

# Choosing & Installing Swift Nest Boxes – a basic guide

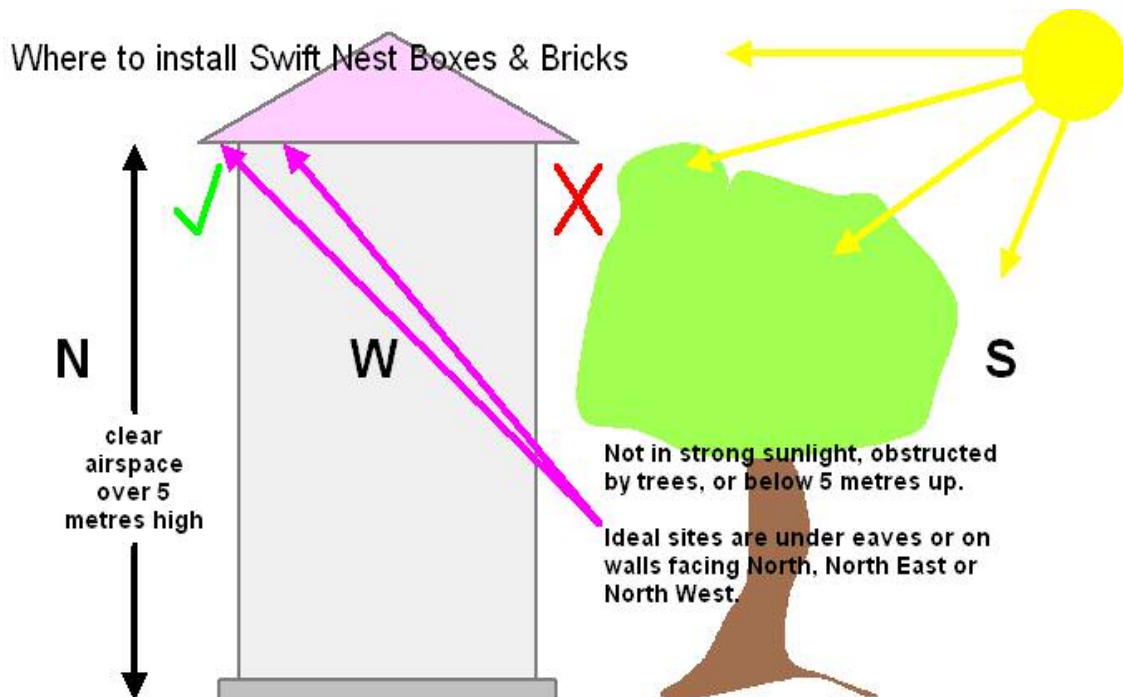
Swift Conservation

[www.swift-conservation.org](http://www.swift-conservation.org)

*Congratulations! You want to help Swifts!*

## Choosing the site

Place the nest box on the side of the building that gets the least direct sunshine. If possible fix it under an overhang or the eaves, to give it more protection from weather and heat. It should be sited at least 5 metres above ground, with clear adjacent airspace so the Swifts can access it in high-speed direct flight (they fly straight into the nest hole to avoid the risk of predation). Make sure that predators (cats, crows, magpies, squirrels, rats and weasels) do not have easy access to the nest (eg by climbing up creepers, sitting on nearby aerials, or flying in from nearby trees).



## Choosing the box

You can find a good range of Swift nest boxes illustrated on the “Shopping!” pages of our website, which also provides links and details of how you can order them. A brief summary of the various types and their uses is below. Select the box that meets your needs, your budget, and your ability to fit it! Please remember that the longer lasting the box and the more soundly it is fitted, the better it is.

### Wooden

We know of two commercial wooden Swift nest boxes available, from John Stimpson and CJ Wildbird Foods. Both are well made, designed for Swifts by experts, and are light and easy to fit when compared to the concrete boxes. The downside of such boxes is their relatively limited life, but careful siting and occasional surface treatments can prolongue their lives to a very useful span.



## Concrete - “Woodcrete”

Some of the boxes available from Schwegler (and some other continental manufacturers) are made from a lightweight concrete known as “Woodcrete”. It is a mixture of cement and plant fibre, and is strong and long lasting, if heavy. Such boxes, if sensibly sited and maintained, have the potential to last as long as the building, making them particularly attractive and cost effective.



## Terra-Cotta

This handsome nest place is available from Ibstock Brick in three clay colours. It fits in with UK brick sizes, and is ideal for new build sites. Designed by a UK Swift colony owner and expert, it provides ideal nesting conditions when correctly fitted.



## Do It Yourself

We feature several different designs for Swift nest boxes on our web sites. Choose the one that suits your site and skills, and make it up! These boxes are light compared to the concrete ones, and require much less effort to fit, but they will not last as long as the concrete ones will. Nonetheless they will, if well made, have a useful life span and are a valuable way of providing Swifts with nest places.



## Inset

Several commercial designs of Swift nest box can be sunk into the walls of most brick or block built buildings. Both Ibstock and Schwegler make such types, the one illustrated is the popular double box from Schwegler. These boxes are heavy, and fitting them in this way is a professional task. Because of this they are usually best suited to new build sites, or ones where the walls are undergoing major repairs.



## Surface Mounted

Several of the commercial designs can only be surface fitted under eaves or onto walls. This type opposite is a strong and popular, if heavy, concrete design from Schwegler. We have had success with this model at projects at London Zoo, Regent's Park, and (illustrated) in Northern Ireland.



## **Fitting the box**

Good nest boxes are made to give many years of useful service, and so the fixings must be equally long-lasting. Use strong corrosion-resistant fixings appropriate to the wall material e.g. fittings designed specifically to work with brickwork, timber cladding, concrete or stone. The boxes may also be fitted to tall lamp-posts, pylons, chimneys, and to metal cladding, in which case the manufacturer's advice on suitable fixing methods should be obtained. If you have any doubts at all about your ability to fit the box, ask a professional to do it for you.

## **Keeping safe!**

Before fixing or checking your Swift nest box, make sure your working conditions are safe. Use only appropriate access equipment, tools and fixings. Make sure all are in sound condition. Follow the guidance supplied by the manufacturers. Take special care when working at high level, on ladders, scaffolding or platforms. Seek professional advice beforehand whenever you are performing any task for which you have not been trained. Obtain and use the appropriate personal protective equipment required for the task.

## **Attracting the Swifts - using the Swift Calls CD**

It can take a long time for Swifts to find a new nest place. But nest box occupation can be greatly speeded up if a recording of Swifts' attraction calls is played early in the nesting season (May -June) and again later on, in the latter part of July, when the juveniles are looking for places to nest in the following year. A CD of the calls is available from us - see our web site's "Shopping!" page. Best results are usually achieved if the loudspeaker is fixed adjacent to, or even inside the nest box, with the CD player/amplifier sited somewhere where it will be easy to operate, such as an indoor room. Any electrical item sited externally must be weatherproofed.

## **Checking use and success and maintenance**

You don't need to clean out the boxes. Swifts nest naturally in holes and crevices, sometimes using the same places for many years, without any cleaning. In fact insects like clothes moths will eat up much of the nest material year on year, and keep the nest box from becoming cluttered with debris.

## **Building on success**

If your box is successful, put up some more! Swifts nest in colonies, often quite loose ones, but they like a few neighbours. Indeed, a busy Swift colony will be a powerful attraction to other Swifts to come in and nest, the more the merrier!

## **CCTV and Audio**

You may wish to fit CCTV cameras to observe the lives of the birds. You can also fit a microphone to transfer the sounds of the Swifts – great fun! Cameras should be very small, with minimal lighting (if any is used at all), must not emit any heat, and must not present any risk to the birds (as might come from loose cables or connections). They should only be fitted and adjusted outside the breeding season. If a camera fails while the birds are breeding, it should not be serviced until they have left the nest for good.

## **Do's & Don'ts**

Do give the birds peace and quiet and every chance to breed.  
Do try and keep a diary of the birds activity.  
Do try and put your CCTV pictures onto the Internet so others can share them.  
Do safely check the box each winter to make sure it is still sound and firmly fixed.

Don't stand and stare up at the nest box when the Swifts are around. It can put them off.  
Don't disturb the Swifts at any time - they will desert the nest.  
Don't attempt to handle the birds unless you are a BTO Licensed Ringer.  
Don't allow creepers or plants to encroach on the nest. They will and give access to predators.

## **Enjoy your Swifts!**

If you need more advice, please do contact us at [mail@swift-conservation.org](mailto:mail@swift-conservation.org)

*Edward Mayer*