

Swift, Swallow or Martin?

Most people find it hard to separate Swifts, Swallows and Martins, and you can see all of them together feeding on insects over the River Wharfe. Forget wings and tails. The trick is to learn the difference between the upper body and under-side of each species.



Swifts

Appear black all over. The white chin is impossible to see in flight.



Swallows

Blue-black above, white belly, dark russet head, nest mainly in barns.



House Martins

White underside, blue-black on top, white rump. Cup-shaped nest on outside of homes (Albion Street and West Busk Lane).



Sand Martins

Brown on top, cream below, brown chin strap. Nest in sandy riverbanks.

How to help Swifts

If you have a nest site please ensure it remains available for Swifts returning each May. Contact Swift-friendly builders (Tom Thackwray, Brick House Roofing & Building Ltd.) or Otley Swift Watch for advice if you plan renovations.

If you don't have a nest site erect a nest box and play Swift attraction calls. This may encourage a new colony.

If you find a grounded Swift never throw it in the air. It is likely injured or too young to fly.

Contact Leeds Swifts as they can offer a specialist diet and rehabilitation:

leeds.swifts@gmail.com or visit

www.startbirding.co.uk/leeds-swifts/



Credit: Mark Smyth



Otley Swift Watch

'Look! They're back! Look!'

*And they're gone
On a steep controlled scream of skid
Round the house-end
And away under the cherries.*

From *Swifts* by Ted Hughes.



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Swifts are in decline

Swifts epitomise summer with their screaming aerial displays but 50% may have vanished between 1995-2016.

Swifts rely on cracks and crevices under eaves of older houses to nest, returning to the same sites in May each year. But re-roofing, demolition and refurbishment mean that on arrival they can find these sites destroyed.

This does not have to be the case: Swift friendly builders can ensure they retain these gaps and flat ledges to nest on. Houseowners just need to know they are there.



Credit: Richard Woodward

Where do they nest in Otley?

Traditional stone-built houses account for almost all nest sites in town. So far 90 nest sites in 60 buildings have been found.

Swifts cannot access modern brick-built houses. There are no known nests north-west and north-east of the river, nor on West Busk Lane, the Cambridge Estate, or Whitely Croft.



Credit: Roger Wyatt

Otley Swift Watch

This group of 15 volunteers started in 2016 to locate and monitor nest sites in Otley, which requires patience and a keen eye.

The town is split into patches patrolled by one or two volunteers who get to know owners of houses with nests, raising awareness and championing their cause.



To find out more about Otley Swift Watch contact richardmarsh25@yahoo.co.uk or telephone 01943 465412.

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