

NOTES ON SETTING UP A SWIFT NEST BOX PROJECT

The Swift is an amber-listed bird of conservation concern in Ireland and Europe. The main threat to them is loss of breeding places. They breed in buildings either at the top of walls behind the fascia board or in holes in walls. When buildings are renovated the modern techniques used fit so tight up to the building walls that they usually exclude Swifts from nest sites. Providing nest boxes for Swifts helps to preserve and expand the population.

1. Location

If you want to install Swift nest boxes in a location and have the best possible chance of the nest boxes being used, then it is important to find out if there is a traditional/established Swift colony within a mile of your location.

Swifts nest in traditional sites, i.e. they will always return to the nest site where they bred the previous year. Therefore, when you planning to install nest boxes it is very important to establish where the traditional nest sites are. This is to ensure that any nest boxes erected do not block these traditional sites. If you want to erect nest boxes and know that Swifts are nesting in the area but don't know the exact location, then try to find a location where there is no chance of Swifts nesting e.g. at GMIT Castlebar we knew Swifts were nesting somewhere around the campus but did not know the exact location. We identified a building where the fascia was in concrete that fitted snug to the wall, therefore, no chance of access to the roof space for Swifts and we chose this building to erect our nest boxes.

PICTURE A



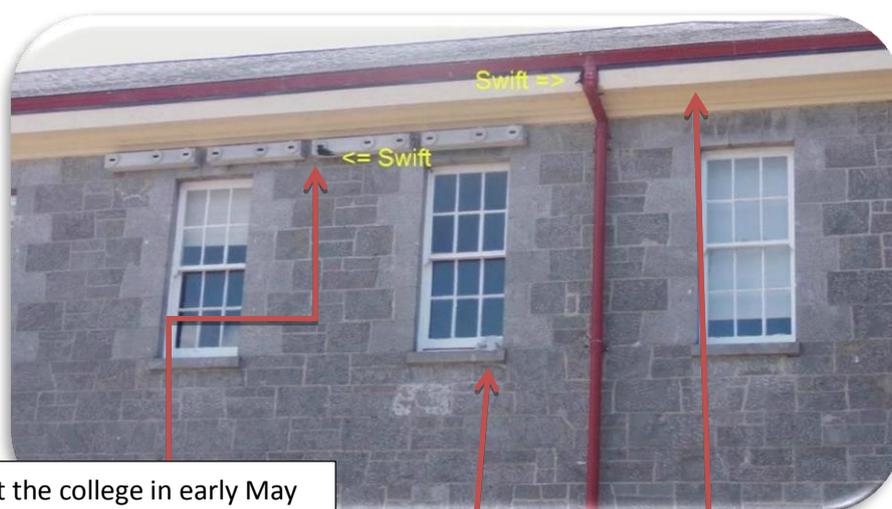
Location of the traditional nest site. Birds can gain access to top of wall behind the fascia board which supports the guttering. Yellow lichen growth on the wall indicates nests above as nutrients running down the wall from nest site promote lichen growth.

Swift nest boxes. We erected 4 triple cavity Schwegler boxes to accommodate 12 pairs.

We erected the nest boxes in early April so that they were in situ before any of the birds arrived. We also started to broadcast the Swift calls from a CD player in the last week of April and continued to play the calls 24/7 until late August when the birds had departed.

Once the Swifts arrived in early May and started flying around above the courtyard we were watching our nest boxes closely. It was at this time that we discovered the traditional nest site behind the fascia board of an adjacent building (see Picture A). There are at least 6 pairs of Swifts nesting at this traditional site. This was a perfect scenario for us because our nest boxes are very close by and so should be easy to find for new breeders. Within days of the Swifts arriving they were attracted to our nest boxes and were seen looking inside the boxes on several occasions (see Picture B). Usually Swifts who are coming up to breeding age (2-3 years old) will prospect for a nest site the year before they want to breed so we are hopeful that in 2013 Swifts will use our boxes for the first time.

PICTURE B



Swifts arrive at the college in early May and within a couple of days of arrival in 2012 they were already inspecting the nest boxes. Hopefully, they will use them this year (2013).

CD player which was broadcasting the Swift calls 24/7 from May to late August.

The concrete fascia here fits tight up to the wall so has no gaps where Swifts can get access to the top of wall and roof space. This makes it was an ideal location to put the nest boxes.

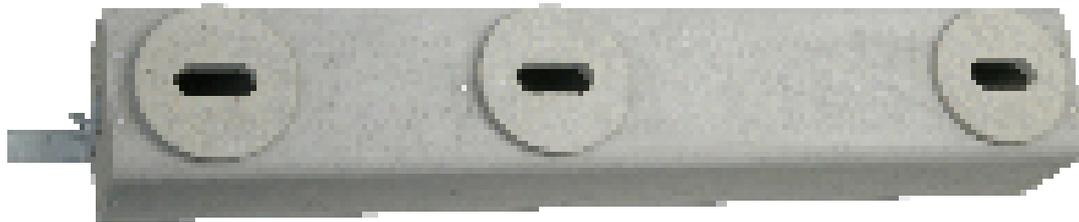
Orientation of the nest box is important. Don't have the nest boxes facing directly to the South because the nest boxes will get too much direct sun and any chicks in nest boxes would over heat and probably die. The following link gives good advice on nest box installation:

[swift-conservation.org/Installing%20Swift%20Nest%20Boxes%202011%20\(small\).pdf](http://swift-conservation.org/Installing%20Swift%20Nest%20Boxes%202011%20(small).pdf)

2. Nest Box, Nest Mould and Nest Box Cameras

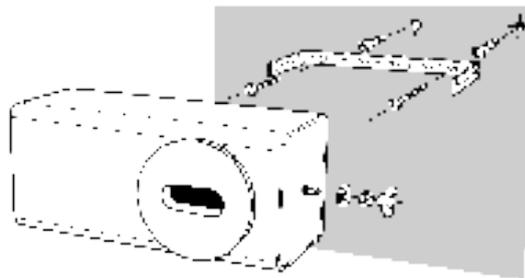
There are several types of Swift nest box available. On the advice of Swift expert Mr Brian Cahalane of the Northern Ireland Swift Group we bought the Schwegler (No. 17) Triple Cavity nest box. We bought our boxes from Jacobi Jayne in England through the following website <http://www.livingwithbirds.com/nest-boxes-by-species/swift>. The No.16 Schwegler is not recommended because Starlings can get into it. As far as we know there are no suppliers of the Schwegler box in Ireland. The Schwegler boxes are made of woodcrete and have a 25 year guarantee. The longevity of the boxes appealed to us and the woodcrete colour blends in with the traditional stone work of the college building. The Schwegler No 17 box comes in single or triple cavity. A triple cavity box which provides nests for 3 pairs is cheaper than buying 3 single boxes (Picture C).

PICTURE C – Schwegler Triple Cavity Nest Box



The Schwegler Triple Cavity box costs £134.95 plus shipping. You will need to contact Jacobi Jayne directly to get an estimate on shipping. The nest boxes are large and heavy so are usually sent on a pallet. We ordered 4 x triple cavity boxes and shipping came to £83.00. If you can pool your order with someone else then you could share the shipping costs.

When costing your project you will also need to take into consideration the cost of erecting the boxes. You will probably need to use either scaffolding or a cherry picker to reach the location. Also, if you buy a triple cavity boxes bear in mind that they are quite heavy so it takes two people to erect them. The boxes are fixed to the walls using brackets and wing nuts.



In order to make the nest boxes more attractive to the Swifts it is recommended that nest moulds are placed inside them and a few feathers stuck to the nest mould using PVA glue. You can buy Schwegler nest moulds but we discovered that they do not fit in the No17 box because they are too big to fit through the entrance hole. Schwegler advised that it is not essential to put nest moulds in the nest boxes and that the No.17 triple is their most successful box even without nest moulds. However, we wanted to include nest moulds and decided to make our own from wood which were of the right dimensions to fit through the

entrance hole (another alternative would have been to cut them in half for insertion into the nest box (see Pictures D and E).

PICTURE D – Nest mould being prepared with chicken feathers



PICTURE E – Nest mould inside the nest box



We were able to afford to put cameras in two of our nest boxes. We bought the cameras from Ebay which cost around £40 with extra cost for usb connection and splitter. Details of what you need can be found on the following website:

http://www.saveourswifts.co.uk/setting_up_a_nest_camera.htm

The camera is about the size of matchbox (Picture F) and should be fitted in the box at the back of the box at the nest entrance end so that you can observe the bird on the nest (see Picture E). The technicians at the college have linked our cameras up to computers so that we can monitor any activity in the two nest boxes on the computer screens. The cameras we purchased are analogue so we had to buy a convertor so that they could be used with a

computer. We are currently looking into specifications and cost of wireless cameras so that we can live-stream activity at the traditional nest site. If you want to install cameras and would like more information you can email me at lynda.huxley@gmit.ie or go the Save our Swifts website (see link above).

PICTURE F



3. FUNDING

We obtained our funding under the Local Agenda 21 grant scheme. Application forms are usually available from the local county council. Other possibilities of funding are the county Heritage Officer, the Heritage Council (although they do not have any funding for 2013), BirdWatch Ireland or local branches of BirdWatch Ireland may also be a possibility.

4. USEFUL WEBSITES

Saveourswifts.co.uk
Swift-conservation.org
Concernforswifts.com
Livingwithbirds.com



SWIFTS IN OUR BOXES IN JUNE 2013