

Exeter Swift Tower

Frequently Asked Questions



Background

The swift tower was installed in 2015 as part of the Exeter Wild City project, an initiative between Exeter City Council and Devon Wildlife Trust that aims to help wildlife thrive in the city and help people enjoy nature on their doorstep.

The tower project was developed working closely with the RSPB. It was funded by the construction of the nearby Jury's Inn hotel and from housing development, with money required to be spent on local artwork. No money was spent from Exeter City Council's budget. Devon Wildlife Trust did contribute to the scheme. The tower provides an artistic impression of a swift in flight whilst also providing 90 separate nest boxes.

Each year swifts fly more than 6,000 miles from southern Africa. They arrive here in May and stay just long enough to nest, lay eggs and rear their chicks, before making their return flights in August.

Swift numbers have fallen by 50% in the last 30 years. Many birds don't survive the hazardous journey from Africa, and when they do arrive they struggle to find suitable places to nest. Modern and renovated buildings no longer contain the holes, nooks and crannies that the birds need.

We're proud that swifts still visit us each summer and proud that Exeter is doing its bit to make them welcome! The tower is one of only a few that exist in the whole of the UK.

This swift tower has been fitted with solar panels. The panels power speakers which play recorded swift calls aimed at attracting the birds during the summer months.

- Swifts are fast fliers reaching up to 70mph
- Swifts can fly up to 500 miles in a single day
- Swifts spend nearly all their lives in the air – this includes eating and mating!
- A swift will catch and eat up to 10,000 insects each day
- Before they take their first flight young swifts do press ups to strengthen their wings

Why is the tower on a roundabout and not in a field?

- Swifts used to nest in ancient trees, as these disappeared they began to nest in buildings. They are now an iconic urban bird species, who look for nesting opportunities around the eaves of houses
- There are nests nearby in Jurys Inn and Newtown, but not in the city centre – this installation helps to connect existing nesting sites with other opportunities popping up in the city centre
- The tower is prominent, it has provided a talking point and raised awareness about swifts, this has contributed to further nest spaces being created around the city
- The roundabout provides a safe place – there's no risk of renovation or loss of these nesting spaces. Swifts don't perch on the ground or in trees, they fly straight out and up to search for food on the wing. The roundabout provides wide open space in front of the boxes to allow swifts to enter and exit their nests safely

Are there any swifts using the tower?

- As far as we're aware, not yet. However, we weren't able to do volunteer surveys in 2020 or 2021



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- From previous surveys we know there are sparrows and tit species using the boxes, and no doubt there will be insects
- It may take some time for swifts to find the boxes (10 years is the figure often suggested). However, if other birds are using it then it's already a success story. The conversations that have been generated around the tower and roundabout meadow will have ensured that more people are taking action to help urban wildlife – this in itself is worth the installation

Could the money have been spent on something else?

The funding for the swift tower was earmarked for artwork in the vicinity of Jurys Inn, it couldn't have been used for any other purpose. Working with ECC, we were able to ensure that the funding provided an artistic element with a biodiversity enhancing capacity: the structure provides an attractive shape that lights up at night, and it provides shelter for wildlife.

Has the tower been successful elsewhere?

- Warsaw tower (installed in 2012) has seen great success
- The Cardiff Bay tower (installed in 2015) hasn't had swifts yet

Can the tower nest boxes be accessed for cleaning?

The boxes can be accessed if necessary. However, it isn't recommended to clean out swift boxes. Swifts are relatively clean birds that remove droppings from the nest. Importantly, it can take a whole season to build a nest cup which the same birds will return to year on year. Removing nesting material could lead to the pair abandoning the nest or not laying eggs the following year.

How can I help swifts?

- Install nest boxes (swifts are colony nesters, you ideally need to place 2 or more nests up) on your house or nest bricks into new build. For more information on where to fix boxes and what kind of box to install visit <https://swift-conservation.org/>
- Report suspected damage to existing nests during renovation works. It is illegal to restrict access to or damage nests during the breeding season (March-August) and replacement of lost nesting sites should be provided in accordance with UK law. If you suspect that undue damage is being caused then report it to your Local Authority planning department. Alternatively contact the Devon Wildlife Crime Officer on 101.

I've found a swift on the ground, what do I do?

- Visit Swift conservation website for full advice and swift rehabilitation carers - [Swift First Aid & Carers \(swift-conservation.org\)](https://swift-conservation.org/)
- Put the swift in a clean ventilated shoe box in a quiet place and contact a rehabilitation carer via the Swift Conservation website [Swift First Aid & Carers \(swift-conservation.org\)](https://swift-conservation.org/)
- Alternatively contact the RSPB on 0300 1234 999 for further advice on local carers