

Ludlow Swift Group Newsletter

October 2013

Introduction



The first swift was spotted over Ludlow on 25th April 2013 and the first confirmed sighting of swifts using nests was 7th May.

After a good start to the season the weather became decidedly cool and windy and this resulted in the first known casualty of the season. It appeared to have been blown into the building on its entry to the nest, falling to the ground and despite no outward signs of damage it did not survive the night.

Later in the season another 2 dead birds were found. However the last known casualty of the season who was found in the street did fly away after resting overnight.

In order to give these wonderful birds the best chance of survival please follow carefully the advice in the leaflet shown below.

It is crucial NOT to throw birds in the air and hope that they will fly - if they want to go they will take off from your hand but if they don't then put them in a box and seek advice from us.

July was a fine month and the swifts were very active during the first 3 weeks feeding their young. There were many fine evenings when groups of up to 50 could be seen – and heard - as they broke away into screaming parties of sometimes up to 14 birds. Towards the end of the month the numbers started dropping away a little and we realised that birds had started their migration south.

On 8th August the last swifts were seen over Ludlow but we don't know if these were "our" birds or ones passing over on their way south.

We continue to build contacts with other swift enthusiasts throughout Shropshire and beyond and share experiences of trying to give these birds a brighter future.

There were some high points during the year but it was not all good news as you will see below.

We do need more people to be involved with the Ludlow Swift Group so please get in touch if you want to help make sure that the birds continue to come to our town.

Ludlow Swift Group



Vital Information if you find a fallen Swift

Don't delay!

Swifts come to Ludlow – and other towns in Shropshire - between May and August each year to raise their young. They spend most of their life on the wing but occasionally may be found on the ground – and this means they are in trouble.

So – if you find a fallen swift please follow the guidelines below.

- 1. Put the bird in a warm, safe, calm environment**
A good sized cardboard box lined with paper towels and with some air holes is ideal. Put the box in a quiet room out of the sun and away from cats and dogs.
- 2. DO NOT feed the bird.**
- 3. Try to give it water by putting drops on its beak with a Baby Bud.**
- 4. DO NOT throw it into the air - this may seriously injure or kill it.**

Contact a member of Ludlow Swift Group as soon as possible on 01584 876818 or 01584 875031 or email swifts@ludlow21.org.uk

We may be able to take the bird to a specialist carer



KEEPING THE SKIES ALIVE

You can find more information about Swift first aid at

<http://www.swift-conservation.org/SwiftFirstAid.htm>

It is definitely worth reading this informative article but do not attempt to feed a swift yourself.

Welcoming the Swifts

Inspired by the highly popular annual ceremony at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, Ludlow Swift Group decided to launch its own 'Welcome The Swifts' event this year. This comprised a market stall on the town square and a weekend's viewing at The Charlton Arms on Ludford Bridge. Many European towns welcome the arrival of this iconic summer migrant back to their nesting sites and we believe that these astonishing birds are as much citizens of Ludlow as we human residents and that we should help them as much as we can.

1. Local to Ludlow Market Stall



This display gave us the chance to publicise the work that we have done and to raise awareness of the problems that our swifts are facing.

We were keen to promote both 'Swift Watch', our weekly walk around town spotting nest sites, and, more immediately, the Charlton Arms weekend.

A series of leaflets, covering everything from handling fallen birds to how to make houses 'swift friendly' were available there was a steady stream of visitors – many of them on holiday in the area - to the stall. The DVD 'Devil Birds' was played several times and the calls of the birds echoing over the, at times, damp market square drew people in and mingled with the calls of a few hardy swifts flying overhead! Was it just coincidence that, each time screaming swifts were heard on the video, one or two local ones appeared?

Although it was a damp day we did feel it had been worthwhile and that we had made an impact and enthused a number of people.

2. The Charlton Arms Weekend

On the weekend of May 18th and 19th we hosted a 'Welcome The Swifts' event on the top balcony at the Charlton Arms. We thank the owner and staff for their great help and enthusiasm in helping us get set up.

Unfortunately the local press managed to publish a photo of two of the group watching swifts but with no mention of this event at all!



However despite a cool breeze on both evenings the skies were clear and the event was a great success with good numbers of people coming to visit us. Even better was the fact that throughout both evenings we were joined by swifts – sometimes up to 30 in number - feeding over the river and the woods of Whitcliffe. There was a great deal of lively discussion and interest. It was particularly gratifying to meet casual drop-ins who came and talked before their meals or whilst

having a quiet drink. We were even joined by some bikers, though not particularly 'Hairy'!

Contact swifts@ludlow21.org.uk or phone 01584 876818

Whilst not actually counting all the visitors, it would be fair to say that we involved approaching 50 people over the 2 evenings. Of these, some promised to join us and took away contact details and others went away better educated and enthused.

Most gratifying to us all was the great deal of goodwill towards swifts and the feelings that they engender in so many people. As a result, we would really like to make this an annual event at Ludlow.

A Silent Spring

In early June Maddie Close- the wildlife filmmaker - went to Germany to meet Erich Kaiser and to London to talk with Edward Mayer of Swift Conservation. She also visited Ludlow to film swifts in the UK. She says

“A Silent Spring, narrated by wildlife cameraman, John Aitchison is my final project for my Masters Degree in Wildlife Filmmaking at the University of the West of England, Bristol.

Each spring more than 30 species of bird travel 1000’s of miles on epic journeys from Africa to the UK. However, up to two thirds of the birds that visit Britain each summer are suffering dramatic declines. This programme uncovers the trials and tribulations of some of our favourite summer visitors (the cuckoo, swift and osprey) and whether the latest tracking technology can help solve the mysteries of their decline before it’s too late. Conservation is at the heart of this short documentary about three well-loved species and the dedicated people that are working to save them.”

You can see the film at <https://vimeo.com/74567803>. It is definitely worth watching.

Swift Watch

This was our 3rd year of looking for swift nests in town – and we found yet more nest sites. Were these sites that the birds had used previously and that we had not spotted? Or were they sites that had not been used before? We don’t know but we will watch them next year to see if the birds return. Well over 100 nest sites have been recorded around the town centre and we know some of these are used regularly each year but there is still a lot that we don’t know. So we will go out again in 2014 and try to answer some of these questions. We do need more swift spotters so please come and join us on Thursday evenings or do your own surveying (we can train you if you are unsure what you are looking for) and let us have your results which will be submitted to Shropshire Council’s Ecological Database as well as the RSPB’s swift survey.

This year we also worked with other swift groups across the UK to pilot a new way to assess the number of swifts by counting the number of birds seen in the sky and the number in screaming parties. This survey was carried out twice – once at the start of the season and once later on. We have passed all our data to the RSPB who will now analyse it. On fine evenings when there were a lot of birds around it was hard to count them so we wait to see the outcome of this study.



St Laurence's Tower

At the height of the swift season in mid-July we were fortunate to be given access to the tower of St Laurence's Church in the centre of Ludlow. This was a great opportunity to get a 360° view of Ludlow and see if we could determine how many large groups of swifts there were flying around. It also gave us the chance to view the garden side of many properties that we had previously only been able to view from the street. So with lots of good ideas we

went up the spiral staircase in the tower and had great views of swifts feeding over the river in the evening sun. However once the sun dropped it was very hard to see the birds although we could hear them screaming very clearly. So unfortunately no new nest sites spotted but perhaps we will have a chance to repeat this trip to the tower in 2014. We thank Shaun Ward for arranging this visit for us – and helping us get out of the locked church when it was dark.

Scaffolding



This scaffolding was erected at the start of July and blocked the entrance to 2 nest sites just as the adults were busy feeding the young.

Evidence of young in the nest can be seen by the white streaking on the bricks shown by the arrow.

Scaffolding is needed for building jobs to be carried out safely but its proliferation over recent years has not come with the awareness of the problems it can cause to those who harmlessly share our houses and other buildings with us.



Can you spot the swift in the picture above?

Fortunately members of Ludlow Swift Group acted quickly and the scaffolding was taken down. We were relieved to see the adults returned to feeding the young and did not abandon the nest. Phew – good result.

BUT the scaffolding was then re-erected before the young had fledged. At first a guard rail impeded access to the nest but the birds soon learnt to negotiate this. Then yet more boards put around the nest entrance which meant that the young did not have a clear flight path to drop out of the nest. Did they fledge? We just don't know.

We were very disappointed that the builders and scaffolders did not come back to consult us about how best to re-erect the scaffolding – they clearly do not understand the life of these birds and how they enter and exit their nests and we were more than willing to talk to them about how the job could be done and the birds' needs cared for.

The group had flagged the swifts nests as an issue to be considered when the planning application was submitted – and it was a shame that this is how it turned out. **So – please – if you are having work done or you see a house where you know swifts are nesting and scaffolding is put up in the breeding season take action promptly to prevent a repeat of this scenario. It occurs far too often and we have heard of several other places where this has happened and birds have failed to raise young. A little thought by those carrying out work and talking to people who have experience is all that is needed.**

Talks

We already have a booking to give two talks in 2014 but are more than happy to talk to any other group that is interested to find out about Shropshire's swifts. Please pass our contact details on to anyone you know who is looking for a speaker.



Other News



Following two very successful International Swift Conferences in Berlin in 2010 and 2012 the next one will be in Cambridge from 8th to 10th April 2014. You can see more information at <http://cambridgeswifts2014.blogspot.co.uk/> which is being updated regularly as plans for the conference progress but at the time of writing there are already 80 people from more than a dozen countries indicating their intention to attend. Already 3 members of the Ludlow group have booked to go to this event so if you want to join us do get in touch via swifts@ludlow21.org.uk or book your place directly with the [conference organisers](#) via this email link.