

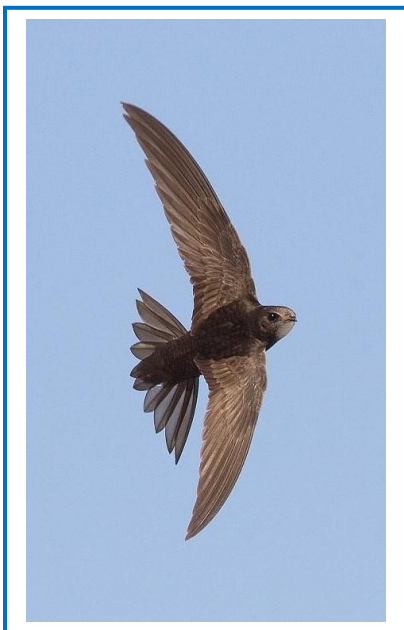


A Miraculous Bird Present in Farnham, but needing our help



If you look up while out walking in Farnham in summer you may very well see the most amazing of *all* birds, not the now familiar red kite but a much smaller bird — a dark, scythe-winged bird, reminiscent of a bow and arrow: the swift.

Other than incubating eggs and feeding their chicks, swifts do *everything* in the sky: they feed, sleep, bathe and even mate in the air. Most of their year is spent above Africa and they visit us only briefly, from May to August, to bring up their young, taking advantage of the long daylight hours and warm temperatures that encourage a glut of aerial insects on which they feed.



Our swifts, however, are in trouble! Industrial farming, on-going destruction of habitat and the liberal use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers has seriously reduced that insect glut. Moreover, swifts face another problem: they tend to nest in old buildings, in ‘unwanted’ crevices missing from our modern airtight dwellings. The combination of these factors has caused British swift numbers to plummet by 58% since 1995. However, they are present in small numbers and Pete Bickford, an Associate of the Farnham Biodiversity Partnership, believes that locally, collectively and individually, their plight can be improved upon. There are around 18 pairs left in Farnham town — all nesting in buildings over 100 years old – and there are other small colonies in Crondall lane and around Hog Hatch. The Partnership will be carrying out a survey exercise in late spring and summer 2021 to confirm and map any more locations – please get in touch if you know of any specific sites.

Swifts will use well-placed swift nest boxes and swift bricks, although they prefer to join existing colonies. We have been promised that swift bricks will be included in the Brightwells development. If you do have swifts nearby, it is worth providing more homes. Sometimes, recordings of swift calls can

be used to attract them to the new sites. Other things that we can all do is to avoid the use of pesticides and fertilisers in our gardens, growing insect-friendly plants and allowing our lawns to flower—cutting only once a month, particular in spring and early summer. These simple actions will allow insect numbers to increase and will help the swift population to do so also.



Swift Brick. Can be bespoke for different building materials



Swift box

You can record sightings using the Swift Mapper website and App at:

<https://www.swiftmapper.org.uk/>

For more information, look at:

<https://www.swift-conservation.org/> or contact Farnham Biodiversity Partnership: contact@FarnhamBAP.org.uk