

Swifts in Herefordshire Churches

The Herefordshire Bat Research Group (HBRG) has been raising awareness for swifts since 2014, as part of a local Bats and Swifts Project. The biggest danger to swifts is the loss of nest sites during repair/renovation works, so surveying and mapping their nest sites is important.

A total of 128 churches were surveyed by local volunteers for swifts with 34 Schwegler swift boxes being installed at 12 Herefordshire churches. So far swift presence has been recorded in 11/28 boxes.

Swifts at St. Mary's Church, Staunton-On-Wye – A Success Story

This 13th century church was surveyed for swifts between 2014 and 2017 and 12 natural nest sites were recorded by HBRG. Most of them were located around the church tower which was earmarked for urgent repair works. After a series of meetings with the Church, architect, and ecologist, all existing swift nest sites were able to be retained. In addition 4 swift boxes were applied for by the Church as part of the renovation project and installed in the louvres (Fig 2).



Fig 1: Red circles indicate some of the swift nest sites retained after Repointing works in 2021.



Fig 2: One of 4 swift boxes provided during the renovation works.

Swifts have now returned to the St. Mary's church in high numbers, so it wasn't surprising to find that 7/8 swift boxes installed at St. Mary's had evidence of nesting swifts. A recent monitoring visit revealed lots of insect remains and droppings in the boxes as shown below (see Fig. 4 & 5).

This project has demonstrated what can be achieved with a small amount of effort, and for St. Mary's Church it was a win-win situation for the birds, the Church, the architect, the ecologist and HBRG who strived to retain these nest sites.



Fig 4 Swift droppings were encountered in the boxes.



Fig 5: One of the swift droppings broken open revealing indigestible remains of insects.

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For more information about the project contact the Herefordshire Bat Research group via their Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100083317270181)