

Common Swift

Description

The Common Swift is a familiar summer visitor and are often seen flying at great speeds around our towns and cities, uttering its characteristic screaming calls. Swifts are sometimes confused with swallows or martins; but unlike the latter, appear uniformly blackish-brown, having no white on the belly and no tail streamers. Swifts are listed as Amber on the Irish and UK Birds of Conservation Concern lists because of declines in excess of 25% over a 25 year period. Decline has been accelerated due to the loss of nesting sites in buildings.



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The species breeds in cracks, holes and cavities in buildings especially older ones. A few pairs can still be found in traditional cliff nesting sites in Counties Antrim and Fermanagh. A flimsy nest is constructed of aerially collected material and stuck together with the bird's saliva into which 2, sometimes 3 dull white eggs are laid. Incubation is 19 days with chicks fledging after 5-7 weeks depending on weather conditions and food availability.

Distribution

The common swift can be seen right across Northern Ireland, and one of their largest colonies can be found in the Crescent Arts Centre in Belfast. The adult birds return in early May with the juveniles arriving a few weeks later, they return to their wintering grounds in August. Lough Neagh, with its huge insect populations, is thought to be an important foraging and feeding area for the species. Cliff nesting birds can be found in Larrybane or Fair Head, County Antrim.

Action

A number of high profile 'swift friendly' sensitive refurbishment and new build schemes including nest box provision have ensured the protection of some significant colonies. Championed in a number of Local Biodiversity Action Plans and nesting occur in protected sites in Larrybane and Monawilkin. A few proposed actions include maintaining and where possible enhance current population. Also ensuring protection of existing colonies through the planning process would also help.

Further Information

<http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/species.asp?item=53>

MLA Species Champion