

How to help stem the losses

As so often in nature conservation, 'If it ain't broke don't fix it' – or, if you have a natural system which is functioning well, try to maintain it. If you have any of these nesting with you, try to keep them. They nest almost exclusively on or within man-made structures.



House Martins

If you have House Martins nesting, leaving piles of dropping below, please live with that and certainly don't knock them down or block access with wire mesh or other means. Some people put up ledges to collect the droppings while others put pieces of wood or card on the ground to collect them. It is illegal to destroy occupied nests.

Martins appear to choose sites at random but painting the top half of a building white or cream may attract them.

- Create a muddy pool or puddle where martins can collect mud, especially during a dry spring.
- Martin nests sometimes fall down, fatally depositing eggs or young on the ground. In Aston in 2020 four nestlings were taken to the Cuan Wildlife Rescue, Much Wenlock to join a dozen others similarly being cared for.
- Fix scallop shells about 100mm below the soffit and Martins may move in and build on them, in the secure place without the danger of the nest falling.
- There are local examples of fallen young being 'posted' into nearby nests already with young, the adopted parents apparently successfully rearing their enlarged family.

Nest locations

House Martins stick their cup-shaped nests high up under the eaves.

Swallows typically build in open farm outbuildings, sometimes in sheltered porches and open garages, with examples of both in Broome in 2020, and even in old pig stys (three in 2015, two in 2020 in a Hopesay garden and a farmyard).

Swifts nest high up inside roof spaces, entering through small gaps under the eaves.

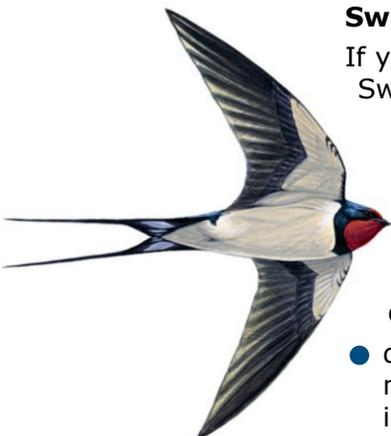
Dealing with the House Sparrow problem.

- Pugnacious sparrows often succeed in requisitioning martin nests for themselves. There is an example of martins breeding peacefully in August after the sparrows had bred.
- Place sparrow nest boxes (32 mm entrance holes) under eaves well away from the martins – it may persuade sparrows to use these instead.
- Erect artificial martin boxes, leave sticks in the holes to keep out sparrows and remove them when the martins arrive.
- Discourage sparrows by placing a curtain of weighted strings in front of the martin nest. Sparrows find it difficult to fly up at a steep angle to the nest but martins do so easily. The strings should be about 230 mm long, 65 mm apart, all of the same length to prevent tangling, be no nearer than 150 mm to the nest hole and can be fixed with nails or drawing pins and weighted with steel nuts or plasticine. This curtain should be erected before sparrows begin nesting, to keep them out before the martins arrive.

Swallows

If you have Swallows nesting in a barn or open shed, or one with access through an open window, or perhaps an old pig sty then

- don't destroy the nest, but leave it intact for birds wanting to fly back into it.



Swifts

Swifts favour high lofts with entry holes, typical of older and Victorian houses. Some will use other high gaps in walls but holes giving access to loft spaces are their favourite.

If you have Swift nests do not block them and try to maintain their access.

Special 'Swift brick' nest boxes can be used in new builds, adding accommodation for the birds.

- Starting next year there will be a parish project to attract more Swifts to nest.

