



The swifts have gone! It does not seem that long ago that we were looking forward to their arrival but they really are here for only a few weeks each year. Swallows will be around for a few more weeks and martins will stay til October.

In the 2 or 3 weeks before they left there were was a lot of screaming from quite large groups of birds. But then around the start of August the numbers of birds started to decline. During the height of the season we had often seen groups of around 50 birds but by 2nd August the groups seemed to have dropped to around 20 indicating that some were already on their way back to Africa.

On 5th August I saw a handful of birds in the morning but then nothing in the evening – I think those that had nested in Ludlow had more or less left. I saw some swifts in Clun on 6th August and on 11th August there were 5 birds over town in the evening. Perhaps these were migrating birds?

Late afternoon on 12th August around 100 swifts were seen over farmland close to the Corve – there was no noise and they looked as though they were busy feeding. Another migratory flock? The last sighting at the date of writing is 2 late swifts on Saturday 20th August over Mill Street who stayed around for about 2 hours. Briefly they were chased by a hobby! Perhaps this is the same hobby that was after the sand martins nesting in the town walls in Linney a week or so ago.

If anyone sees any more late swifts please do let me know by emailing swifts@ludlow21.org.uk

I make absolutely no claim to be a photographer but I did manage to get a picture of some flying over the bowling club at Linney – see above. Anyone else got any photos of local swifts?

Where do they go now?

The swifts will now work their way down through Europe and arrive in Africa in November. They will stay there for 3 or 4 months and then the breeding birds will make their way back to Europe for the 2012 season. They seem to spend so much of their lives in transit.

You can see more about the migration route at

<http://www.londons-swifts.org.uk/Where%20Swifts%20Fly.htm>

Swift Watch

The weekly evening swift watch was a huge success – it was well supported and almost every week we found a new swift nesting site. There is a lot of information to be collated and a full report will be written as soon as possible and sent to you. The information will also be submitted to the RSPB Swift Nest Site Survey which is building a good picture of where swifts are seen and are breeding in the UK.

A quick summary – swift nest sites were found widely spread over the town. They were, as expected, mainly in old buildings but encouragingly a couple of sites on new buildings were also found. So, good to find that the swifts in Ludlow are not just dependant on 1 or 2 locations. We heard young birds calling from nest sites – hopefully they fledged successfully and will return to Ludlow when they are ready to breed. Also there seemed to be good numbers this year – groups of around 50 birds seen quite frequently and in different parts of town at the same time i.e. it wasn't the same group of 50 that we were seeing in different places!

Please do email or phone with your thoughts about this year's swift season – did you think it was a good year? Did they arrive early or late this year? Did they leave early or late this year? I know that some of you have kept records for many years of the swift season so please let the swift group have this information as it allows us to build a better picture of Ludlow swifts and how well they are doing.

What next for this project?

- collate and map all the records we have of the swift nesting sites identified in 2011
- submit data to RSPB survey
- identify sites that could be enhanced by swift nesting boxes and devise an installation plan
- liaise with builders and contractors to recruit their interest in maintaining the swift population
- liaise with owners of buildings with nest sites to ensure that they don't destroy existing sites
- work with homeowners who wish to encourage swifts to their properties

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

See www.ludlow21.org.uk

Swifts in Swifts

The display boards were in Swifts in Parkway for several weeks and were, we hear, looked at by a lot of people. As a result of this display several emails and phone calls were received and it was good to make contact with people who live just outside Ludlow but who have – and want to encourage - swifts.

Our thanks to Graeme Perks for spotting this opportunity and arranging it with Swifts.

Swift Group in Oswestry

The Oswestry group of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust has arranged for Edward Mayer of Swift Conservation to talk at their AGM in 2012. It's a long way to go and the meeting is not until April 18th. However if you were unable to attend Ludlow 21's AGM in January this year it might be worth thinking of making the trip to Oswestry to hear this inspirational and very knowledgeable speaker. Perhaps if there is a number of us who want to go to hear Edward and to support the startup of another Shropshire swift group we could look at car sharing nearer the time.

Some Swift news from elsewhere in the UK

The 2 news items below have been taken from the Swift Conservation website

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

First – a good news story

Swift nesting sites saved on Village Park Estate in South Ealing



Photograph ©Beth Hales

A Niblock Building Contractors roofer cuts a hole for Swifts to continue nesting in eaves at the Village Park Estate in Ealing. This hole is a special one to resist entry by Starlings but let the Swifts get back to the same nest sites they used before the old wooden soffits were replaced with the modern Upvc ones.

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Roofs on this estate were due to be repaired under the Decent Homes programme.

However as one resident – Beth Hales - was chatting with the site manager of contractor Niblock she looked up and noticed the Swifts and asked: “what will happen to the Swifts as they nest in the eaves”. Although sympathetic the site manager had no power to change the plastic soffits that would close the eaves. Beth decided not to let the issue go that easily, as she had spent the last 18 summers enjoying watching the birds.

Together with local RSPB member Peter Bird, the author of the Birds of Ealing, John Green and fellow resident Gary Fisher Beth wrote to the leader of the Council. Swifts were becoming a topic in local Council and wildlife meetings and within days the Council was talking to the building contractor.

Edward Mayer of Swift Conservation, who advise architects and builders on how to keep or encourage Swifts to nest, was brought in as a consultant and he quickly engaged the 17 roofers who were working on the project.

The result? Niblock installed 70 Swift holes and two summers on it goes to show how an action as simple as cutting a small hole can have such a dramatic impact on local wildlife. The Swifts are still on the estate!

This shows that installing UPVC roofing materials does not have to mean excluding swifts. So if you know anyone who is purchasing - or who installs - these products please make them aware of this article. It is possible for swifts and well insulated houses to live together successfully. More information is available from <http://www.swift-conservation.org/>

And now a not so good news story

Major Swift Colony wiped out in New Milton, Hampshire?

The Bournemouth Echo reported the potential destruction of a major colony of Swifts numbering perhaps as many as 50 pairs at the New Milton Housing Estate managed by New Forest District Council.



Photograph © Debbie Podjacki Pigeon spikes that are preventing swifts from reaching their nest sites

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It seems that in an effort to stop House Martins nesting at the estate, the Council put up anti-pigeon spikes under the eaves and in doing so blocked access for the Swifts when they returned from migration. These spikes have been known to fatally injure Swifts trying to access their old nest holes elsewhere.

Efforts are being made by local residents, the RSPB and Swift Conservation to convince the NFDC to change their mind, remove the spikes and restore the Swifts' nest places back to them using well proven low cost low impact techniques.

NFDC have said that they are reviewing their actions and it is hoped they will decide in the Swifts' favour. Then they will still be around to eat up all the local flies and mosquitoes in the years to come! See the original article [here](#) .

Since this news item was brought to everyone's attention by Edward Mayer of Swift conservation many of the Ludlow Swift Group contacted NFDC to express their concern at this action. The final communication I received on this topic read

"As you have contacted us in the past about your concerns for nesting birds at the North Milton estate in New Milton, we'd like to give you an update on what the council is doing to support nesting birds at the site.

The council has been liaising with ecological consultants (ECOSA) and the RSPB, and following discussions between all three parties, a bird mitigation strategy is currently being prepared. This strategy will be approved by all three parties and will be aimed at maintaining existing bird nesting locations and providing a range of nesting opportunities including bird boxes and cavities within buildings so that, ultimately, the bird populations at the site are enhanced. We anticipate that many of these features will have been installed by the 2012 breeding season.

With regards to specific comments we have received concerning the spikes, as the breeding season is now drawing to a close, they will be removed in line with the construction programme for the project.

If you would like to see this strategy once it has been approved by ECOSA, RSPB and New Forest District Council, please contact the council in early September.

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So it looks as though this sorry tale may have a happier ending – although the residents will have to wait to see if the birds return next year after having lost a breeding season at this estate.

