

Why swifts are amazing



Some of 'our' swifts migrate as far as South Africa for winter. Typically, swifts migrate 5 to 6 thousand miles each year.

Apart from when nesting, swifts stay almost exclusively in the air, never coming down to rest. They even eat, mate and sleep in the air - they can 'snooze' with one side of their brain at once, and then switch to the other side.

Swifts live a long time for a small bird, on average about five and half years. One tagged bird was known to live twenty-one years and so might have flown nearly 4 million miles.

In the nest, at about one month old, the babies do 'press ups' in the nest, lifting themselves up and down on their wings. This strengthens them for when they fledge. After leaving the nest they will keep flying non-stop for three years, never landing at all.

Parent swifts gather insect snacks for their chicks, carrying as many as 1,000 at once. Gulp!

Swifts nest in houses, churches, old factories and many other types of building - they squeeze through small gaps to nest in cavities inside roofs and walls.

At dusk, groups of swifts fly at high speeds around the areas where they are nesting, swooping and circling around and about.

As a group, swifts are the fastest of all birds in level flight (the peregrine is the fastest, but only in a steep dive called a stoop).

Swifts formed as a species some 65 million years ago. Archaeopteryx and Tyrannosaurus Rex were just dying out when the swift family came into existence.

They are in decline!

Numbers nesting in the UK have been declining for years and are now on the Amber List for Europe listed as birds in serious decline.

Last year there was a freak storm in the Mediterranean and numbers here in the UK were distinctly lower than expected.

Swifts will return to their nest sites to breed. Existing and potential nesting sites are often inadvertently destroyed when old buildings are demolished or converted and old walls are repaired. Across Europe old buildings are disappearing and being replaced with new builds, unsuitable for swifts.

