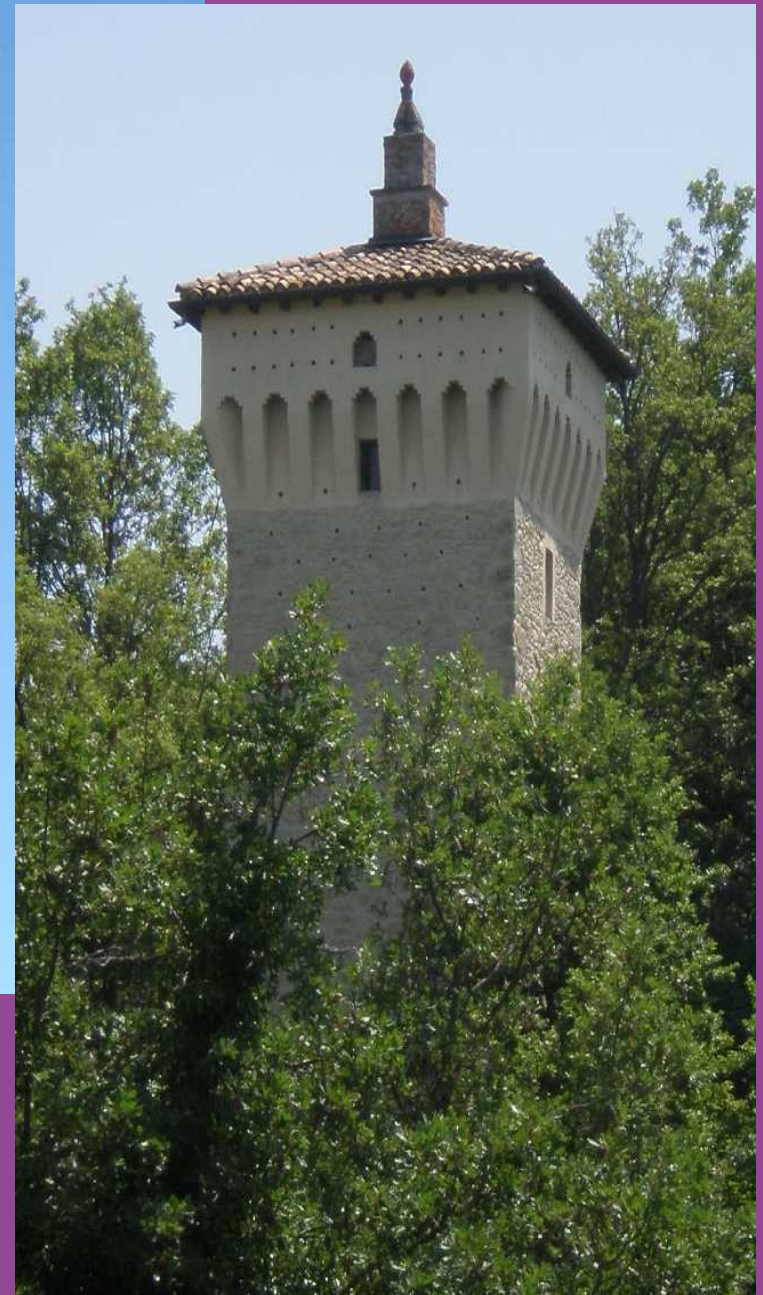


Swift Towers of Emilia Romagna



In May 2009 Dr Mauro Ferri of Modena took a small group of Swift enthusiasts from Swift Conservation, London's Swifts and CommonSwift.org on a tour of ancient Swift Towers in the countryside of Emilia Romagna, in Northern Italy

Common Swifts *Apus apus* arrive there around 25 April and stay the usual 90 days to breed. From at least the XV Century they were encouraged to inhabit towers built in the fortified country farms

Chicks were taken for food, at night, depending on the size of the brood, leaving enough to sustain the parents' interest and to maintain the population

The practice died out in the early part of the last Century and the towers' holes are now often plugged when renovated or they are simply neglected. But some are still active, while one major tower has been restored purely for breeding Swifts

Our first Swift tower - a medieval building now a roadside bar! Note the Swift holes, and the row of patterned tiles below the top window, there to deter Beech Martens *Martes Foina* from raiding the nests



The countryside is dotted with farms and many of them have towers



More examples of these towers are easy to find



La Vignola

and some more ...

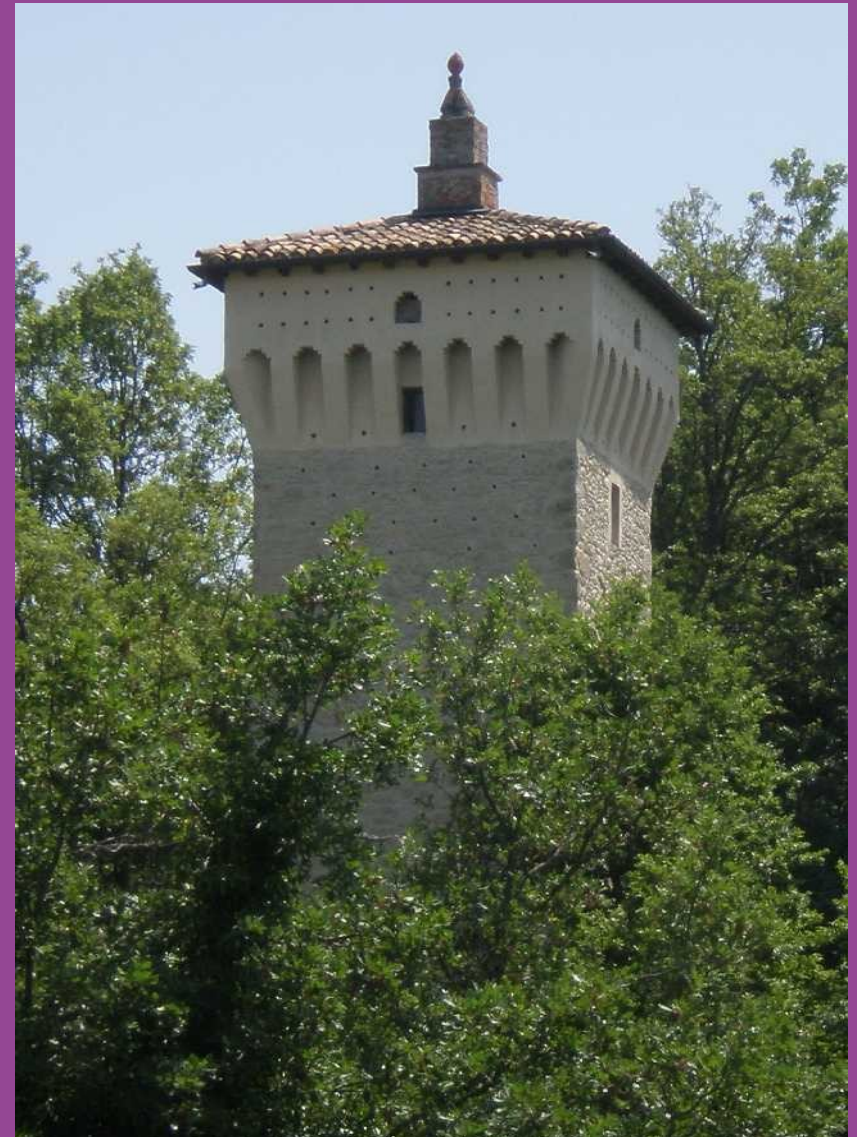


Cà di Monte Pugnano



This building shows how a medieval structure has been added to and Swift holes incorporated under the eaves in a line

Highlight of the trip was Torre il Castellaro at Sassi di Roccamalatina. Mauro found Swifts still using the ancient tower some 25 years ago. He worked to maintain it before handing it over to the Regional Park



Access to the tower was originally via the first floor
Swifts nest behind the plugged holes on the upper floors
They share the tower with Lesser Horseshoe bats
Rhinolophus hipposideros



Inside the Swift area the holes have been numbered in modern times but are still sealed in the original way with wooden plugs and rags



The hole provides access into a recessed area within the wall where the Swifts nest – all is neat and tidy - the chicks have flown



At the farm of Razzolé they were busy renovating, but intended to leave the Swifts undisturbed - “fantastic creatures”. The holes in the XVII Century tower had been created in the old way using clay bottle necks - the square holes below were for doves and lined with clay tile



Another renovation project

This tower was interesting for showing the preserved glazed ceramic tiling inserted into the corners of the tower to deter both Beech Martens and Rats



and we found a couple of Swift Towers in Modena itself

One in the Via Montevercchio, which was in use



and another in the Via Ruggera, near the Church of San Barnaba, which had Swifts flying around it but no sign of them entering - this tower is unusual as the holes are in the fold of the cornice



A wonderful trip, showing the affinity the Swift has had with the people of Emilia Romagna over the centuries. We can only hope there will still be homes for them in these towers in the years to come



**For more information on Swifts
and their conservation
please contact
mail@swift-conservation.org
or see our web site
www.swift-conservation.org**