

Case study: Swift groups in Sheffield

Name of project or group

Swift Groups in Sheffield

What actions for nature do the Swift Groups want to take and why?

Swifts are small, fast-flying birds which migrate to north Europe to breed in summer. They are sociable and noisy, spending their whole lives in the air, hardly landing at all except briefly to raise their chicks. Their characterful calls and aerial skills means they are well-loved by many, but unfortunately swift populations are declining rapidly - their numbers have declined by 50% in the last 20 years. Swifts feed on insects, which are also in rapid decline, and are losing their traditional nesting places in high-up, narrow spaces such as the eaves of roofs. The people of Sheffield are taking action to help swifts across the city by forming Swift Groups.

There are six Swift groups in Sheffield currently (March 2022), located in S6, S7, S8, S11 and S17. Collectively they have installed over 300 swift nest boxes in the last few years, providing more than 500 nesting sites.

Each swift group is independently run by residents who want to see swift numbers recover. Some are supplied by local business Peak Boxes, who supply nest boxes at a discount to groups. Residents of those postcodes can contact their local group, purchase a box and the group will install it. Boxes are suitable for houses, schools, local businesses - anywhere that swifts might use as nesting habitat which is higher than 4.5m from the ground and ideally north/east facing. Swift groups can give advice on a case by case basis.

If you would like to take action to help swifts, please contact your local swift group and consider having a nestbox installed. If there isn't a group in your area, why not consider setting one up? S6 Swifts have useful information on their website: <https://s6swiftssheffield.org/>. It would be wonderful to see swift groups in the east of Sheffield.

You can also support Action for Insects, a campaign by The Wildlife Trusts, to help insect populations recover and therefore help provide swifts with the food they need.

Nicola from S11 Swifts:

"After an online talk about the plight of swifts by Edward Meyer, a friend from the Street Tree Action Group (STAG) suggested we start our own swift group. We are now part of a Whatsapp group for swift groups across Sheffield, and are meeting up in person soon.

"As part of campaign groups such as STAG and Extinction Rebellion, I can tell you it's just lovely to be part of the swift group as we don't have an "enemy", it's non confrontational - just lovely!"

One difficulty has been how to get (an ethical) bank account - we tried Coop and Triodos as they are considered to be more ethical banks, but we had no luck, so we have now applied to Virgin. S17 Swift group nearby use Virgin so we hope this will be successful. We need a constitution in order to apply and we're in the process of writing this"

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We have used South Yorkshire Funding Advice Bureau for advice on funding, and we work with Jan-Erik Bullet Nestbox Installations to install the boxes. He normally charges around £25 per box, residents simply arrange a convenient day with him. We use Peak Boxes (as do most of the groups in Sheffield) to supply the nestboxes as we like their design, but some swift groups build their own boxes.”

Chris from Totley Swift Group:

"Our survey work between May and August 2020 had provided us with a good idea as to where swifts were nesting in the village. We had found natural sites in holes in brickwork and under gutters. This helped us make decisions as to where to site the nest boxes we had purchased. Since then, a second season of survey work has enabled us to establish that we have at least 25 natural nest sites in Totley. A reasonable base from which to work and we hope to find more next year.

We hope to encourage the Council to make Sheffield a City of Swifts, getting developers to use Swift Bricks and nest boxes around the city wherever possible." Chris Measures, Chair of Totley Swift Group. Full report here: <https://www.friendsofgillfieldwood.com/totley-swift-group-1/>



Image credit: Chris Measures/Totley Swift Group