



MAYOR OF LONDON

Boris urges action to protect swifts

The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson is supporting the RSPB and London's Swifts in calling for Londoners to help count one of the UK's most iconic birds.

Numbers of swifts halved between 1994 and 2007 and one of the problems is a lack of nest sites. The RSPB is joining up with the Mayor and London Swifts to ask Londoners to look out for swifts in their local area and fill in a survey. The information is vital as we currently do not have information on how many of the birds are left in London.

Swifts can be seen circling overhead of an evening, usually in pairs or small groups, with their distinctive cry, a high-pitched "screee" noise, easily heard. These small, fast moving birds arrived in May and should remain with us until August or early September. Since Roman times, swifts have nested here in our homes and buildings. Originally cave and cliff nesters, they switched their nesting habits to high man-made structures; under tiles, in the eaves, in lofts, spires and towers.

Boris Johnson said: 'We can all play a part in boosting the chances of survival of these fabulous city birds simply by helping to garner information about them. So, when you are at home of an evening, look out for them sweeping past your window and take part in this survey. Let's make sure these fantastic aerial acrobats remain a common sight over the capital.'

RSPB Regional Director Chris Corrigan said "We desperately need more information about where they are breeding. Then we'll be able to protect existing nest sites and identify key London areas where we can provide extra help for swifts."

To kick-start this initiative, 20 swift nestboxes will be installed on Metropolitan Police Service buildings in the coming months. The Mayor is working with the functional bodies* - the LDA, MPA, TfL and Lfepa to look at ways to further support this initiative. The Mayor's draft London Plan and supplementary Planning Guidance for sustainable design and construction include policies promoting biodiversity and the incorporation of nesting and roosting structures into buildings.

Swifts live most of their lives on the wing and only land to breed. They feed, mate and even sleep on the wing. Each year they arrive in the UK to breed, but a drive to insulate our homes and drive down wasted energy is depriving them of traditional nest sites.

Look out for low-level "screaming" groups of swifts (that means they're breeding nearby) or take note of where you've seen swifts nesting; perhaps entering a roof or hole in a building. The best time to look is around dusk on warm, still evenings. Screaming swifts flying low around houses or other buildings are probably nesting in them somewhere close by.

Ends

Contacts

For the RSPB, please contact London Communications Manager Tim Webb, on 020 7808 1246, mobile number 07921 740 753 or email tim.webb@rspb.org.uk

For the GLA/Mayors Office, contact Nicola Dillon, on 020 7983 4066 or email Nicola.dillon@london.gov.uk

Photos

Images of swifts in flight, and an illustration, can be downloaded free of charge by [clicking here](#) and using the login details below:

User Name: Swift
Password: London

Having Problems? Copy and paste the link below into your browser:

www.rspb-images.com/respages/storysetsignon.aspx?key=3195570e-74e1-4796-b2e7-e139f85586d9

Swift facts and Editor's notes

- To take part in the survey, please visit either:**
 - For the GLA:** <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/environment/urban-space/biodiversity/swift-action>
 - For London Swifts:** <http://www.londons-swifts.org.uk/news.htm>
- * The London "Functional Bodies" are the London Development Agency [LDA], the Metropolitan Police Authority [MPA], Transport for London [TfL] and London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority [Lfepa].
- Swifts stay in the UK for about three months every year. They're some of the last spring migrants to arrive, but the first to leave.
- Swifts are a very clean bird, with the parents often eating their offspring's droppings to absorb extra minerals.
- They mate for life and are a plain sooty brown in colour. In flight against the sky, they appear to be black. Swifts have long, scythe-like wings and a short, forked tail. They are often misidentified as swallows or martins.
- Evolved for perfect flight they cannot walk or hop. They cannot cling to branches, but can hold on to and crawl up vertical walls. When exhausted, swifts have been recorded perching on high ledges at night. Their nests are usually made just inside eaves or gables at roof height on buildings at least two-storeys high.
- They eat flying insects and airborne spiders and often gather thousands daily just to feed their young. For moisture they skim water surfaces or snatch raindrops from the air.
- This initiative is the basis of a new London drive to save swifts and further partners will be joining the GLA and the RSPB. London's Swifts is the first London organisation supporting the project, visit www.londons-swifts.org.uk

