raise awareness across the Carse of what is happening to swift numbers, and to involve as many people as possible in the Tayside Swift Survey.

This was achieved through various walks, talks and events. Guided walks were run in Errol, Rait and Inchtute, with talks being given to Bonnie Rait and the Bullionfield Hall Committee in Invergowrie.

The following schools were visited:

- Longforgan primary – talk to whole school, guided walk to Community Committee (20), and liaison with Community Committee regarding the Swift Twinning Project.
- Inchtute primary – talk to whole school & nursery, guided walk to p2 & p4/5.
- Errol primary – talk to whole school.
- Abernyte primary - talk to whole school, liaison with pupils regarding the Swift Twinning Project & guided walk.
- St Madoes PS – talk to whole school.
- Invergowrie primary – liaison regarding the Swift Twinning Project.
- Meeting with the Junior Carsonians for suggestions for swift nestbox locations and liaison regarding the Swift Twinning Project.

The Tayside Swifts banners were displayed at the Errol Gala Day, Glencarse Games, Hutton Institute, Invergowrie (for their Open Day) and Inchtute Hotel over the summer. The Errol Gala Day and Glencarse Games were very successful events, with members of the public being able to see what a real swift looks like, talk about nest site locations and take part in a raffle for a nestbox.

A number of press releases in the Courier and Perthshire Advertiser were issued and two interviews with the project officer were broadcast on Radio Tay. The Courier attended the project launch at Cairn O' Mohr winery near Errol and the press release is included in this report.

With funding from Hillcrest Housing Association, a swift text survey was run across the Carse, which led to a few new records. This was then expanded to include the whole of Tayside and records were received from further afield, with the greatest number of birds being twenty plus - recorded in Kirriemuir. Hillcrest Housing funding also enabled a reprint of the swift bookmark which was widely distributed throughout the Carse and beyond into Tayside.

Survey results were returned through personal contact with the project officer, e-mails, brief reports on the Tayside Swifts Facebook page, paper survey returns and phone calls. These results will be shared with the Tayside Swifts Interest Group, and entered onto Perth and Kinross Council Planning GIS systems to assist in swift conservation.

Table 1 – Swift Survey results:

Settlement	Number in screaming party	Location of new nest sites
Errol	4	Church Lane & Station Rd.
Errol Station	6	
Kilspindie	9	
Rait	11	
Inchtute	8	Inchtute Church
Invergowrie	10	Bullionfield Hall & Main St.

There are still data gaps, with no records from the Glencarse/ St Madoes/ Longforgan areas, where it is likely swifts will nest in the older buildings in these villages. Volunteer survey co-ordinators are being established in Kilspindie, Errol and Inchtute to continue the survey and it is hoped these gaps will be filled in 2014.



A swift nest site on Inchtute Church, discovered by primary two of Inchtute Primary School, when on a Swift Guided Walk. © Perthshire Wildlife

Tayside Swifts Nestbox Trial: From the survey results, the best locations for the nestboxes were planned. Businesses and householders in these areas were contacted to see if they would like to take part in the project.

Over twenty householders in Glencarse, Glendoick, Errol, Aberntye, Kilspindie, Rait, Ballindean and Invergowrie received a nestbox, with a further two soon to be erected on Errol Village Hall and Bullionfield Hall in Invergowrie.

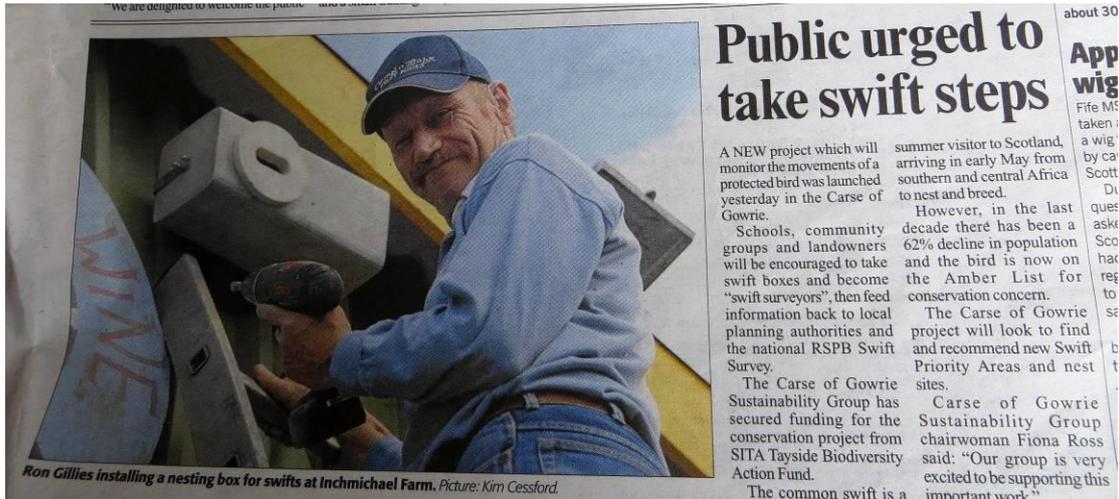
The following businesses have been involved with the project through taking swift nestbox(es) to help swift populations across the Carse expand:

- Cairn O' Mohr, Errol
- Mackie's Crisps, Errol
- Redford Construction, Errol
- Inchtute Hotel, Inchtute
- QV Foods, Inchtute
- Scottish Water, Invergowrie
- The Hutton Institute, Invergowrie

All householders and businesses have been encouraged to play the swift call CD to help birds find the nest boxes. They will monitor their nestboxes and report to Tayside Swift about uptake and usage. Redford Construction kindly donated £100 to Tayside Swifts to help with the cost of cherry picker hire.

Throughout the second phase of the project communications with Perth & Kinross Council's Conservation Officer were maintained to ensure the Council was happy with the locations of the nestboxes.

Three developers building houses in the area were contacted to ask if they would like to be involved in the project, but did not respond. It is important that new build properties in 'Swift Priority Areas' such as Inchtute, Errol and Invergowrie should contain in-built nestboxes to help swift populations expand. This needs to be addressed at a national level.



Courier coverage of the launch of the Carse of Gowrie Swift Conservation Project, 18th May, 2013.

Schools' Swift Twinning Project: To find schools in countries where swifts overwinter and who would want to take part in the twinning project, the Scottish Countryside Rangers' Association was initially contacted. This led to a link with the Scotland-Malawi Partnership, then to Tiwonge Gawa, the government of Malawi's official ornithologist. Apus apus is widely found throughout the country, so to help pinpoint a few schools, it was decided to focus on locations where swifts ringed in the UK had been recovered in Malawi. Tayside Swifts made contact with the British Trust for Ornithology to find these locations, which are being used by the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi - a voluntary group which works closely with schools on environmental projects – to establish links with schools in those areas. Abernyste primary and Invergowrie primary are keen to set up links with Malawi; Longforgan primary is building on its established contacts with Katinge school in north-east Uganda.

Conditions in Malawi & Ugandan schools are very different to those in Scottish schools, with electricity only being available for a small percentage of time, usually in secondary schools. Few schools have access to computers, so it has been agreed that communication by post will be the best method. The Carse schools are keen to carry out fund raising to help pay for postage costs on the African side.

Work is still on-going with the Swift Twinning Project, with the schools being offered support via e-mail.

It is likely that the Schools' Swift Twinning Project will expand into Angus in 2014, through the Tayside Swifts Interest Group and Angus Council Ranger Service.

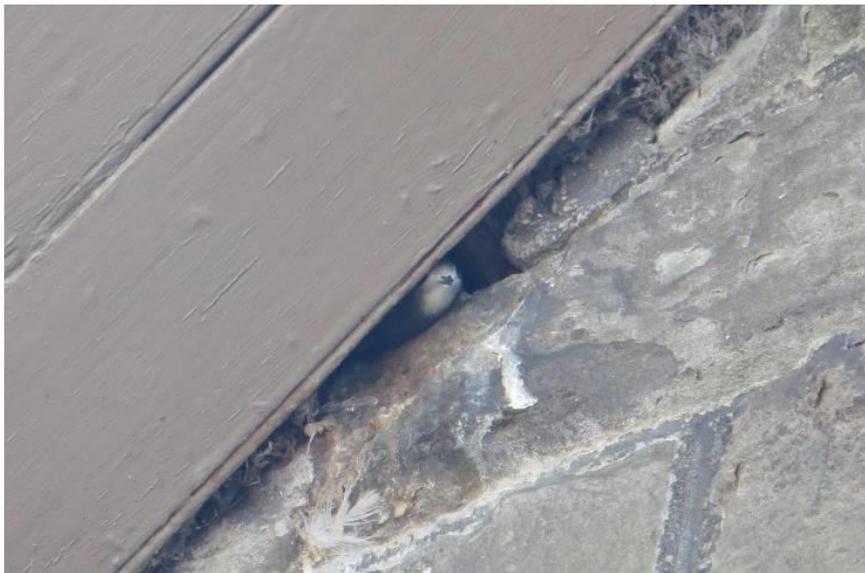
Abernyste and Longforgan primary schools have received a nestbox for erection on their school buildings.

Conclusion.

The Carse of Gowrie Swift Project has been a great success, involving hundreds of people of various ages, from nursery pupils to retirees. It has raised awareness of swifts within the area and has led to new sightings of swifts being recorded and new colonies being discovered. Young swifts returning to breed in 2014 should be able to find a nest site easily, with over forty new nest boxes having been erected across the Carse. The project was concluded in October with a talk to the Tayside Swift Interest Group.

It is hoped that even more can be achieved with an extension to the project where the school initiatives can be completed and close work with the Carse churches and congregations can be achieved with a Carse Churches & Schools Swift Project.

The experience gained in this pilot project is already assisting with plans to introduce a Swift Conservation grant in the Kirriemuir Conservation Area, tying in with the new Heritage Lottery Fund's property frontage improvement grant. The findings of the pilot project will be shared with Tayside Biodiversity Partnership's Swift Interest Group and Urban Working Group to encourage similar projects to be rolled out across Tayside and beyond.



A small swift colony was discovered in Invergowrie. A number of volunteers are keen to continue surveys in 2014. © Perthshire Wildlife.

Further details on the project are available on www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk and www.carsesus.org
E: taysideswifts@yahoo.co.uk

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