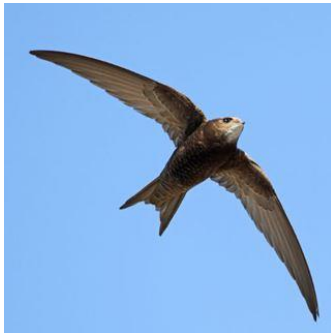


Save our Swifts



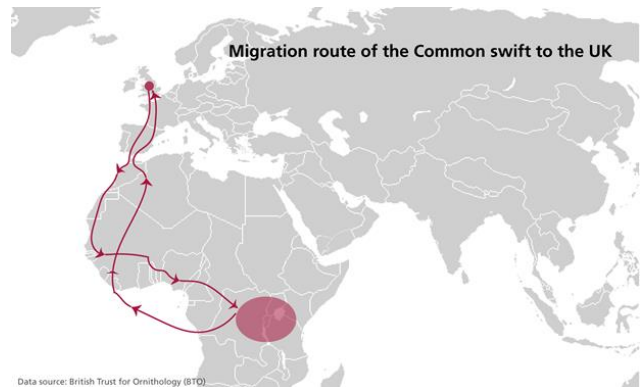
Common swifts (*Apus apus*) are one of our most loved birds. They announce the arrival of summer when they return from their long migration to Africa, to nest in our towns and villages in mid May. They mate for life and often return to nest in the same place year after year.

They feed exclusively on insects, hunting over meadows, open water and woodland, and only come to land when nesting. An abundant supply of insects is critical for their survival.

Swifts are Amazing!

Here are our top reasons why they are so fantastic:

- After leaving the nest where they hatched, they'll keep flying non-stop for three years, before they are ready to mate themselves.
- They eat, mate and sleep in the air - they can 'snooze' with one side of their brain at once, and then switch to the other side.
- Our swifts migrate to Africa for winter. A swift might fly 2 million km (more than 1.24 million miles) in its lifetime (sometimes 500 miles a day).
- Parent swifts gather insect snacks for their chicks, carrying as many as 1,000 in their cheeks at once.



- Swifts like to nest in our houses and churches - they squeeze through tiny gaps to nest inside roofs and walls.
- At dusk, groups of swifts fly around at high speeds, making their typical 'screaming' sounds, as they hunt for insects.

Swifts are in trouble

Sadly, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds reports that more than half of our swifts in the UK have disappeared in the last 25 years. This is mainly due to the loss of their normal nesting sites, and a decline in available insect food.

We can help our swifts

- We can protect their existing nesting sites, and encourage house builders to ensure places for swifts are included in new buildings.
- We can put up bird boxes, designed especially for swifts, as they prefer to nest in groups.
- We can grow insect friendly plants in our gardens.
More information about wildlife friendly gardening can be found here - <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife> .
- We can protect and plant more trees and woodland areas.

Can you tell your swifts from your swallows?



We would like everyone to keep a look out for our returning swifts in May. Let us know when you see the first swifts circling high in the sky, and have a go at counting how many individual birds you can see. You can email us at tidzaeg@gmail.com with all of your sightings, or post your sightings and any images on the TDEG Facebook group page.

Swifts are difficult to tell apart from swallows and house martins, and they do sometimes fly in mixed flocks (just to make life difficult) - so here are some ID tips.....



Swallow

Swallows are most easily identified by their red chin and their distinctive long forked tail, making them easy to spot in flight.



House martin

The house martin is the smallest of the three species and has a gently curved tail. Their white rump can often be clearly seen as birds fly past. House martins also build small cup-shaped nests under the eaves of houses.



Swift

Swifts have curved, sickle-shaped wings, together with a short forked tail, and are dark brown all over. They can often be seen on warm summer evenings performing acrobatics in the sky. You may hear their typical shrill "screaming" as they hunt for their insect prey.

And remember - if you see similar birds perching on wires or posts, they are not swifts, and are likely to be house martins or swallows. But we would like to see more of them as well.

Tideswell & District Environment Group

(contact us by email: info@tdeg.org.uk)

