

Homes for swifts

Swifts are extraordinary birds. They spend almost all of their lives in the air, only coming down to nest. Swifts are summer visitors in the UK, staying only a short time (mainly May - August), wintering in Africa. However, their populations have declined by over 50 % in the last decade in the UK.

Although swifts used to nest in trees and on cliffs they are now entirely reliant on buildings in which to nest. Protecting existing nests and providing new nests is one of the most constructive things we can all do to help them.

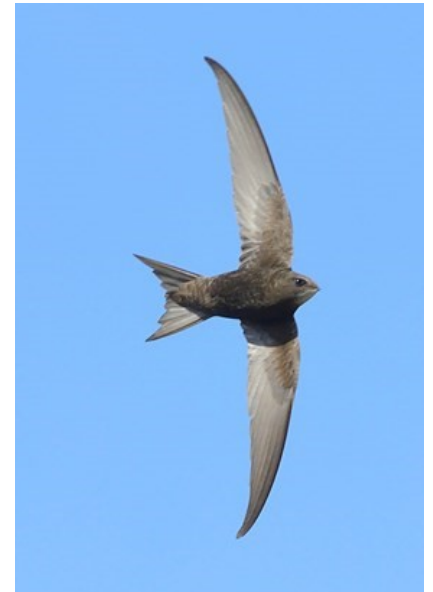
Bed and breakfast service for swifts

Providing homes for swifts is an excellent step to help them.

However, swifts still need to eat and drink. Providing areas of long rough with a diverse sward will attract plenty of insect prey for swifts to eat. Swifts drink by catching raindrops in the air, or by flying low over water, skimming a mouthful from the surface. Maintaining waterbodies with open water not covered by vegetation will mean water is accessible for swifts to take in flight. Also ensuring the water is kept clean is important. Providing a buffer zone around the waterbody with longer vegetation will limit runoff contaminating the water sources for swifts and other species.

Benefits for wildlife and people

- Swifts are amazing creatures with a unique life style, attracting them to nest creates an opportunity for you and your golf club members to see birds close up and learn about their social behaviour.
- Swift nest boxes could be made during family or member days at your golf club, this not only creates homes for swifts but provides an opportunity to engage members with wildlife on the course.
- As a species of conservation concern, any beneficial features are always a positive step.



Swift © Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)



Swifts © Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)



Working together to give nature a home



Create a swift nest box

Use Diagram 1 below to create a swift box that can be placed under the eaves or on the side of a building without eaves. The dimension of the entrance hole is important and should not exceed 30 mm x 70 mm to ensure predators cannot enter the box. An oblong entrance hole of 28 mm x 65 mm will prevent starlings from squeezing into the box*.

A cutting design to produce six boxes of the Zeist design is available here: <http://actionforswifts.blogspot.com/p/diy.html>

*Other species using a nestbox isn't always a bad thing and can often attract swifts to the box. However, starlings often outcompete swifts for the same nest sites. If you want to help starlings on your golf course why not create nestboxes designed specifically for them.

Zeist Swift Nestbox – drawings based on a design used in the town of Zeist in Holland

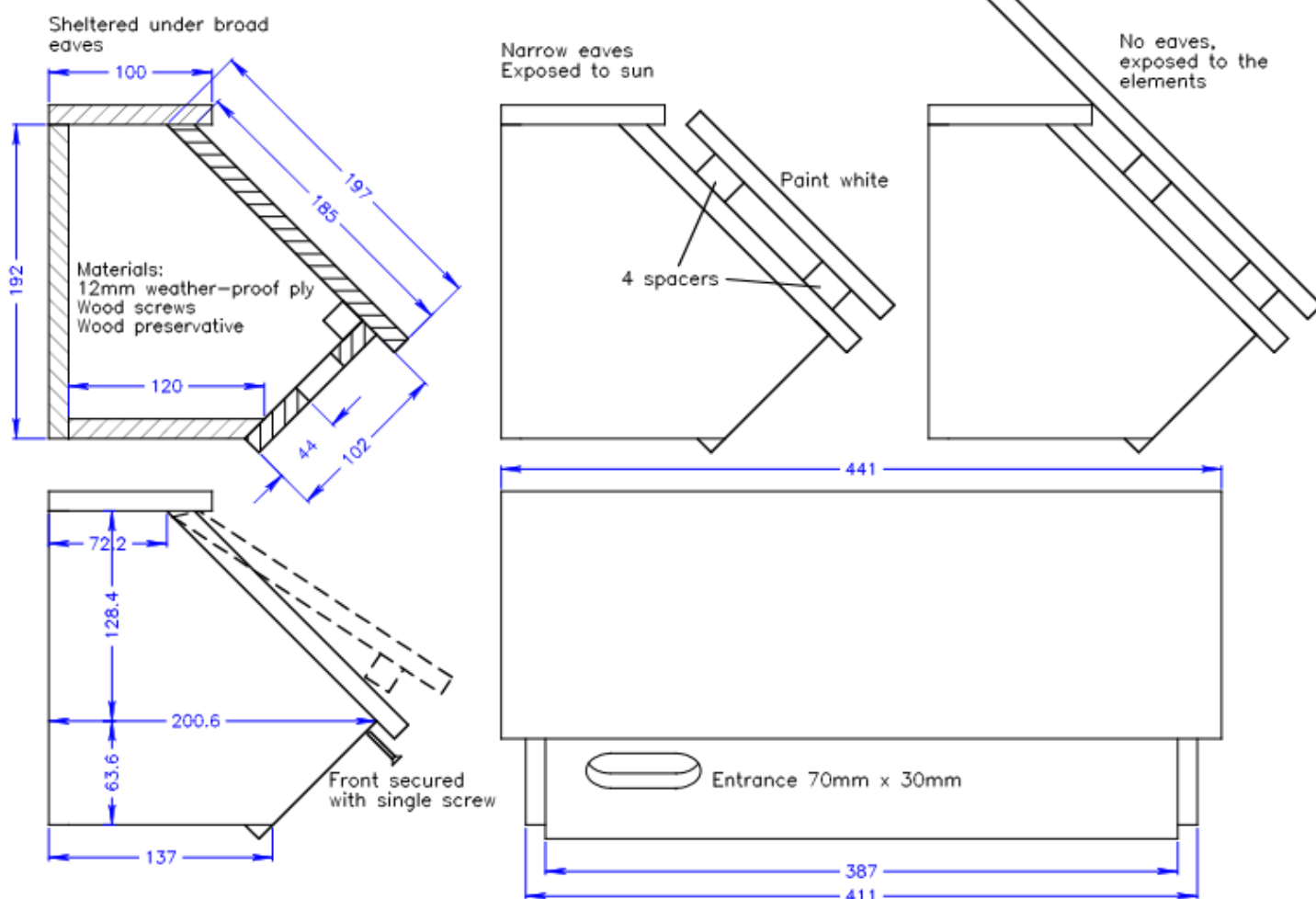


Diagram 1: The Zeist Swift Nestbox design, a design taken from Swift Conservation website. Other designs are also available on their website <https://swift-conservation.org>



Swift © Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

Putting up your swift box

- Swift boxes should only be secured to buildings. How about the clubhouse, or a greenkeepers maintenance shed?
- Secure the box beneath the eaves, at least 5 m from the ground. Ensure the box is not above any door or window and has an all-round view and clear unobstructed flight-path to the nest. Avoid placing on a south facing elevation as the box can get too hot (see diagram 2).
- If the box cannot be placed beneath the eaves ensure the swift nest box has a sloped roof design (like on the Zeist design on page 2), this prevents predators accessing the box.
- Swifts are colonial birds and would benefit from multiple boxes. It is generally recommended to install 2 - 4 or more boxes. You may start with one or two and add to them as birds begin to move in.
- Remember, all wild birds, their eggs and nests are legally protected whilst in use or being built. Please leave the nests alone during this period and allow the birds to rear their young.

For more information and alternative designs see <https://swift-conservation.org> or to buy a ready made swift box go to <https://shopping.rspb.org.uk/swiftbox>

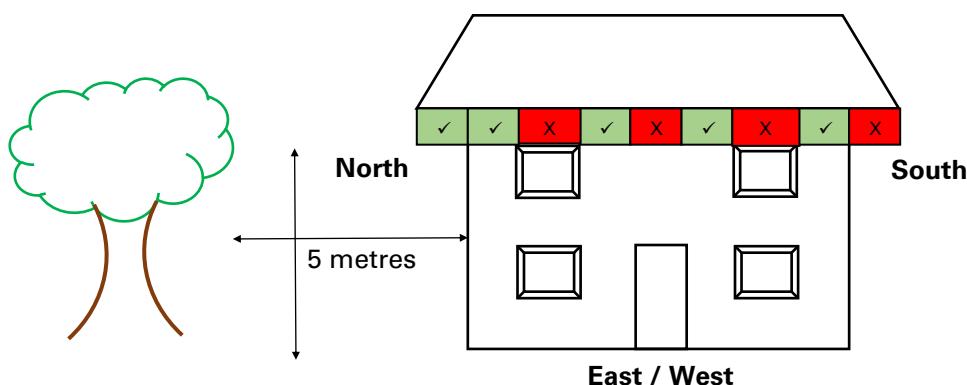


Diagram 2: Optimum location for swift nest boxes. Five metres from the ground and from any obstruction e.g. tree, to allow free flight access. Do not locate in full sun (if not under eaves do not place on southern elevation). Do not place over windows or doors.

Once you've made your nest box and put it up at your golf club why not take a picture and share on social media. Tag [@marieathorgolf](https://twitter.com/marieathorgolf) and use on #MoreThanAGolfCourse on twitter!

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When will they nest?

- Swifts first arrive back in May but it can take several years for swifts to find new nest boxes. In the meantime, other birds such as house sparrows might use the nest box. This is not a bad thing as sparrows need help and their presence is known to attract swifts to look for nests.
- It is difficult to start a fresh colony. Non-breeders or displaced birds can be encouraged to investigate new nests if you play recorded swift calls to attract them. These, and a range of ready made nest boxes are available from Swift Conservation at: <https://swift-conservation.org/>

If you get swifts using your nestbox or any buildings on site please report the sightings on the swift mapper:

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

Managing your nest box

- Swift boxes shouldn't need a lot of maintenance. Swifts are fairly house proud birds and so the nest box won't need clearing out.
- It is best to check on the fastenings of the nest box every so often (maybe every couple of years) but make sure you do this over the autumn or winter, outside the nesting season as all wild birds, their eggs and nests are legally protected whilst in use or being built.
- No work should be conducted near the nestboxes during the breeding season, this includes erecting scaffolding near the nestbox.

Further reading

More guidance on how to help wildlife on your golf course on The R&A and RSPB partnership webpages: <https://www.randa.org/en/sustainability/services/rspb-partnership>

To read more about how to help swifts:

<https://swift-conservation.org/>
<http://www.actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk>

To report swift sightings go to:

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

Contact

A partnership between the R&A and the RSPB exists to address wildlife conservation and the management of natural habitats at golf courses throughout the United Kingdom. If you want any advice relating to nature and wildlife on your golf course contact Dr Marie Athorn on: Marie.Athorn@rspb.org.uk

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