

# Swift *Apus apus*



Swift on the wing, June 2010. Photo: Killian Mullarney

## How to identify a swift

- Medium size - almost always seen on the wing.
- Plain sooty brown with a pale chin, but appears black against sky.
- Long, sickle-shaped wings and short, forked tail.
- Bigger than swallow or house martin, with longer wings.
- Usually seen high in summer skies, always flying, never perch on wires.
- At dusk and dawn often flies low and very fast in excited parties around rooftops. Can be heard 'screaming'.

## Habitat and requirements

- Summer visitor April-August. Breeds from Ireland across to China, winters in central and southern Africa.
- Found all over the UK where suitable nest places are available.
- Eats flying insects and airborne spiders.
- In rough weather, may fly low over water to feed on emerging insects.
- Gregarious, nesting in colonies, pair for life. Nest is a cup of airborne material (often pigeon feathers) cemented with saliva.
- Most common in villages and towns.

### ***Did you know?***

***Swifts fly an average daily total of 800 km - nearly 500 miles. So during their lifetime they fly about 2 million km!***

## SWIFTS IN SUFFOLK

Swifts are widespread in Suffolk with the records mainly focused in the urban areas (see Fig. 1). Many records relate to feeding flocks and there are few records of confirmed breeding. The species appears to be scarce around the Alde estuary and inland to Tunstall and Rendlesham forests, and there are some notable recording gaps in West Suffolk and along the Waveney Valley.

The first swifts are usually seen in April and numbers build up rapidly during early May with most swifts at their nesting sites by the middle of May. In 2014, the first sighting was at Corton on 17th April, followed by sightings in Ipswich and at SWT Lackford Lakes. In early June, over 1000 swifts flew south at Thorpeness, over 400 were recorded at Landguard and 'hundreds' noted at Hollesley Marshes. Over 100 swifts were noted feeding low over the sea in light drizzle at Ness Point, Lowestoft in July.

Departure in autumn is rapid and most swifts have left by the end of August. Swifts are rarely seen after mid September and only a few pass through in October. In 2014, the last inland record was at Long Melford on 5th Sept; the last coastal records were at Belton on 15th Sept and Reydon Smear on 16th Sept.

Suffolk Birds 2014

The Birds of Suffolk, Steve Piotrowski 2003

# THREATS TO SWIFTS IN SUFFOLK

- ◆ The main threat to swifts is through loss of nest sites as they are very site faithful, always returning to the same site year after year.
- ◆ Unfortunately, nest sites can be destroyed through buildings being demolished, renovated, reroofed, or repaired. The use of PVC or plastic fascia' and soffits is detrimental for swift nests unless holes are cut to replicate the original nest entrances before the PVC was fitted.
- ◆ Blocking access to a nest not only prevents swifts from returning to the nest the following year but may trap swifts inside causing them to starve and die. This is illegal under UK and European law.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP SWIFTS

### MAINTENANCE

- ◆ Leave existing nest sites undisturbed.
- ◆ Protect nest sites under threat.
- ◆ If re-roofing, make access holes to match the existing nest site's entrance exactly.

### PLANNING DESIGN

- ◆ Erect correct sized nest boxes with oval entrance holes (65 mm x 28 mm) - for details see [Swift Conservation >](#)
- ◆ Install swift bricks—for details see [Swift Conservation >](#) in new buildings and extensions.
- ◆ Boxes should be sited at least 5 m and as high up as possible on buildings, out of full sun and with a clear drop below entrance.

### RECORDS

- ◆ Report sightings to Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service to enhance county and national data of swift distributions. [SBIS has a dedicated survey page >](#)



Swift nest box with oval entrance hole. Photo: Sue Hooton



Swift bricks on new build. Photo Gen Broad

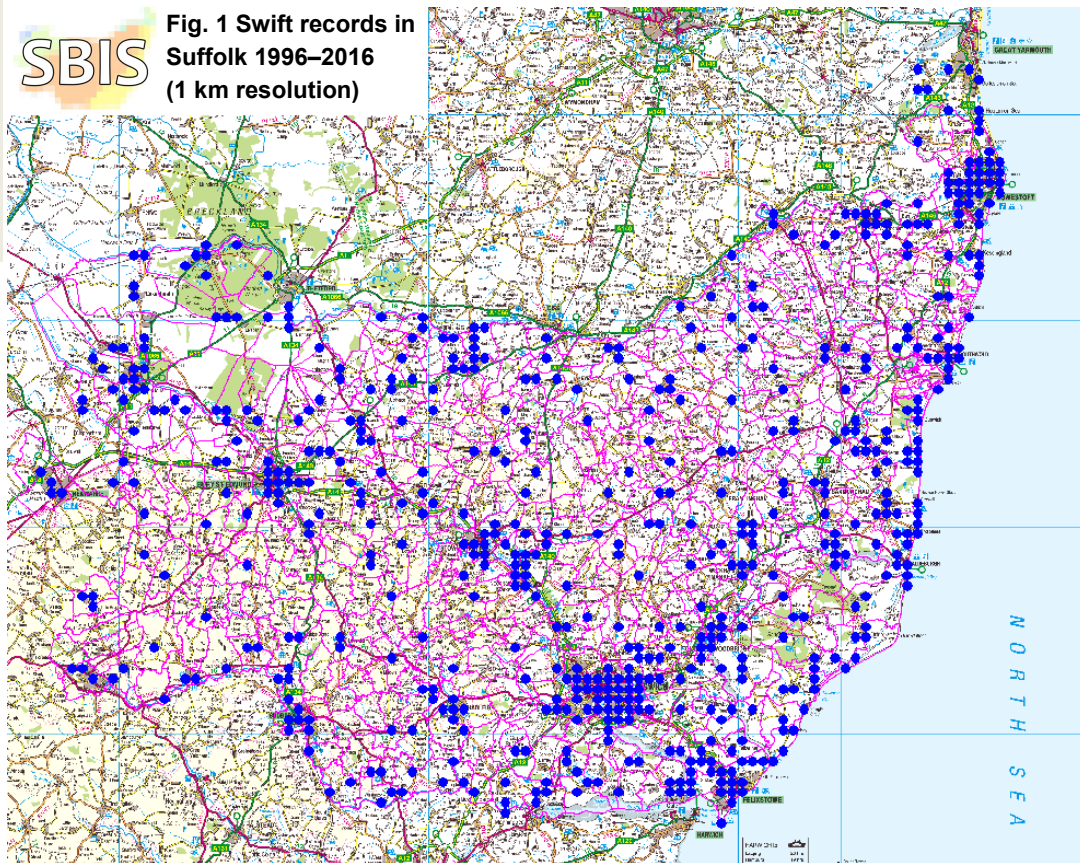
## WHERE TO FIND FURTHER INFORMATION

- ◆ [Swift Conservation >](#)
  - ◆ [Action for Swifts >](#)
  - ◆ [RSPB Discover and Enjoy Nature >](#)
  - ◆ [RSBP Help us help swifts >](#)
  - ◆ [British Trust for Ornithology—swifts >](#)
  - ◆ [Birdlife Species Factsheet >](#)
  - ◆ [Suffolk Birds 2014, published by Suffolk Naturalists' Society >](#)
  - ◆ [Society >](#)
  - ◆ The Birds Of Suffolk, (2003), Piotrowski, S. Christopher Helm London
  - ◆ Distribution of swifts in Suffolk and comparison of change inc. breeding status —[Suffolk Bird Atlas >](#)
- Images of Suffolk Priority species can be found on [Pinterest >](#) and [SBRC Flickr Group >](#)

# SWIFT RECORDS IN SUFFOLK

SBIS

Fig. 1 Swift records in Suffolk 1996–2016 (1 km resolution)



## SPECIES DESIGNATIONS

[Red Data Book 2014, Birds of Conservation Concern – Least Concern](#)

[European Red List of Birds - Least Concern](#)

[Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan - Local Species](#)

Fully protected under the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#) >



Swift showing pale chin. Photo: Kilian Mullarney

### Swift Groups in Suffolk

- ◆ Worlington Swift Group > ([Contact Judith Wakelam Tel: 01638715971](#))
- ◆ SOS Swifts - [Suffolk Ornithologists Group](#) > & [Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#) >

#### FEEDBACK

*If you have information to add to this factsheet, please contact us at the address below. The factsheets are live, working documents and can be updated at any time.*

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