

## **Louth Swift Group**

### **Report 2024**

The Louth Swift Group was set up to help save and preserve the local Swift population in County Louth. It is a small but dedicated group of volunteers who help erect Swift nest boxes and identify existing nest sites of Swifts in the county. The Swift group operates under the umbrella of Louth Nature Trust.

The Common Swift bird is a long distant migrant from the Congo basin in Africa that visits Ireland to nest every summer. They can be seen over our towns and villages from May to August.

The Swift is a red listed bird that has declined by 40% in the last 15 years. Several factors are at play as to the reasons why there is such a drastic decline. Issues such as climate change, biodiversity crisis i.e. lack of insects and a large reduction of nesting sites all contribute to the decline of the Swift bird.

With modern building regulations, the nooks and cranny's where the Swift used to nest are being blocked and sealed off for insulation purposes. One way of helping the Swift is to increase the availability of nest sites through nest box erection, Swift brick installation and preserving existing nest sites.

A survey was carried out in 2022 to identify existing Swift nest sites to understand what needed to be done in terms of protection and nest box erecting where appropriate.

Drogheda and Dundalk were understandably the two largest populations with around 49 breeding pairs in each town. However, the Swifts in Dundalk were more centrally located compared to Drogheda which had a more scattered population.

As Swifts like to nest in colonies there is more concern over the Drogheda population.

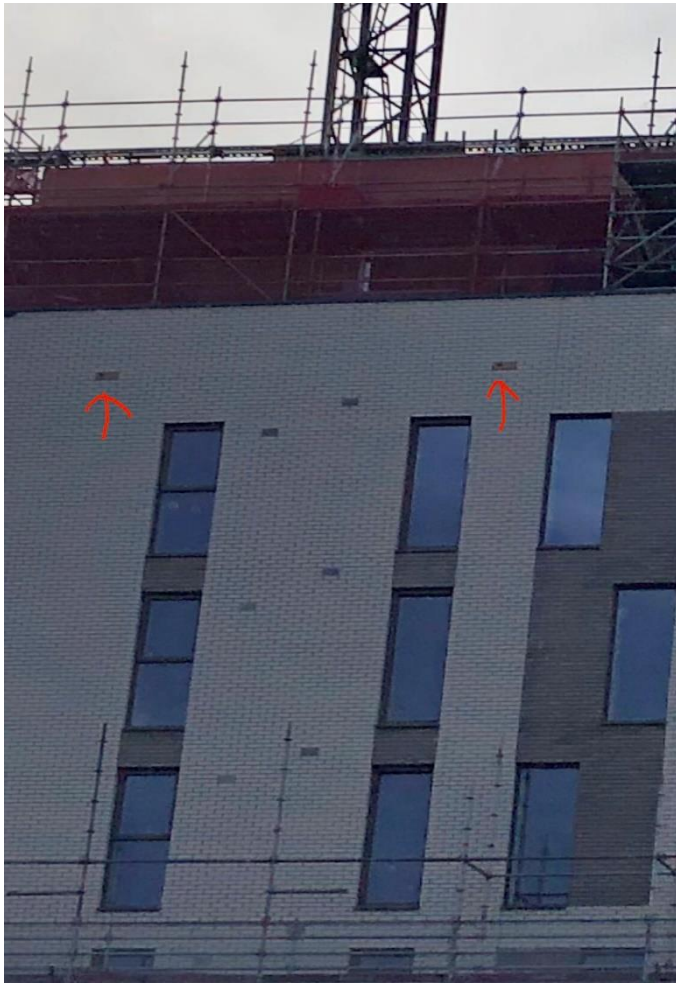
The first set of boxes that were erected was in Drogheda. These boxes were funded through the Drogheda Tidy Towns biodiversity project. Swift boxes were erected close to existing nest sites. Nest sites in Drogheda included Millmount, Barlow house, Yellowbatter, Sluagh hall and Drogheda United clubhouse.



*Nestboxes and caller at Millmount in Drogheda*



*Two triple nestboxes and caller at Barlow house Drogheda*



*Swift Bricks at new apartment building at bridge of peace Drogheda.*

The new apartment block on the bridge of Peace also included in its structure Swift and Bat bricks. Going forward this would be the ideal solution to the Swift nesting site problem.

Louth County Council in conjunction with the National Park and Wildlife service funded a Swift nest box project for the whole of County Louth. Swift nest boxes were prioritised for locations that were most in need according to the survey carried out in 2022.

Omeath, Greenore, Ardee and Tallanstown had Swift nestboxes erected at locations identified as best suited i.e. close to existing nest sites.





*Four triple boxes and caller at the Dolmen centre Omeath.*



Swift nest boxes at Ardee Community School.



Boxes at the Dee Hub Ardee



*Swift boxes at Tallanstown National School*

To date (December 2024) the Louth Swift Group have erected 133 Swift nesting holes.

As the Swift project is in its infancy it may be a few years before we see any uptake in the use of the boxes. Swifts are very site loyal which means that the bird will continue to use the same nesting site year after year. To increase the chances of getting Swifts to use the nestboxes a caller is attached to the side of the boxes.

What is hoped for is that when the young of these older nesting birds are prospecting for their own nest sites, they will hear the call coming from the boxes and investigate the nest hole and start using it.

There are more Swift boxes in the pipeline with Dundalk, Dunleer and Drogheda being earmarked for installation.

Whilst each new nestbox increases the chances of survival of Swifts in County Louth, the longer-term solution would be that all new buildings in urban areas have Swift and Bee bricks installed as a part of their planning applications. Some councils in the UK have this as a stipulation of their local planning laws, hopefully Louth County Council will be the first to do it in Ireland. Email your local councillor to ask for such.

Gerard Murray Louth Swift Group.