



## Offaly County 2023 Swift Survey

Prepared by: Jaroslaw Majkusiak, Tara Adcock and Brian Caffrey.



**BirdWatchIreland**  
*protecting birds and biodiversity*

A project funded by



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí  
Offaly County Council

An Roinn Tithíochta,  
Rialtas Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta  
Department of Housing,  
Local Government and Heritage

# Table of Contents

Executive summary .....	1
Introduction .....	2
Project aim and objectives.....	4
Methodology.....	4
Results.....	7
Building type distribution.....	10
Nest orientation .....	11
Site based results .....	12
Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown .....	12
Banagher .....	21
Tullamore .....	31
Clara .....	38
Edenderry.....	41
Portarlinton .....	50
Daingean .....	54
Clonbullogue .....	60
Cloghan .....	62
Shannonbridge .....	64
Durrow .....	66
Killeigh.....	68
Shinrone .....	70
Kinnity .....	73
Kilcormac.....	75
Geashill.....	78
Horseleap .....	80
Cadamstown .....	81
Shannon Harbour.....	82
Clonmacnoise.....	83
Nest site changes .....	84
Nest box uptake .....	86
Discussion.....	87
Overview .....	87
Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown .....	88
Banagher .....	88

Tullamore .....	88
Clara .....	89
Edenderry.....	89
Portarlinton .....	89
Daingean .....	89
Clonbullogue, Cloghan and Shannonbridge.....	90
Durrow and Killeigh.....	90
Shinrone, Kinnity, and Kilcormac .....	90
Geashill.....	91
Horseleap .....	91
Cadamstown, Shannon Harbour, and Clonmacnoise.....	91
General recommendations .....	91
Data access and planning.....	91
Community engagement.....	92
Future surveys.....	93
Local recommendations.....	94
Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown .....	94
Banagher .....	94
Tullamore .....	94
Clara .....	95
Edenderry.....	95
Portarlinton .....	95
Daingean .....	96
Clonbullogue .....	96
Cloghan .....	96
Shannonbridge .....	97
Durrow .....	97
Killeigh.....	97
Shinrone .....	97
Kinnity .....	98
Kilcormac.....	98
Geashill.....	98
Horseleap .....	99
Cadamstown, Shannon Harbour, and Clonmacnoise.....	99
Acknowledgements.....	100
References.....	101

Supporting information.....	103
Suggested policy wording – County Development/Heritage Plan documents or similar .....	103
Swift nest boxes and bricks in use.....	104
BirdWatch Ireland ‘Saving Swifts’ guide.....	106
Appendices.....	107
Appendix 1: Project promotion.....	107

## Executive summary

- This survey builds on work carried out in 2017 by BirdWatch Ireland and commissioned by Offaly County Council.
- Nineteen localities (towns and villages) and 1 heritage site were surveyed this season.
- Nest sites were confirmed in 16 localities in 2023, compared to 19 localities in 2017.\*
- The overall number of Swift nests in Co. Offaly has remained stable with 162 Swift nests confirmed in 2023, compared to 165 nests recorded in 2017.
- Nest sites were recorded in 62 built structures this season, compared to 75 in 2017.
- Of the 75 structures recorded in 2017, 17 had increased their Swift colony size, 15 had remained stable, and 38 had lost some or all their colony.
- Renovation was the most frequently identified cause of nest site loss, accounting for 42% of buildings.
- Commercial and residential buildings accounted for 86% of all buildings which had lost Swift nest sites between 2017 and 2023.
- In 2023 reliance on commercial and residential buildings remains high with a combined 62% of nest sites recorded in these building types.
- Fifteen nest box projects were surveyed. Of 70 available nesting cavities, 8 (11%) were occupied by Swifts.
- Nest box projects provide an excellent opportunity to retain and grow the Co. Offaly Swift population, but more maintenance practices (luring calls, repairs) need to be put in place for these to be successful.
- This survey should be repeated within the next five years to monitor the Common Swift population dynamics in County Offaly and uptake of nest box and brick projects.
- Retention of existing nest sites, particularly in public and religious buildings and provision of new nesting space, particularly through built in nest brick projects needs to be prioritised.

\* In Horseleap, access to nest sites previously recorded in 2017 was restricted in 2023 and Swifts may still be actively nesting in this locality.

## Introduction



Figure 1. Swift in hand (Birdwatch Ireland).

The Common Swift, *Apus apus* (hereafter referred to as 'Swift'), is a migratory bird belonging to the family Apodidae. Its breeding range is widespread across North Africa, Europe, and Central Asia, while it winters in Sub-Saharan Africa (Chantler & Driessens, 1995). In Ireland, the Swift breeds throughout the country, with the exception of north-west Co. Mayo and the coastal islands (Balmer, et al., 2013; BirdLife International, 2021).

The Swift is often concentrated in areas of human occupation, where it takes advantage of the built environment for nesting purposes. This transition likely occurred due to the reduction in ancient forests, where Swifts used to nest in tree cavities (Holmgren, 2004). Outside of the nest, the Swift is rarely seen when not in

flight (Holmgren, 2004) and only occur at ground level if injured, have fallen from the nest, or are too young to fly.

The current taxonomy of the Swift places it in the Apodiformes order of birds (Aves), along with owlet-nightjars, treeswifts, and hummingbirds. They are commonly mistaken for the Barn Swallow, House Martin, or Sand Martin but do not share the same genealogical tree. Swifts have a streamlined body, long wings, and a short, forked tail. Their dark plumage and piercing screech distinguish them from other aerial insectivores. The Swift is a monomorphic species, and visual identification of the sexes is impossible (Chantler & Driessens, 1995).

In Ireland, as well as most of Europe, the breeding season begins in the last week of April or the first week of May (Tigges, 2007; Majkusiak, 2022). The nest cup is constructed with airborne materials carried by the wind, such as dried pieces of vegetation or feathers, which are then assembled with saliva (Cutcliffe, 1951; Lack & Lack, 1951). The Swift lays one clutch (not inclusive of replacement clutches laid due to egg loss) as it can raise only one brood per year (O'Connor, 1979; Thomson, et al., 1996). A completed clutch typically contains one to three eggs (O'Connor, 1979). Incubation of a single egg lasts between 19 and 21 days. Chicks fledge 36 to 49 days after hatching, and the adult swifts depart the nest within a few weeks after the last chick has fledged (Lack, 1958; Majkusiak, 2022).

The Swift is a long-lived bird, fully grown when fledging, and reaches reproductive maturity at the age of one to four (Perrins, 1971; Thomson, et al., 1996). Breeding pairs form life-long bonds and return to the same nest each year (Lack, 1956). The Swift can establish a wide range of colony sizes (Antonov & Atanasova, 2002), but solitary breeders are frequent.

Social behaviours specific to this species include "banging" and "screaming parties" (Lack & Lack, 1951; Oloś, 2017). "Banging" describes the practice of non-breeding Swifts flying up to occupied or

unoccupied Swift nest cavities and holding onto or brushing against them. A "screaming party" is the term used to describe a tightly packed formation of Swifts that flies above and near the nests' locations, emitting loud vocalizations by which the Swift is instantly recognizable. "Screaming" Swifts fly very fast, with the fastest horizontal speed of 111.6 km/h recorded during this aerial display (Henningsson, et al., 2010).

For the Swifts that breed in Ireland, conservation is a multi-faceted and complex issue. The Swift is a migratory bird and spends most of the year outside of Ireland. The issues that Swifts encounter during migration and at the wintering sites are likely to affect both survival rates and fitness (Newton, 2007; Boano, et al., 2020). Nesting opportunities have decreased with the advent of modern modifications to the built environment, which, among other things, eliminate the gaps and crevices favoured by Swifts (Huxley, 2017). In addition, older buildings such as stone houses, churches, or clock towers are frequently either renovated or demolished (Whelan, et al., 2019). The food supply of the Swift has also been decreasing in recent decades. Studies across Europe indicate that insect populations are in sharp decline, and this is correlated with a decrease in numbers in many insectivorous bird species (Møller, 2020).

The newly published 2021 Red List for Europe changed the conservation status of the Swift from "Least Concern" to "Near Threatened" considering recent changes in the European population of the species (BirdLife International, 2021). According to the latest BoCCI assessment, the breeding population of the Swift in Ireland is in decline. The current trend places the Swift on the Red List of Conservation Concern (Gilbert, et al., 2021). This represents a change from the previous two BoCCI reports, which placed the Swift on the Amber List of Conservation Concern (Lynas, et al., 2007; Colhoun & Cummins, 2013). The decline in the Swift population in Ireland has led to the creation of several community-led projects such as the Northern Ireland Swift Group, Swift Conservation Ireland, Dublin Swift Conservation Group, and community led projects facilitated by BirdWatch Ireland (Huxley, 2017; Swift Conservation Ireland, 2020, Whelan et al. 2019). All four groups work to preserve the species by setting up Swift nest box projects, education, and surveying.

Determining the population of the Swift and confirming the number of nests is difficult to achieve for multiple reasons. Firstly, as the Swift nests almost exclusively in urban areas, there are many challenges in accessing the optimal survey locations. Secondly, the window of opportunity is very narrow. The Swift returns to the nests with high frequency only during the chick rearing period that lasts on average 38-42 days (Majkusiak, 2022). Another layer of complexity in the survey is the fact that there are periods of the day when adult Swifts are more active: 4.30 am to 6 am, 9 am-12 pm, and 7 pm to 10.30 pm. The frequency of nest visits is also highly dependent on the weather conditions. Sunny, calm, and dry days are preferable, while days of strong wind, low temperatures, and high rainfall should be avoided.

The 2023 County Offaly Swift Survey aims to quantify the level of Swift nesting activity across the county and measure any changes in the Swift population since the initial County Offaly Swift survey conducted in 2017 (Krastev et al, 2017). The comparison between the results of both surveys will inform the conservation efforts in the county and provide a comprehensive analysis of issues that lead to the loss of nests. All locations with confirmed nests in 2017 were revisited in 2023, and any changes were assessed for the number of nests. If no activity was recorded, the cause of the nest loss was determined where possible.

## Project aim and objectives

### Aim:

To undertake a detailed re-survey of Swifts in Co. Offaly, establishing:

- a baseline for the distribution of nesting Swifts in the county
- changes in population size and distribution between 2023 and the initial 2017 breeding Swift survey.

The data collected will inform planners and decision makers to effectively manage Swifts at site level, helping to conserve this important part of Co. Offaly's urban and natural heritage.

### Objectives:

- Carry out a survey of Swifts in Co. Offaly to locate nesting colonies.
- Engage volunteers, community groups and local people to encourage the development of local Swift projects in Co. Offaly, through training and advice.
- Assess any changes in Swift breeding population over the last six years.

## Methodology

### Swift surveying

Towns and villages (localities) were identified for Swift fieldwork prior to the season. Previous fieldwork efforts by BirdWatch Ireland were used to identify suitable localities for survey. Towns, villages, and heritage sites surveyed in 2017 were revisited this season. Information provided by members of the public was also used to identify survey sites.

During the field season, the number of return visits was determined by (i) the scale of Swift activity, (ii) the size of the locality, and (iii) how widely the Swift colony was dispersed. The more dispersed the Swift colony, the more time was typically required to accurately survey the town or village.

*Table 1. Summary of the number of visits to each survey towns and villages.*

No.	Town/village	Number of visits
1	Birr	6
2	Banagher	6
3	Tullamore	5
4	Clara	2
5	Edenderry	4
6	Portarlinton	2



7	Daingean	4
8	Cloghan	2
9	Clonbullogue	1
10	Shannonbridge	3
11	Kilcormac	2
12	Killeigh	1
13	Durrow	2
14	Shinrone	4
15	Geashill	2
16	Kinnity	1
17	Cadamstown	1
18	Shannon Harbour	2
19	Horseleap	1
20	Clonmacnoise	2

The fieldwork season ran from the 7<sup>th</sup> of June to the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 2023. Survey visits were carried out during periods of fine to moderate weather to increase chances of encountering Swifts. Surveying was mainly carried out between the hours of 08:30 to 13:00, and 18:00 to 22:30, in line with daily peak Swift activity.

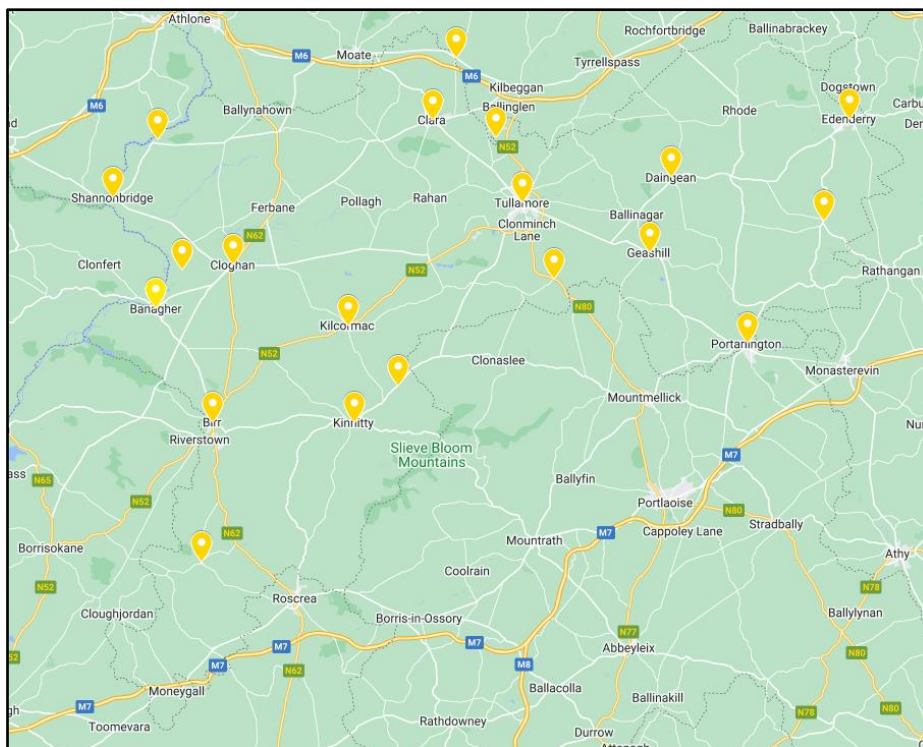


Figure 2. Localities selected for 2023 Swift Survey (Google Maps).

Nest site locations were identified by careful observation of aerial and vocal displays of breeding birds. Surveyors specifically searched for low-flying Swifts, which may have been returning to the nest, or if calling (screaming), searching for nest sites. These latter screaming parties can indicate the presence of Swift nest sites nearby, normally within a few hundred meters.

In addition, special attention was paid to the most suitable buildings. These are typically older buildings which have not been recently renovated, or buildings containing Swift nest bricks or boxes.

When a Swift nest site was identified, a photograph was taken of the building and the location of the nest site was recorded using the edit mode in the mobile camera photo app. Each photo was uploaded on the ArcGIS Survey123 mobile app. Other information collected and uploaded to the app included the number of Swifts present, building type, site of nest entrance, number of nests present, and the orientation of the nest site.

Using Microsoft Excel, arrows were added to each photograph marking the nest site location, and each photograph was numbered. All confirmed nest sites are included in the Site Based Results section of this report.

### *Nest box projects*

Nest box projects were identified by Co. Offaly's Biodiversity Officer and members of the public.

*Table 2. List of Swift nest box projects identified for survey prior to the 2023 Co. Offaly Swift Survey.*

No.	Locality	Location
1	Birr	Birr Civic Offices
2	Banagher	St. Rynagh's National School
3	Banagher	Banagher Further Education and Training Centre (Main Street)
4	Banagher	Banagher Further Education and Training Centre (Cuba Avenue)
5	Banagher	Area 51, Main Street
6	Banagher	Feeney's Shop, Main Street
7	Banagher	Banagher Library, Curraghavarna and Portavolla
8	Banagher	Tourism Office, Main Street
9	Tullamore	Esker Arts Centre, Tullamore
10	Tullamore	Sacred Heart Secondary School, Tullamore
11	Edenderry	St. Patrick's Primary School, Gilroy Avenue
12	Daingean	Community Childcare Services
13	Daingean	'Leoville House', 10 Main Street
14	Shinrone	McNamaras pub, Main Street
15	Geashill	Geashill National School
16	Geashill	Private house, opposite 'The High Chapparral' pub
17	Kilcormac	House next to the Convent of Mercy

### *Citizen Science*

One of the primary goals of the project is to engage local communities with their Swift populations through surveying, fostering a network of Swift enthusiasts and encouraging the development of Swift conservation projects in towns and villages across the county.

Several known Swift enthusiasts, local birdwatchers and BirdWatch Ireland volunteers were contacted via email and invited to help with survey work in their local area, with Co. Offalys Biodiversity Officer also providing invaluable help in this regard.

Online requests were also made for the public to provide information on Swift nest site locations. All e-mail and social media records received from the public were answered and contributors thanked for their input. A high proportion of records submitted by the public were in relation to Swallows and House Martins, species which are commonly confused with Swifts. Nonetheless each contributor was thanked and encouraged to participate in the future.

## Results

A total of 20 localities in Co. Offaly were surveyed for this project. Unfortunately, some of the nest locations identified in 2017 in Horseleap could not be accessed this season, and thus all Swift nest sites could not be confirmed as active or inactive in this town. Of the remaining 19 locations surveyed, Swift nest sites were confirmed in sixteen.

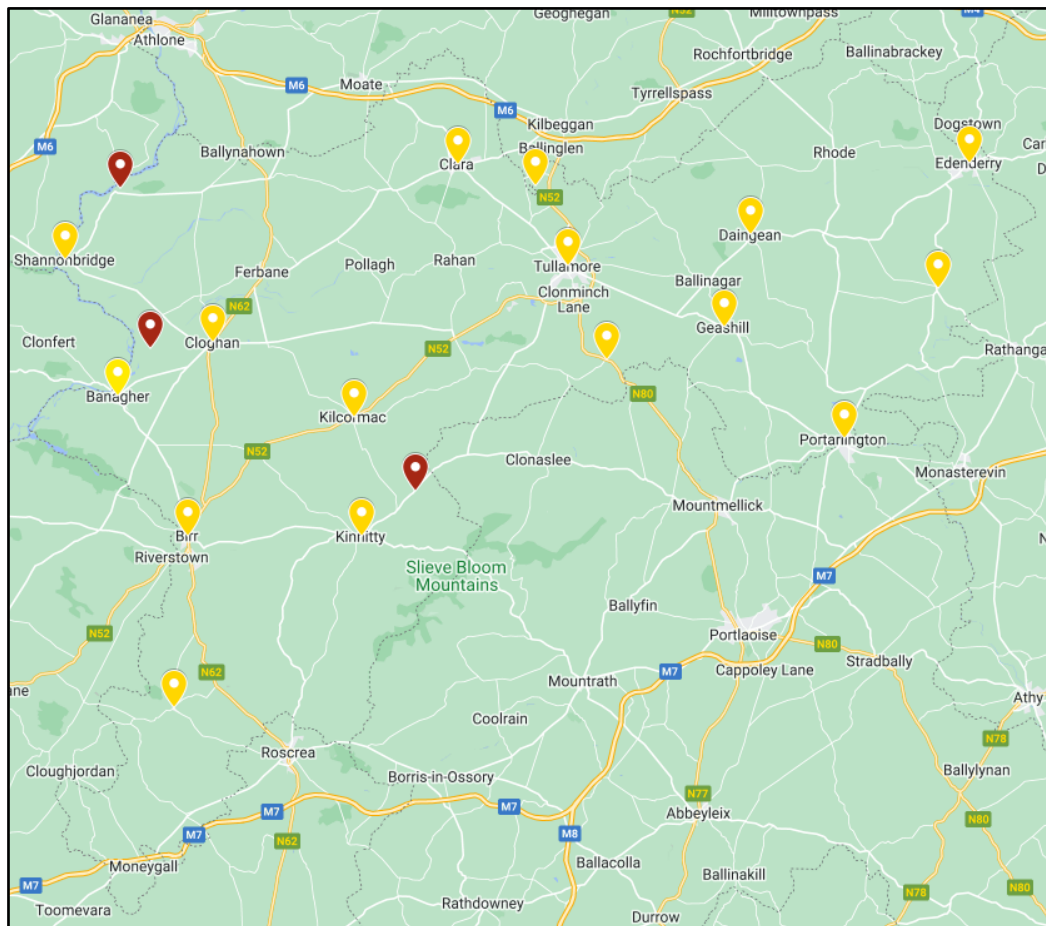


Figure 3. Localities surveyed with confirmed nest sites (red) and no confirmed nest sites (yellow) in Co. Offaly.

*\*Horseleap was partially surveyed but is not included on the map as nest sites could not be confirmed as active or inactive due to difficulties with access.*

A maximum count of 207 Swifts was recorded (max. peak count of all areas combined) and 162 nests were confirmed at these localities. The overall results of the Co. Offaly Swift Survey 2023 are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Summary information for all towns, villages and heritage sites surveyed during 2023 Offaly County Swift Survey.

No.	Town/ village/ heritage site	Swifts present	Peak number of Swifts	Nests present	No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
1	Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown	Yes	25	Yes	23	32	+9
2	Banagher	Yes	20	Yes	32	30	-2
3	Tullamore	Yes	21	Yes	30	25	-5
4	Clara	Yes	16	Yes	9	15	+6
5	Edenderry	Yes	12	Yes	24	15	-9
6	Portarlinton	Yes	20	Yes	5	10	+5
7	Daingean	Yes	8	Yes	5	8	+3
8	Clonbullogue	Yes	14	Yes	5	7	+2
9	Cloghan	Yes	13	Yes	4	7	+3
10	Shannonbridge	Yes	13	Yes	4	5	+1
11	Durrow	Yes	18	Yes	4	2	-2
12	Killeigh	Yes	4	Yes	2	2	0
13	Shinrone	Yes	8	Yes	6	1	-5
14	Kinnity	Yes	3	Yes	3	1	-2
15	Kilcormac	Yes	4	Yes	2	1	-1
16	Geashill	Yes	4	Yes	0	1	+1
17	Horseleap	Yes	4	No	3	N/C*	N/C*
18	Cadamstown	No	0	No	1	0	-1
19	Shannon Harbour	No	0	No	2	0	-2
20	Clonmacnoise	No	0	No	1	0	-1
<b>Total</b>			<b>207</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>162</b>	

\*N/C = not confirmed.

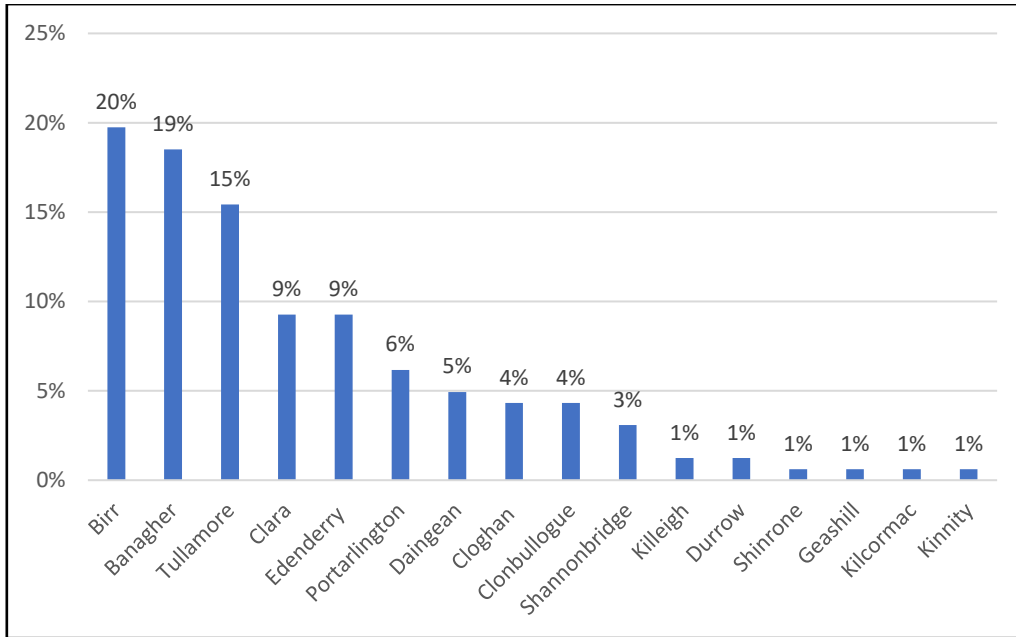


Figure 4. Percentage of Swift nests found in each locality in Co. Offaly.

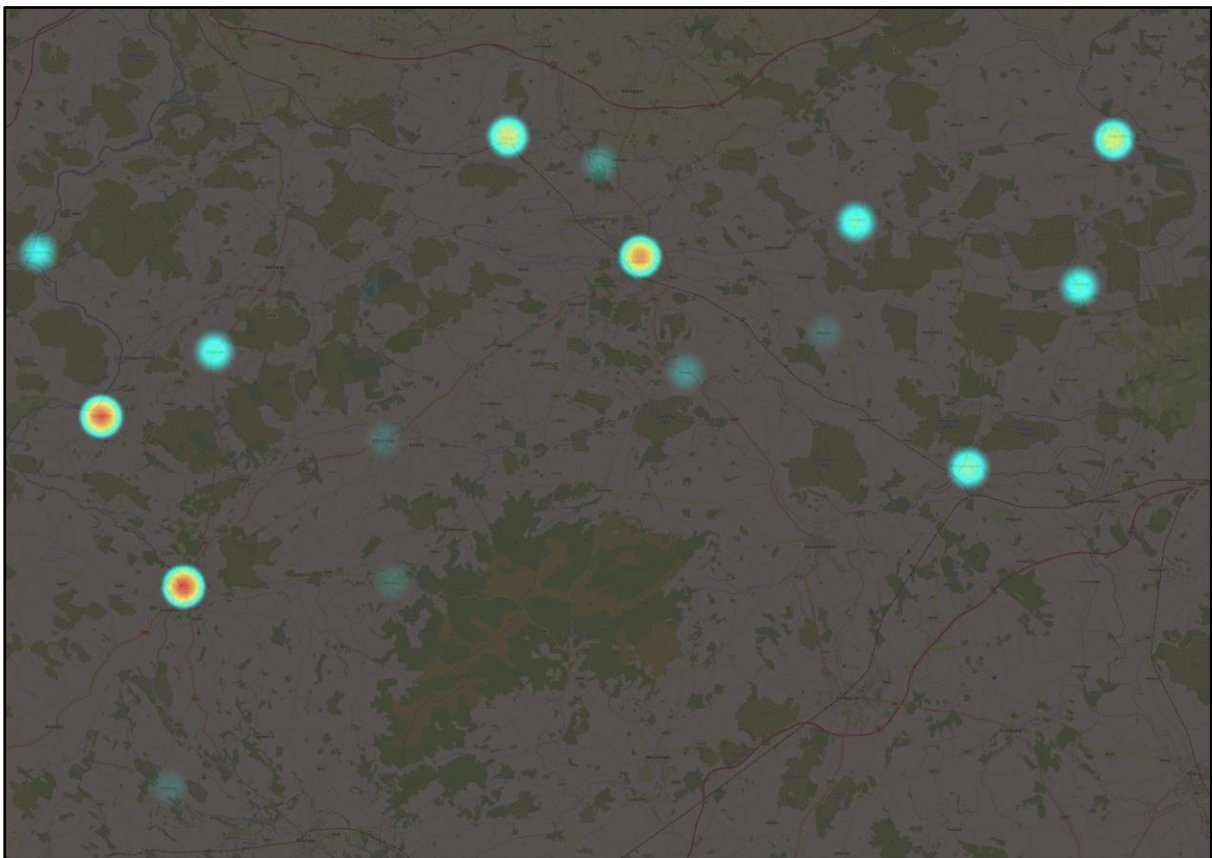


Figure 5. Heat map of confirmed Swift nest locations in Co. Offaly – warm colours showing areas of high nest density.

## Building type distribution

Swift nest sites were recorded in 62 built structures. Of the 162 nests recorded, 62% were in commercial (47 nests) and residential properties (53 nests). The remaining 38% of nests were in public (34 nests), religious (26 nests), and 'other' buildings (2 nests).

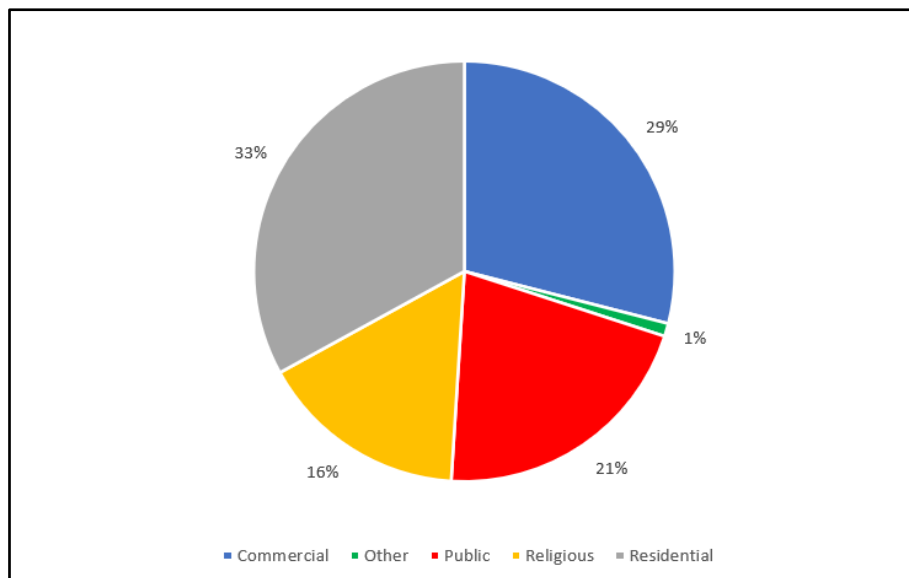


Figure 6. The percentage of Swift nests in each building type across Co. Offaly.

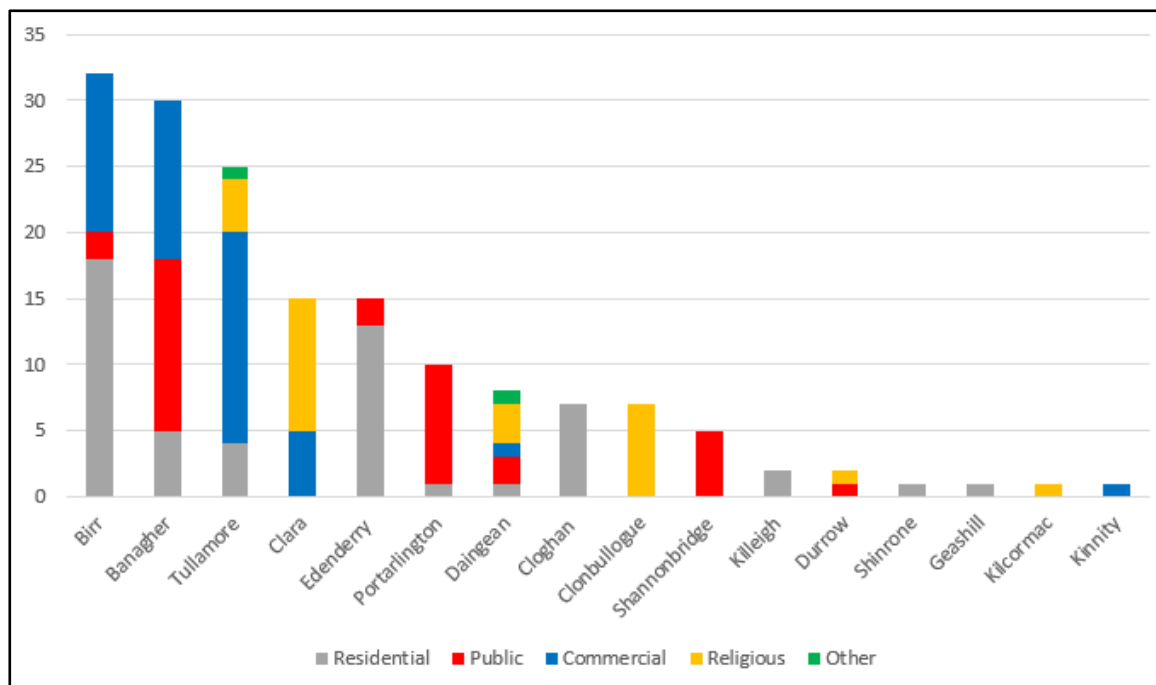


Figure 7. Number of nests in relation to building type and locality in Co. Offaly.

## Nest orientation

The orientation or aspect of nest sites was collected this season. East, north and south, respectively, were the predominant directions nests were found to be orientated toward.

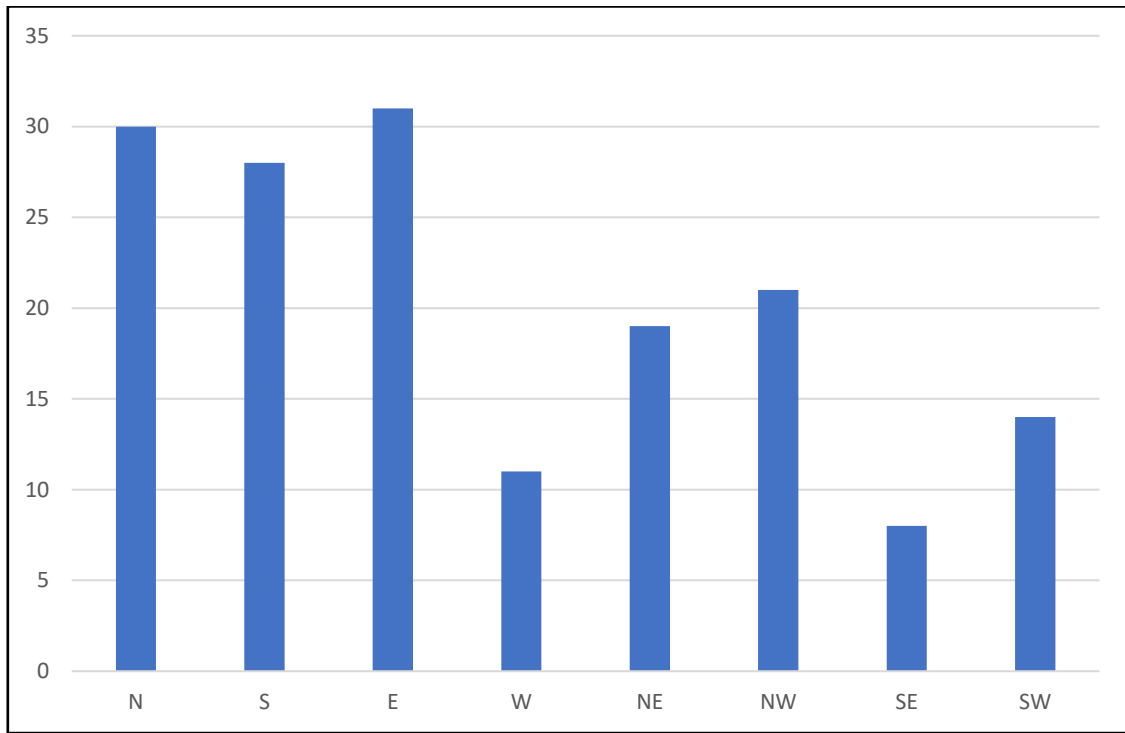


Figure 8. The aspect or orientation of confirmed Swift nest sites in Co. Offaly.

## Site based results

Site based results are presented below, from the localities with the highest number of confirmed breeding pairs of Swifts, to the lowest.

### Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown

Birr and its environs comprise the third largest town in Co. Offaly, with a population of 4,726 as of the 2022 census. Between 2016 and 2022, the population rose by 1.3%. It is on the Co. Tipperary and Co. Offaly border and is situated close to the meeting of the Camcor and Little Brosna rivers.

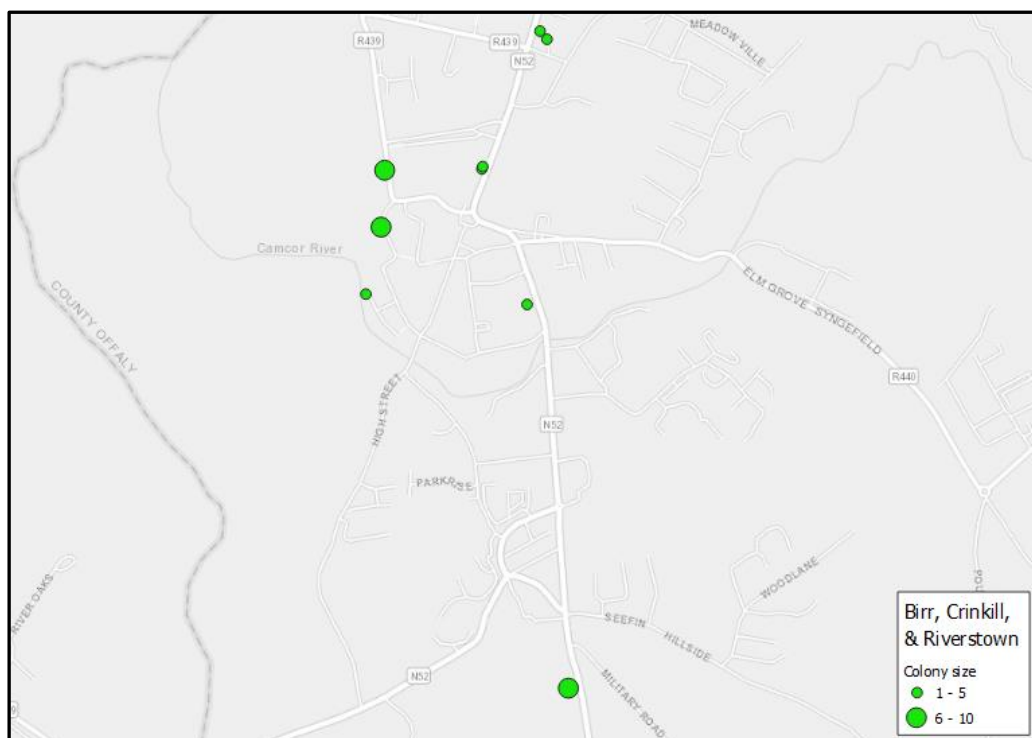


Figure 9. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown.

In 2017, 23 Swift nests were confirmed in Birr and its environs. This has increased to 32 nests as of the 2023 breeding season.

Table 4. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
23	32	+9

Table 5. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	12
Other	0
Public	2
Religious	0
Residential	18



Table 6. Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1b	29 Eden Road	1	0	Vegetation	Residential
2a-2e	Outer Wall of Birr Castle on R439	5	6		Residential
3a-3b	Birr Castle entrance, William's Street	1	1		Residential
4a-4d	Birr Castle wall, William's Street (opposite Marian Hall)	3	5		Residential
5a-5b	The Maltings Restaurant, Castle Street	4	0	Renovations	Commercial
6a-6b	Main Street	1	0		Commercial
7a-7b	Emmet Street	1	3		Residential
8a-8b	Dooly's Hotel	1	0		Commercial
9a-9b	John's Mall, Townparks	1	0		Residential
10a-10c	Old train station, (Hollywoods Garage), Roscrea Road	4	10		Commercial
11a-11b	Birr Civic Offices	2	2		Public
12a-12b	Warehouse adjacent to Riverside Apartments, Newbridge Street	2	0		Commercial
<b>New locations</b>					
13	The Maltings B&B, Castle Street		2		Commercial
14	The Crescent, Townparks		2		Residential
15	The Crescent, Townparks		1		Residential



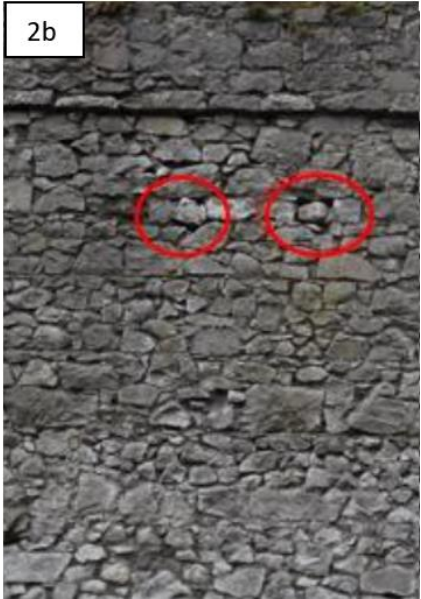
2017



2023



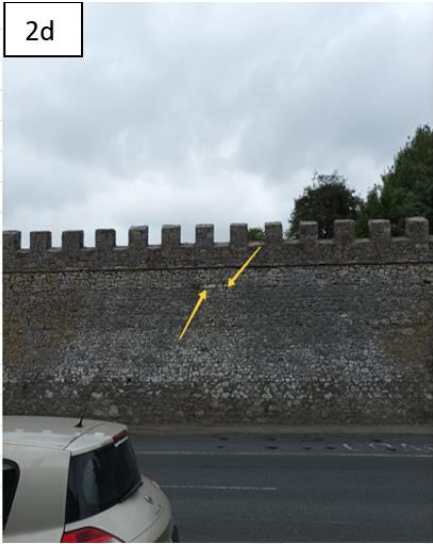
2017



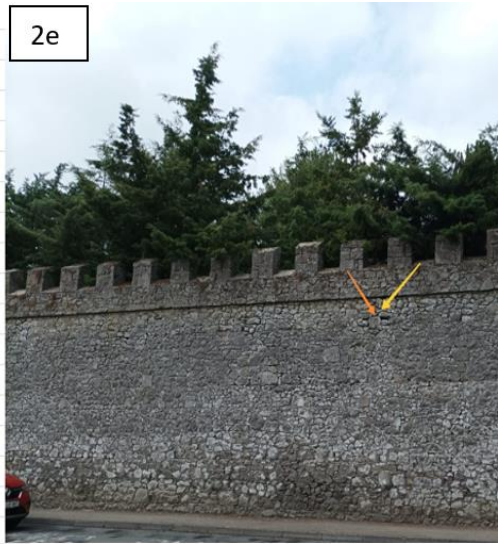
2017



2023



2023

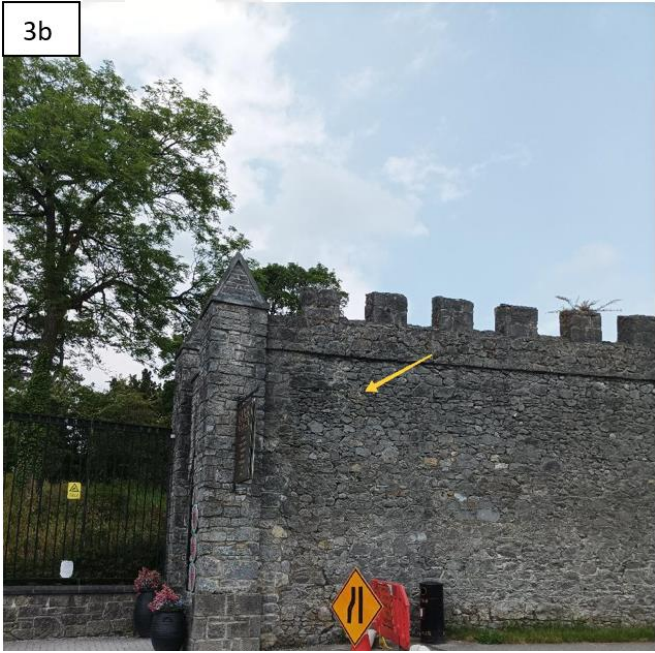


2023



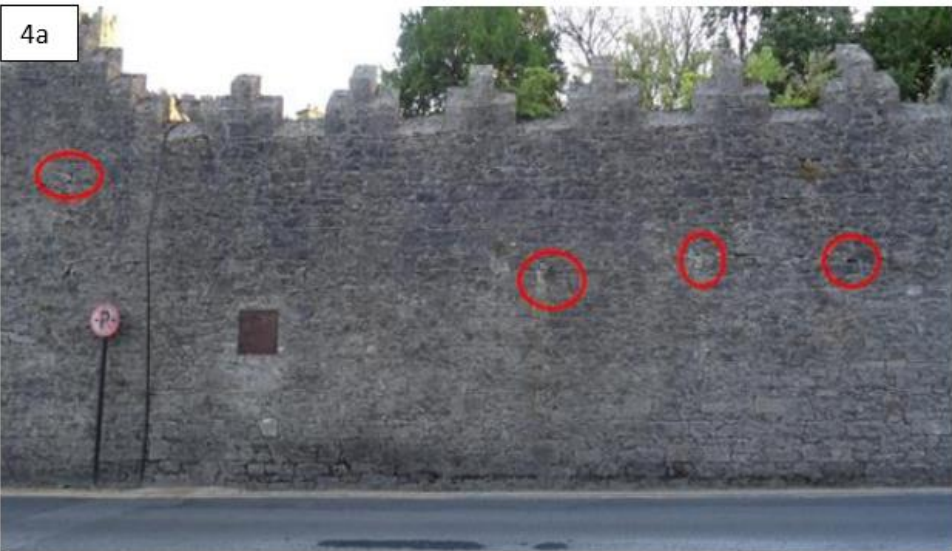
2017

3b

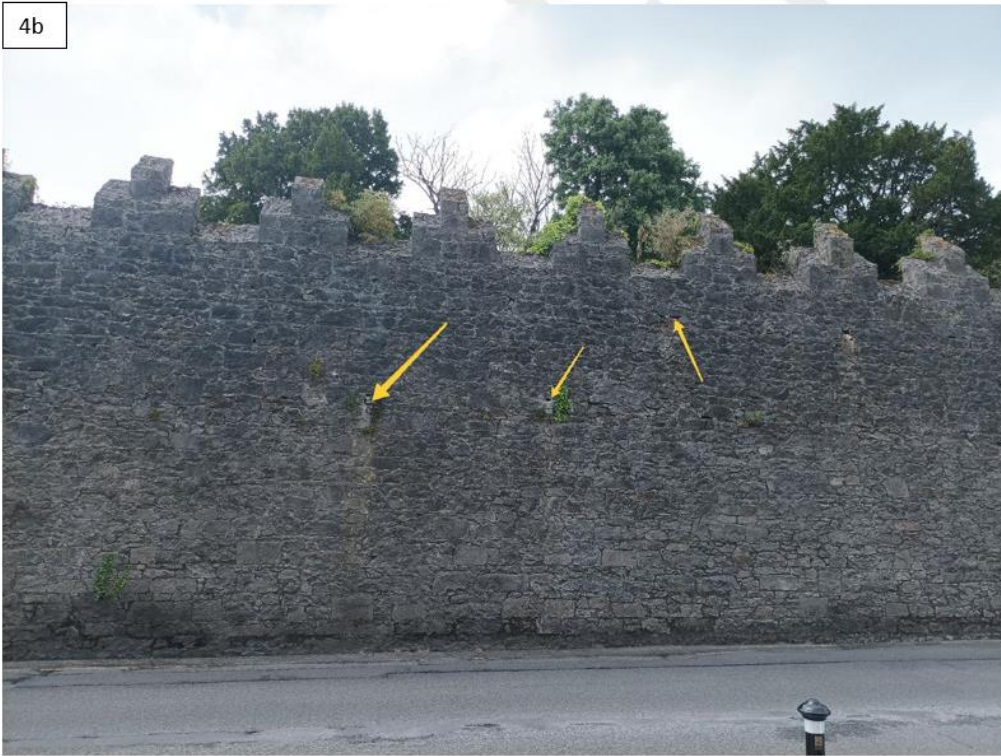


2023

4a



2017



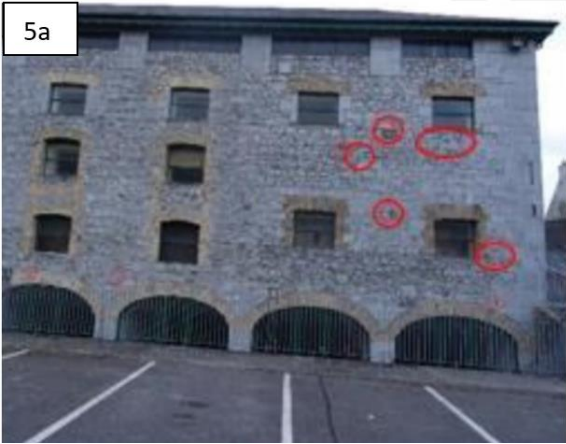
2023



2023



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



8a

2017



8b

2023



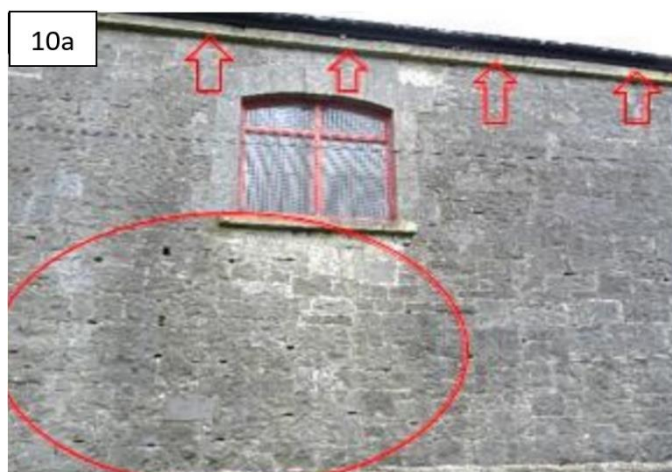
9a

2017



9b

2023



10a

2017



12a



2017

12b



2023

13



2023

14



2023

15



2023



Table 7. Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown Swift nest box project locations and colony numbers.

Photo no.	Swift box projects	Cavities	No. occupied	Building type	Caller system?	Caller system on?
16	Birr Civic Offices	9	0	Public	No	-



2023

Banagher

Banagher is situated on the banks of the River Shannon, on the border of Co. Offaly and Co. Galway. As of the 2022 census, Banagher had a population of 1,907, an increase of 1.4% since the 2016 national census.

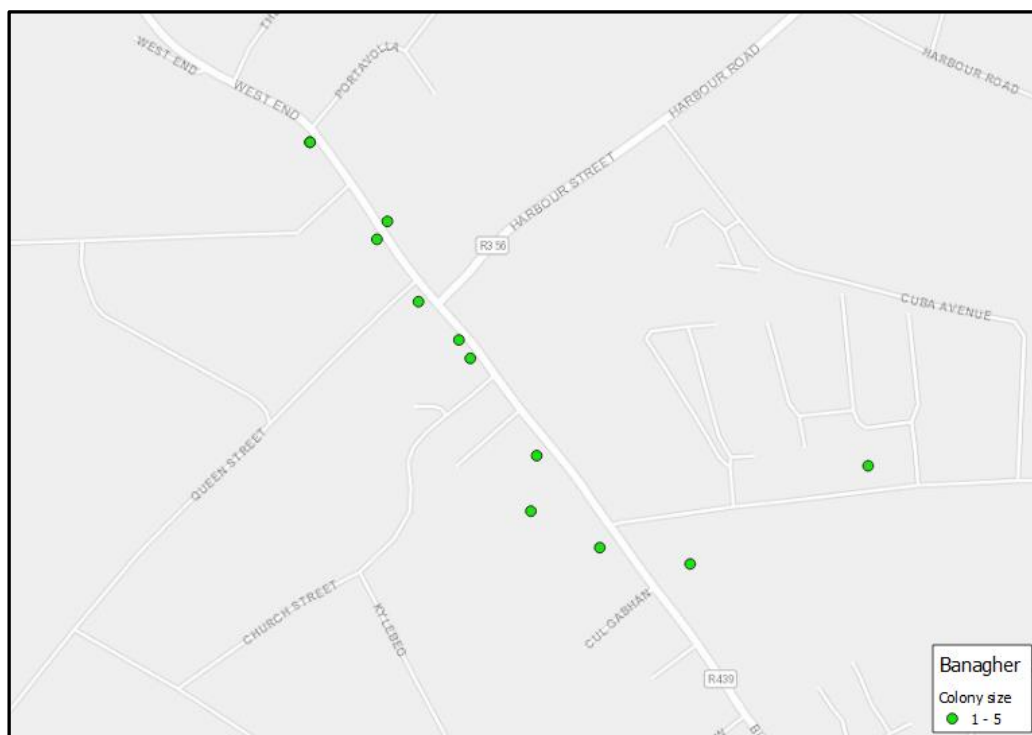


Figure 10. Map showing location of confirmed nest sites in Banagher.

In 2017, 32 Swift nests were confirmed in Banagher. This has fallen very slightly to 30 nests as of the 2023 breeding season.

However, it was not possible to access one previously surveyed site (St. Helen's Court) which in 2017 supported two Swift nests. Therefore the 2023 count may be slightly underestimated.

Table 8. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Banagher in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
32	30	-2*

\*2023 figure may be underestimated. See above.

The 30 nests confirmed this season in Banagher were recorded in three different building type categories.

Table 9. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Banagher by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	12
Other	0
Public	13
Religious	0
Residential	5

Table 10. Banagher confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1b	Main Street (start of Portavolla)	1	0	Renovation	Residential
2a-2b	Quigley's, Main Street	2	2		Commercial
3a-3b	Quigley's, Main Street (back)	5	4		Commercial
4a-4b	Main Street, next to the Post Office	2	1		Residential
5a-5b	Main Street, opposite the Post Office	1	2		Residential
6a-6b	Vincent's, Main Street	1	0	Renovation	Commercial
7a-7b	Old M&S Country Garden, Main Street	1	1		Commercial
8a-8b	Home Needs Ladies Fashion, Main Street	1	0		Commercial
9a-9b	Feeney's Shop, Main Street	1	1		Commercial
10a-10b	Main Street, beside 'Gentlemen's Hairdressing'	1	2		Residential
11a-11b	Main Street, opposite St. Helen's Court	1	0	Renovation	Residential
12a-12d	Former Bank of Ireland, Main Street	4	4		Commercial
13a-13b	La Sainte Union Secondary School, Main Street	5	4		Public
14a-14b	Community Centre, Cuba Avenue	1	2		Public
15a-15b	St. Helen's Court (back), Main Street	2	N/C*	No access	Residential

\*N/C = not confirmed.

Banagher Further Education and Training Centre had 2 Swift nests in nest boxes confirmed in 2017. By 2023, this has increased to 4 nesting pairs in boxes. This project is listed under nest box schemes below.



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



12c

2017



12d

2023



13a

2017



13b

2023



14a

2017



14b

2023



2017



2023

Table 11. Banagher Swift nest box project locations and colony numbers.

Photo no.	Swift box projects	Cavities	No. occupied 2017	No. occupied 2023	Building type	Caller system?	Caller system on?
16	St. Rynagh's National School	6	N/A	3	Public	No	-
17a-17b	Banagher Further Education and Training Centre (Main Street)	8	2	4	Public	Yes	Yes
18	Banagher Further Education and Training Centre (Cuba Avenue)	3	N/A	0	Public	No	-
19	Area 51, Main Street	3	N/A	0	Commercial	No	-
20	Feeney's Shop, Main Street	3	N/A	0	Commercial	No	-
21	Banagher Library, Curraghavarna and Portavolla	3	N/A	0	Public	No	-
22	Tourism Office, Main Street	6	N/A	0	Public	Yes	No





16

2023



17a

2017



17b

2023



18

2023



19

2023



20

2023



21

2023



22

2023

## Tullamore

Tullamore is both the county town and the largest town in Co. Offaly and lies on the Grand Canal. As of the 2022 national census it has a population of 15,598 an increase of 1.1% since the 2016 national census.

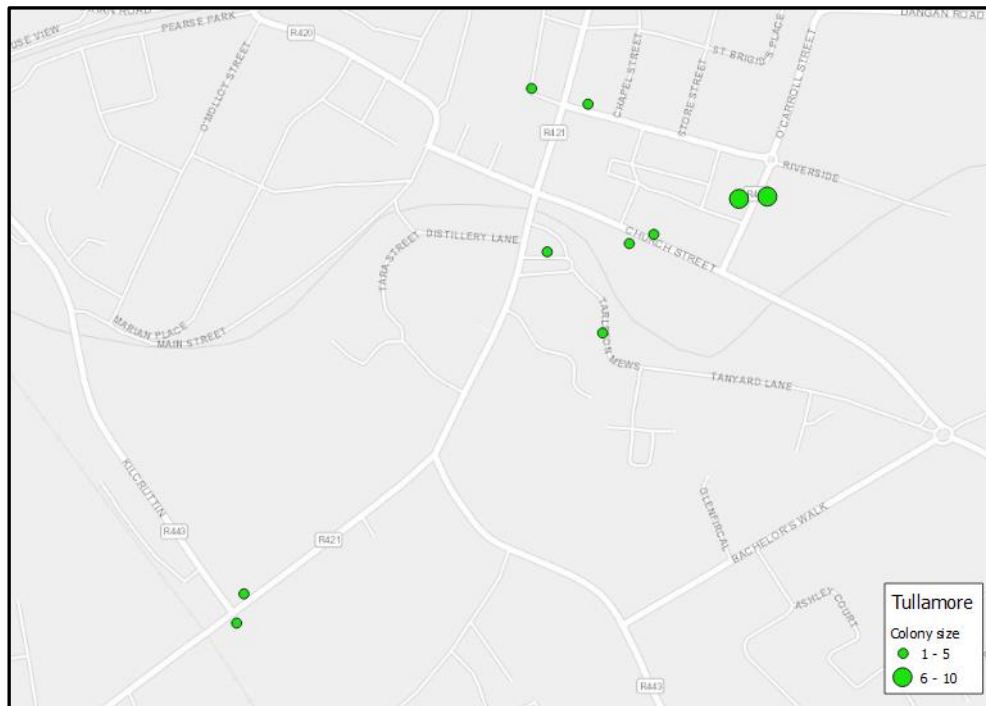


Figure 11. Map showing location of confirmed nest sites in Tullamore.

In 2017, 30 Swift nests were confirmed in Tullamore. This has fallen slightly to 25 nests as of the 2023 breeding season.

Table 12. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Tullamore in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
30	25	-5

Nests were recorded in four categories of building type.

Table 13. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Tullamore by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	16
Other	1
Public	0
Religious	4
Residential	4

Table 14. Tullamore confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1b	Offaly Street, Former TEXAS Department Store	2	0	Derelict	Other
2a-2b	High Street, Former Hostel Mercy Nuns	1	0	Renovation	Residential
3a-3b	Eddie Rockets, O'Connor Square	2	2		Commercial
4	Oisín O Sullivan's Furniture, Tanyard	1	0	Renovation	Commercial
5a-5b	Flynn's Sandwich Bar & Bakery, O'Carroll Street	4	6		Commercial
6a-6b	O'Carroll Street	7	6		Commercial
7a-7b	The Lawn, Cormac Street	2	1		Residential
8a-8b	Eclipse Hair Salon, Harbour Street	1	1		Commercial
9a-9b	10 – 11 Church Street	7	0	Renovation	Residential
10a-10b	Tullamore Methodist Church, Church Street	2	4		Religious
11	Lock House View	1	N/C		Residential
<b>New locations</b>					
12	Building next to Newtown Bar, Church Street		3		Residential
13	Lumley and Sons, Bridge Lane		1		Commercial
14	Charleville Parade, Cormac Street		1		Residential
15	Texas Department Store, warehouse to the south		1		Other



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017



2023



2017

5a



2017

5b



2023

6a



2017

6b



2023

7a



2017

7b



2023



8a

2017



8b

2017



9a

2017



9b

2023

10a



2017

10b



2023

11



2017



12



2023

13



2023

14



2023



2023

Clara

Clara is a small town on the River Brosna, near the Co. Westmeath border. As of 2022, Clara has a population of 3,403, a 0.3% increase compared to the 2016 census.

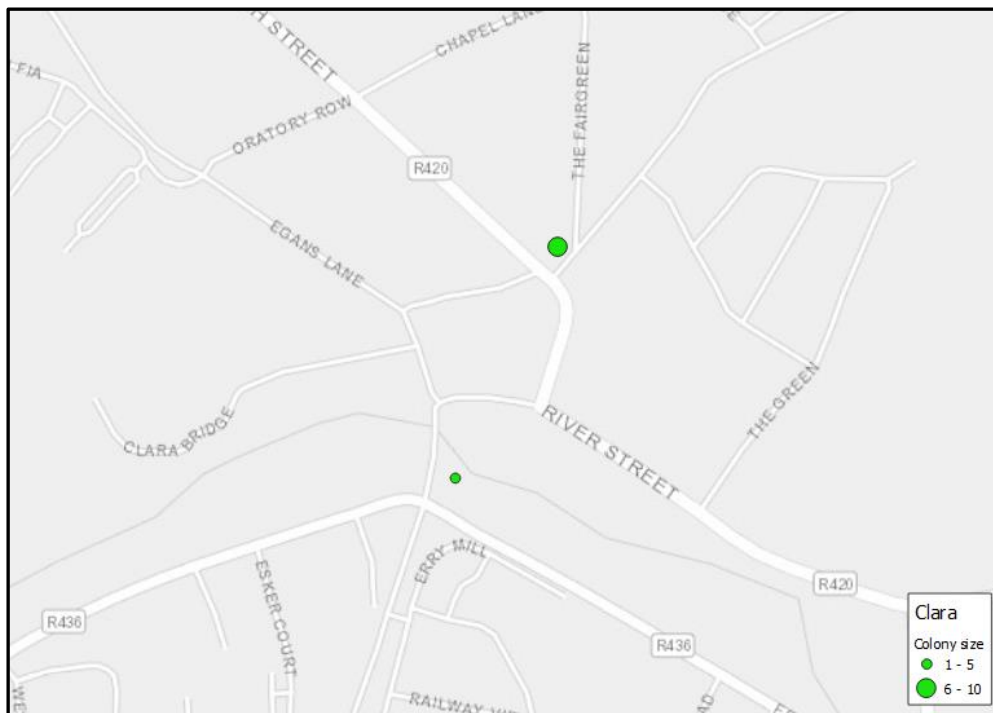


Figure 12. Map showing location of confirmed nest sites in Clara.

In 2017, nine Swift nests were confirmed in Clara. This has increased to 15 nests as of the 2023 breeding season.

Table 15. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Clara in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
9	15	+6

Nests were recorded in commercial and religious buildings.

Table 16. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Clara by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	5
Other	0
Public	0
Religious	10
Residential	0

Table 17. Clara confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1d	St Brigid's Church of Ireland, Church Street	5	10		Religious
2	Erry Mill, Frederick Street	4	0	Dereliction	Commercial
<b>New locations</b>					
3	Shed in front of Erry Mill, Frederick Street		5		Commercial



2017



2023



1c

2023



1d

2023



2a

2017



2b

2023



3a

2023



3b

2023

## Edenderry

Edenderry is a mid-sized town just north of the Grand Canal and is situated close to the Co. Offaly borders with Westmeath, Meath, and Kildare. As of the 2022 census, it had a population of 7,888 an increase of 1.2% since the 2016 census.

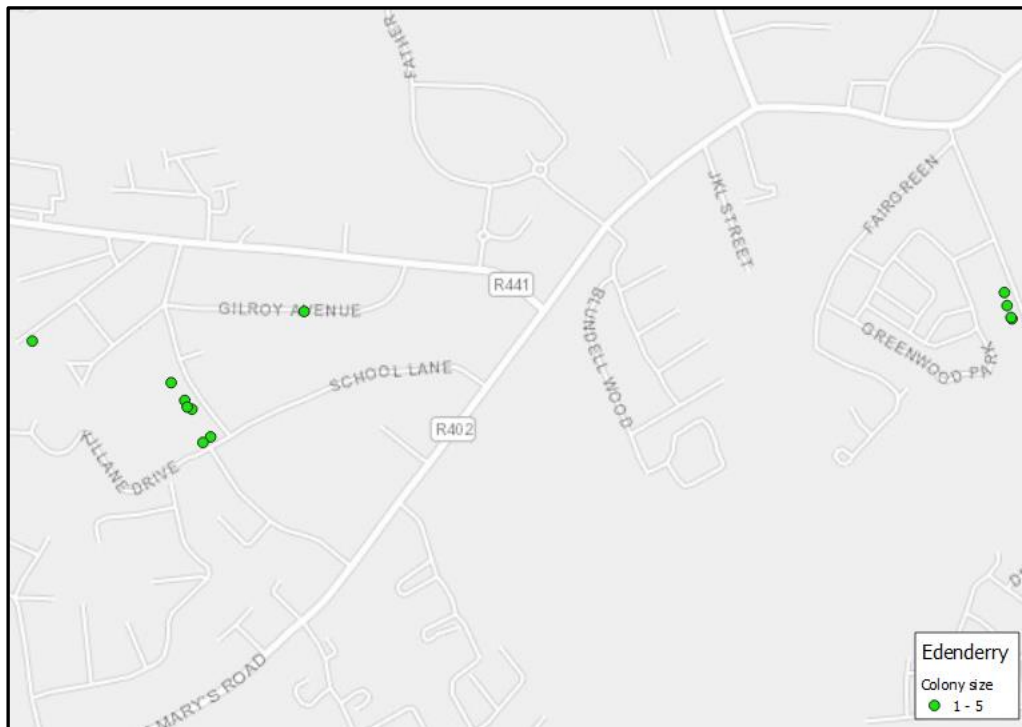


Figure 13. Map showing locations of confirmed nest sites in Edenderry.

In 2017, 24 Swift nests were confirmed in Edenderry. This has fallen to 15 nests as of the 2023 breeding season.

Table 18. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Edenderry in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
24	15	-9

Most nests were found in residential buildings with the remainder in a single public building.

Table 19. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Edenderry by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	0
Other	0
Public	2
Religious	0
Residential	13

Table 20. Edenderry confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1b	61 Assumption Rd.	1	1		Residential
2a-2b	15 St. Colmcille's Road	1	0	Renovation	Residential
3a-3b	8 St Patrick's Road	1	0	Renovation	Residential
4a-4c	33 Castlevew Park	2	2		Residential
5a-5b	35 Castlevew Park	3	1		Residential
6a-6b	39 Castlevew Park	1	1		Residential
7a-7d	25 School Lane	2	1	Renovation	Residential
8a-8b	28 School Lane	1	1		Residential
9a-9b	188 Churchview Heights	4	0	Renovation	Residential
10a-10c	St. Patrick's Primary School, Gilroy Avenue	2	2		Public
11a-11b	Father Paul Murphy Street	1	0		Residential
12a-12b	45 Father Paul Murphy Street	2	1	Renovation	Residential
13a-13b	47 Father Paul Murphy Street	2	1		Residential
<b>New locations</b>					
14	48 Father Paul Murphy Street		2		Residential
15	49 Father Paul Murphy Street		1		Residential
16	32 Castlevew Park		1		Residential



2017



2023



2a

2017



2b

2023



3a

2017



3b

2023



4a

2017



4b

2023



4c

2023



5a

2017



5b

2023 \*no.35 is on the right



6a

2017



6b

2023





7a

2017



7b

2023



7c

2017



7d

2023



8a

2017



8b

2023

9a



2017

9b



2023

10a



2017

10b



2023



10c

2023



11a

2017



11b

2023



12a

2017



12b

2023



2017



2023



2023



2023



**2023**

\*No. 32 is on the left.

In 2017, two pairs of Swifts nested in a double cavity nest box at St. Patrick’s Primary School. In 2023, two pairs of Swifts were recorded nesting at the school, with one pair nesting in a nest box, and one pair nesting under the school roof. Photos of this nest box scheme are included above (photos 10a-10c).

*Table 21. Edenderry Swift nest box project locations and colony numbers.*

Photo no.	Swift box projects	Cavities	No. occupied	Building type	Caller system?	Caller system on?
10a-10c	St. Patrick’s Primary School, Gilroy Avenue	6	1	Public	No	-

## Portarlington

Portarlington is a mid-sized town which straddles the Offaly and Laois border, with the majority of the town located within Co. Laois. Overall, it has a population of 9,288 as of the 2022 census, an increase of 1.8% since the 2016 census. The River Barrow runs through Portarlington.

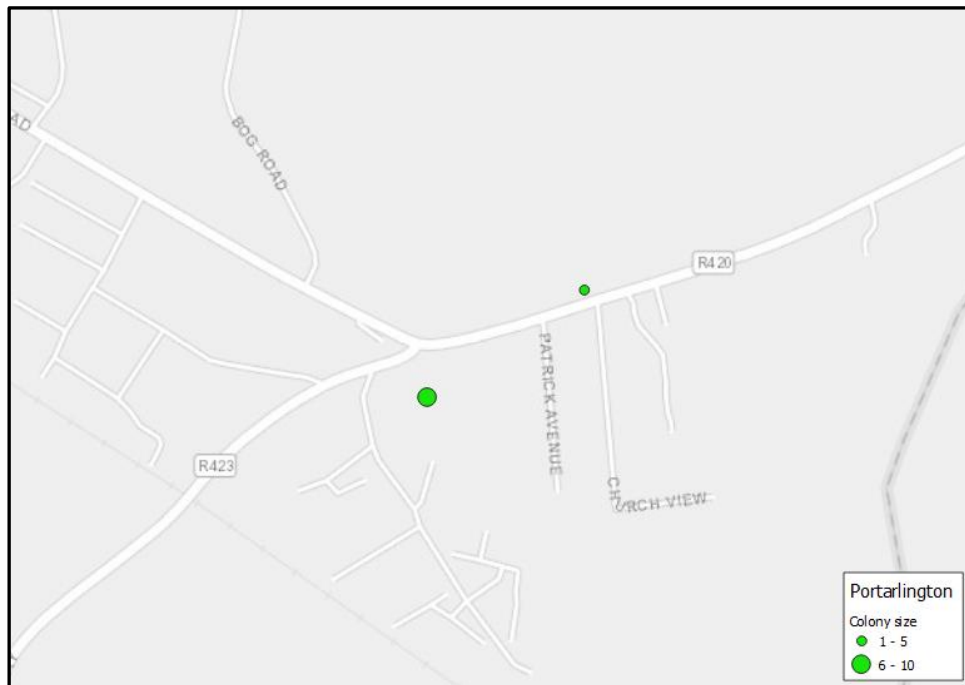


Figure 14. Map showing location of confirmed nest sites in Portarlington.

In 2017, five Swift nests were confirmed in the Co. Offaly portion of Portarlington. This has doubled to 10 nests as of the 2023 breeding season.

Table 22. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Portarlington in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
5	10	+5

Nine of the nests are in a public building with the final nest in a residential property.

Table 23. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Portarlington by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	0
Other	0
Public	9
Religious	0
Residential	1

Table 24. Portarlinton confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1	Patrick Street, third building beside the Hawthorn Bar	1	1		Residential
2	St. Michael's National School, Patrick Street	4	9		Public



2017



2023



2017

2b



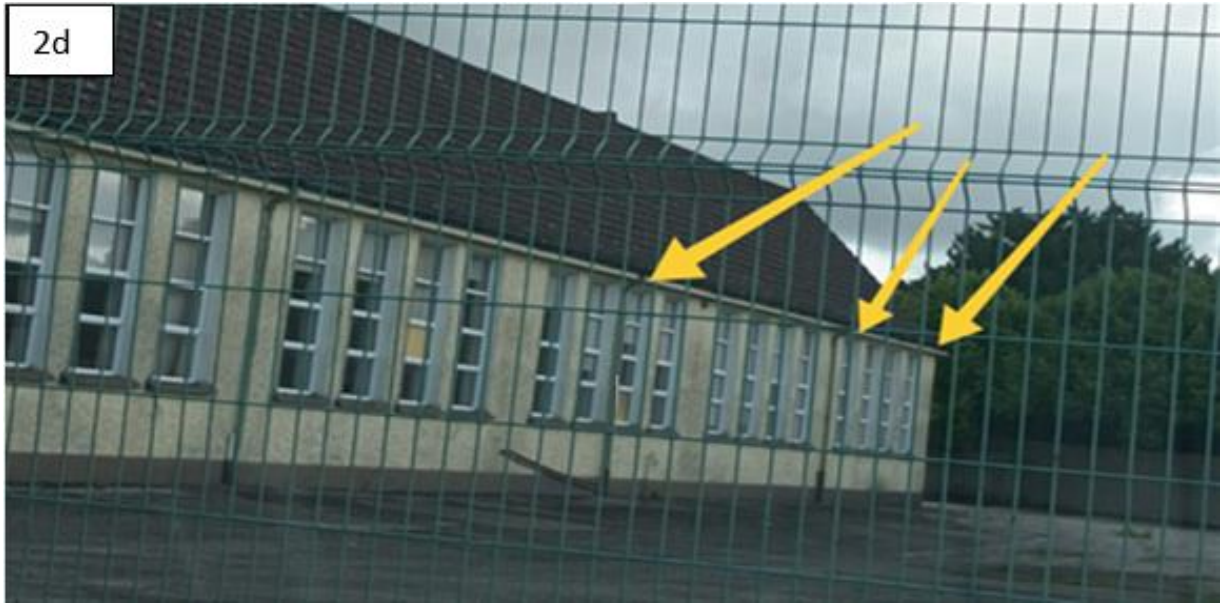
2017

2c



2023





2023



2023

## Daingean

Daingean is a small town, between Tullamore and Edenderry and lies on the Grand Canal. As of the 2022 census it has a population of 1,223, an increase of 2.2% since the 2016 national census.

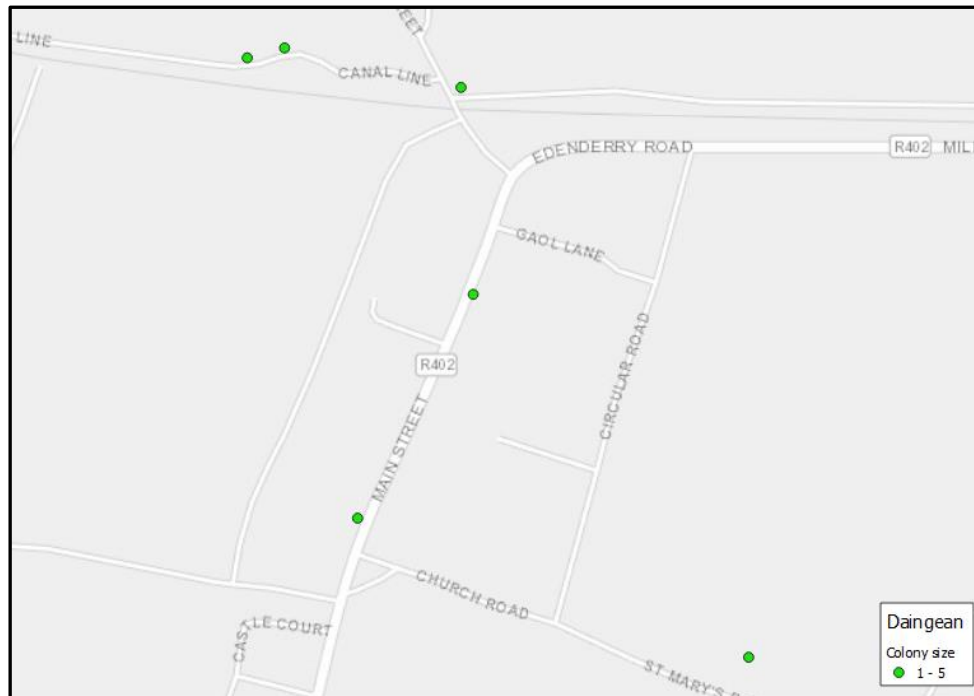


Figure 15. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Daingean.

In 2017, five Swift nests were confirmed in Daingean. This has risen to eight nests as of the 2023 breeding season.

Table 25. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Daingean in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
5	8	+3

Nests are distributed across all five building categories.

Table 26. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Daingean by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	1
Other	1
Public	2
Religious	3
Residential	1

Table 27. Daingean confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1b	Main Street, beside Studio Hair Salon	1	1		Other
2-2b	Main Street	1	0	Renovation	Residential
3a-3b	Leoville House, 10 Main Street	2	0	Renovation	Residential
4a-4b	Community Childcare Services	1	2		Public
5a-5c	Reformatory outer wall, (Daingean Joinery)	1	2		Religious
<b>New locations</b>					
6	Reformatory (south side)		1		Religious
7	12 Main Street		1		Residential
8	Daingean Health Centre, Canal View		1		Commercial



2017



2023



2017



2023



3a

2017



3b

2023



4a

2017



4b

2023



5a

2017



2023



2023



2023

7



2023

8



2023

Table 28. Daingean Swift nest box project locations and colony numbers.

Photo no.	Swift box projects	Cavities	No. occupied	Building type	Caller system?	Caller system on?
9	Community Childcare Services	2	0	Public	No	-
10	'Leoville House', 10 Main Street	3	0	Residential	No	-

\*The photo of the nest box at Leoville House (photo 10) has been used twice.



2023



2023

The triple cavity nest box installed at 'Leoville House', 10 Main Street, was installed to compensate for the loss of a nesting site due to renovation work.

## Clonbullogue

Clonbullogue is a small village on the River Figile, near the border between Co. Offaly and Co. Kildare. It has a population of 401 as of the 2022 census, a decrease of 1.5% from the 2016 national census.

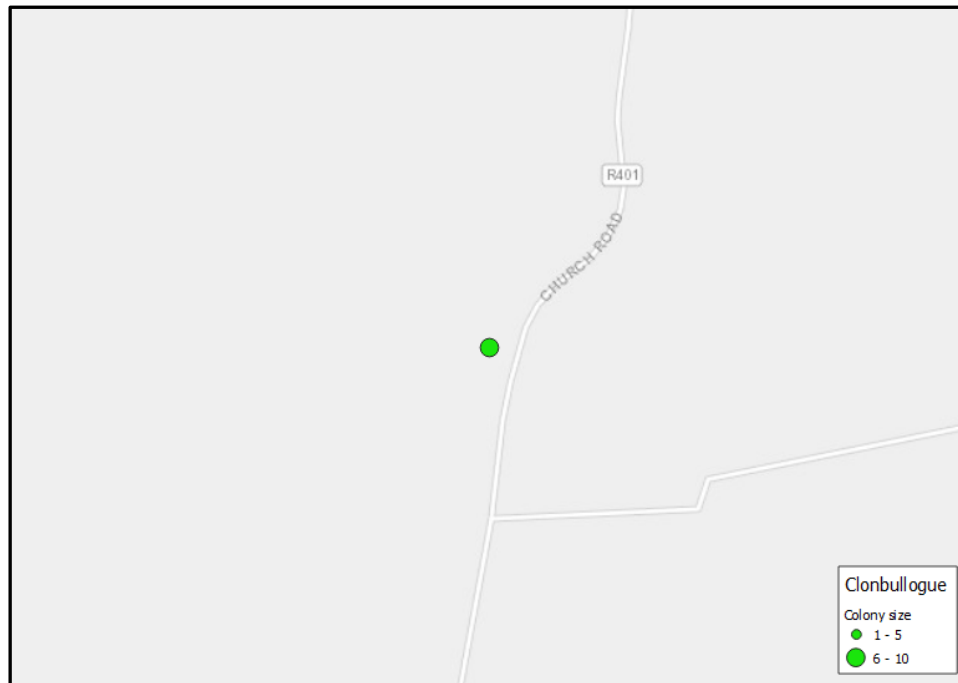


Figure 16. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Clonbullogue.

In 2017, five Swift nests were confirmed in Clonbullogue. This has risen slightly to seven nests as of the 2023 breeding season.

Table 29. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Clonbullogue in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
5	7	+2

All nests were recorded in a single religious building.

Table 30. Clonbullogue confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1d	St. Kevin's Church, Church Road	5	7		Religious





2017



2017



2023



2023

## Cloghan

Cloghan is a village close to the Co. Offaly and Co. Galway border. The River Shannon flows approximately 6km west of the village. As of the 2022 census, Cloghan has a population of 654, a 1.4% increase since the 2016 census.

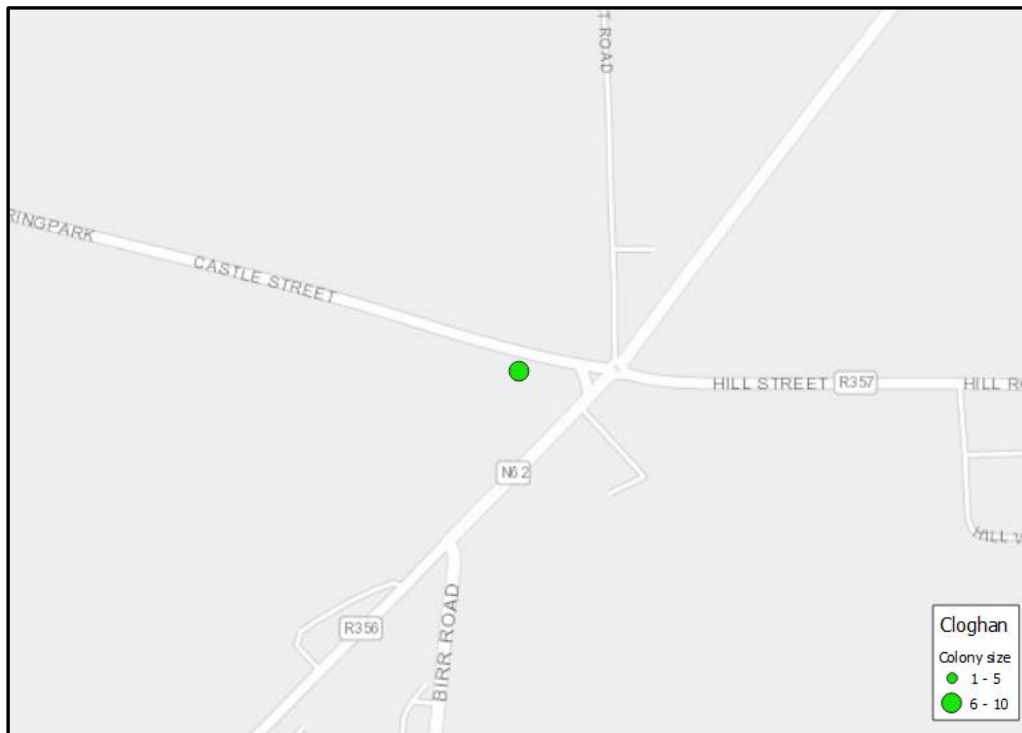


Figure 17. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Cloghan.

In 2017, four Swift nests were confirmed in Cloghan. This has risen to seven nests as of the 2023 breeding season.

Table 31. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Cloghan in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
4	7	+3

All nest sites were recorded in a single residential property.

Table 32. Cloghan confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1d	Castle Street, next to the main town junction	4	7		Residential



2017



2017



2023



2023

## Shannonbridge

Shannonbridge is a small village situated on the River Shannon and the Co. Roscommon and Co. Offaly border. It has a population of 167 as of the 2022 census, a decrease of 0.8% since the 2016 census.

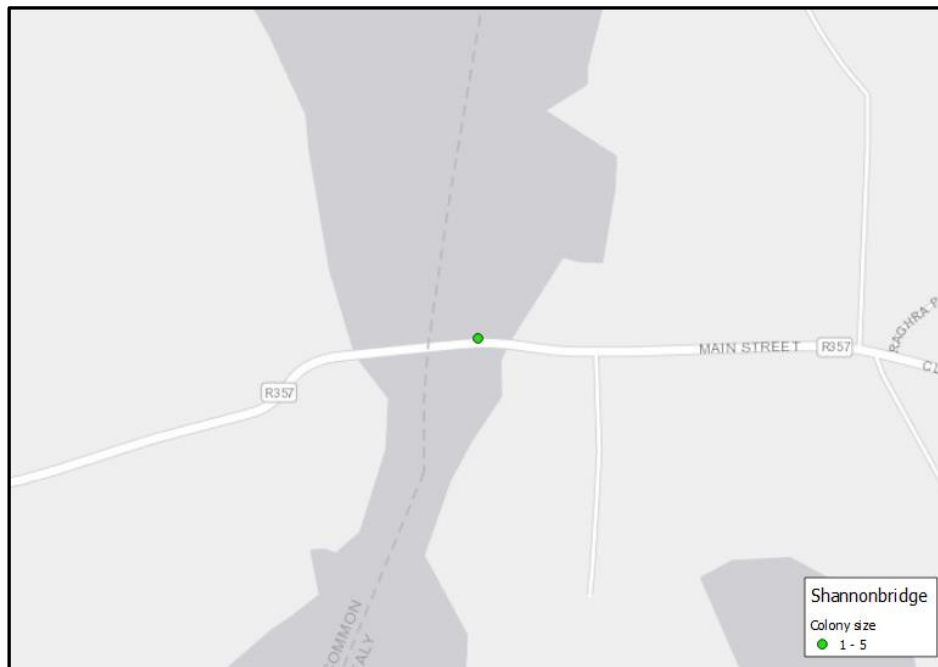


Figure 18. Map showing location of confirmed nest sites in Shannonbridge.

In 2017, four Swift nests were confirmed in Shannonbridge. This has risen very slightly to five nests as of the 2023 breeding season.

Table 33. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Shannonbridge in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
4	5	+1

Nest sites were all located in the Shannon Bridge, a public built structure.

Table 34. Shannonbridge confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1c	Shannon Bridge, R357	4	5		Public

1a



2017

1b



2023

1c



2023

## Durrow

Durrow is a small village and townland on the border of Co. Offaly and Co. Westmeath.

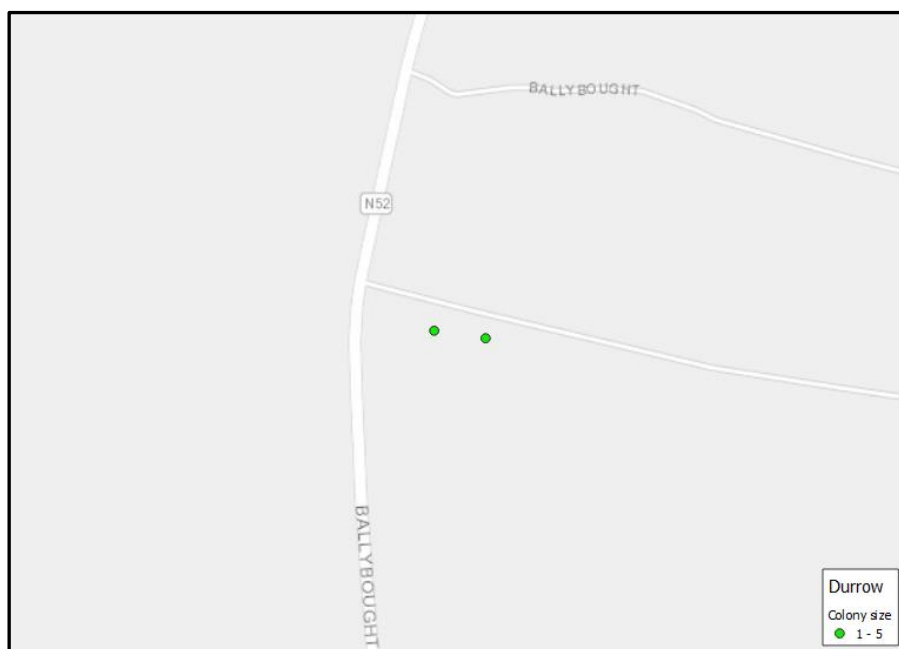


Figure 19. Map showing location of confirmed nest sites in Durrow.

In 2017, four Swift nests were confirmed in Durrow. The population has declined slightly with two nests confirmed as of the 2023 breeding season.

Table 35. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Durrow in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
4	2	-2

The two nests are in a public and religious building.

Table 36. Durrow confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1b	Durrow Community Centre	4	1	Renovations	Public
<b>New location</b>					
2	St. Colmcille Church	-	1		Religious



2017



2023



2023

## Killeigh

Killeigh is a small village close to the Co. Offaly and Co. Laois border. As of the 2022 census, it has a population of 183, a decrease of 2.5% since the 2016 census.

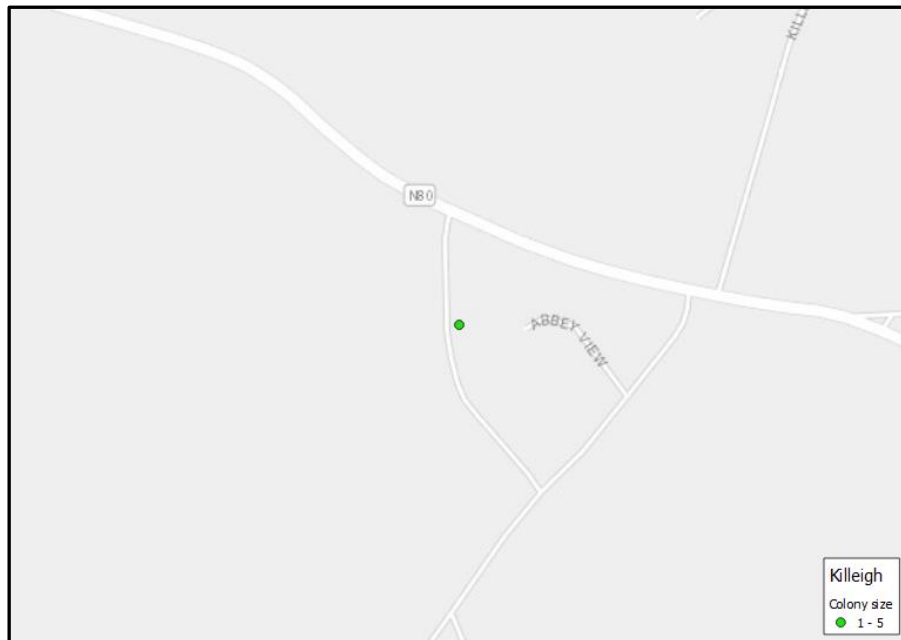


Figure 20. Map showing location of confirmed nest sites in Killeigh.

In 2017, two Swift nests were confirmed in Killeigh. The population has remained steady at two nests as of the 2023 breeding season. Both nests are in a single residential property.

Table 37. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Killeigh in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
2	2	0

Table 38. Killeigh confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1	Abbey Farm	2	2		Residential



1a



2017

1b



2023

## Shinrone

Shinrone is a village lying approximately 14km south of Birr. As of 2022, it has a population of 707 people, an increase of 1.6% since the 2016 census.

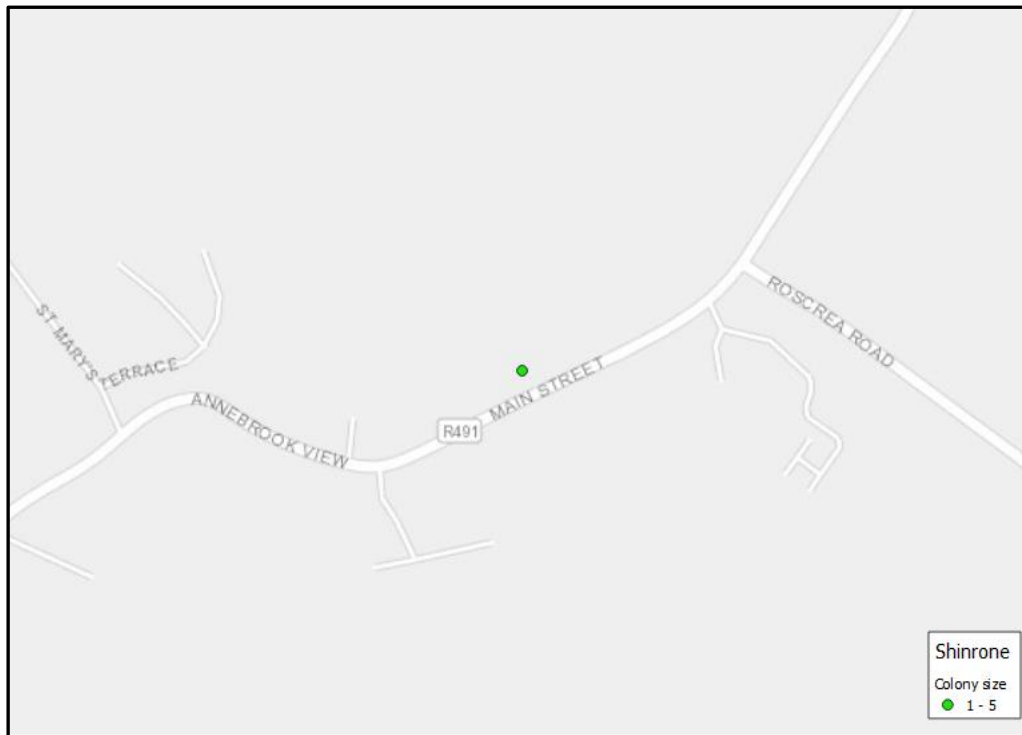


Figure 21. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Shinrone.

In 2017, six Swift nests were confirmed in Shinrone. The population has declined, with one nest confirmed as of the 2023 breeding season.

Table 39. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Shinrone in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
6	1	-5

The single nest confirmed this season is in a residential property.

Table 40. Shinrone confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1b	McNamaras, Main Street	4	0	Renovation	Commercial
2a-2b	Old Cannon House	2	0	Derelict	Residential
<b>New locations</b>					
3	Apartments beside & east of Shinrone Foodmarket.		1	1	Residential



2017



2023



2017



2023



2023

Table 41. Shinrone Swift nest box project locations and colony numbers.

Photo no.	Swift box projects	Cavities	No. occupied	Building type	Caller system?	Caller system on?
4	McNamaras, Main Street	6	0	Commercial	No	-



2023

It is suspected that a second nest exists at the back of two residential properties on Main Street, but due to restricted visibility it was not possible to confirm this sighting.



Figure 23. One Swift nest site is suspected to be behind the two houses on the left-hand side of the photo.

## Kinnitty

Kinnitty is a small village and townland, located approximately 13km east of Birr. It has a population of 270 as of the 2022 census.

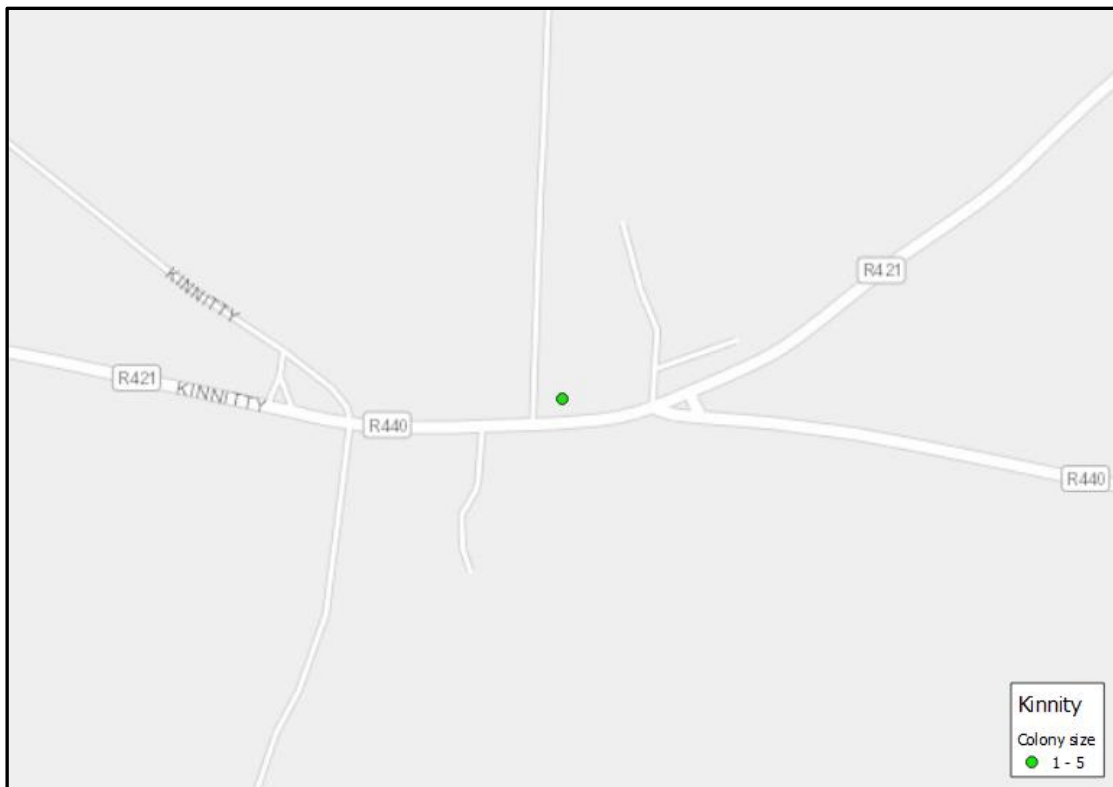


Figure 24. Map showing the location of the confirmed nest site in Kinnitty.

In 2017, three Swift nests were confirmed in Kinnity. The population has declined, with one nest confirmed as of the 2023 breeding season.

Table 42. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Kinnity in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
3	1	-2

The single confirmed nest in Kinnity is in a commercial building.

Table 43. Kinnity confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1	Ardmore Country House B&B	3	1	Vegetation	Commercial



2017



2023

## Kilcormac

Kilcormac is a small town with a population of 1,051 as of the 2022 census, an increase of 2% since the 2016 national census. It is situated on the Silver River.

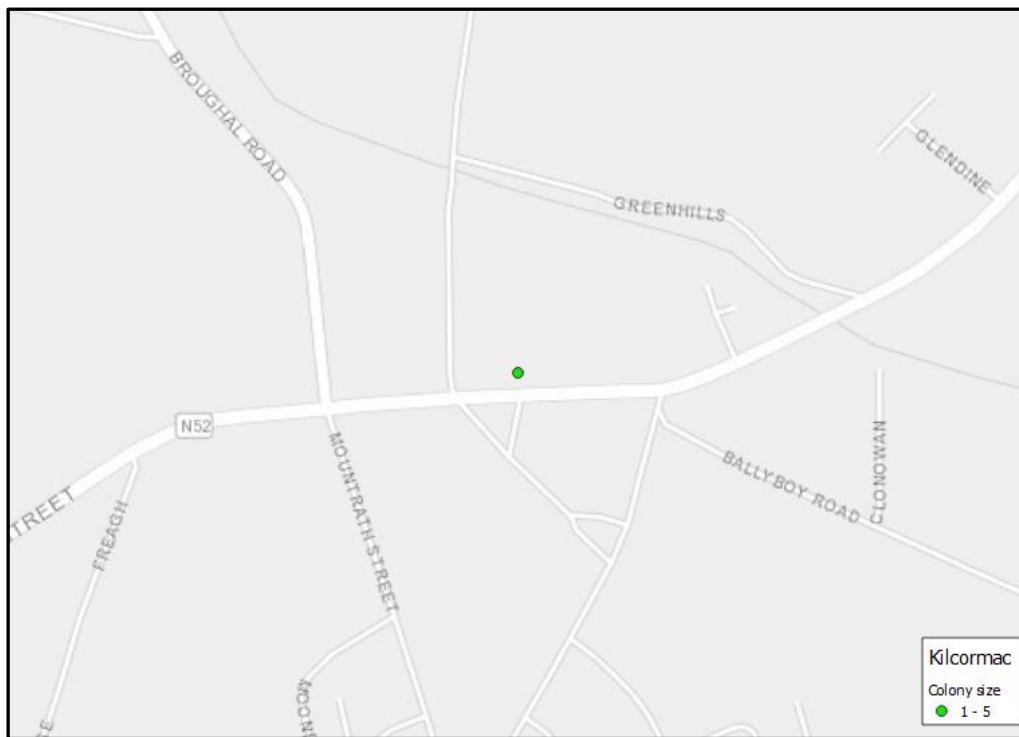


Figure 25. Map showing the locations of confirmed nest sites in Kilcormac.

In 2017, two Swift nests were confirmed in Kilcormac. The population has declined with one nest as of the 2023 breeding season, which was in a religious building.

Table 44. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Kilcormac in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
2	1	-1

Table 45. Kilcormac confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1b	Convent of Mercy, Main Street	1	1		Religious
2a-2b	House opposite the convent	1	0		Residential



2017



2023



2017



2023

Table 46. Kilcormac Swift nest box project locations and colony numbers.

Photo no.	Swift box projects	Cavities	No. occupied	Building type	Caller system?	Caller system on?
3	House next to the Convent of Mercy	6	0	Residential	No	-





2023

It is suspected that a second nest exists in a shed belonging to a house beside the Convent of Mercy. Unfortunately, it was not possible to confirm this sighting, this season.



*Figure 26. Shed next to Convent of Mercy. One Swift nest suspected but not confirmed in this building.*

## Geashill

Geashill is a small village, with a population of 392 as of the 2022 national census, a very slight decrease of 0.1% since the 2016 census.

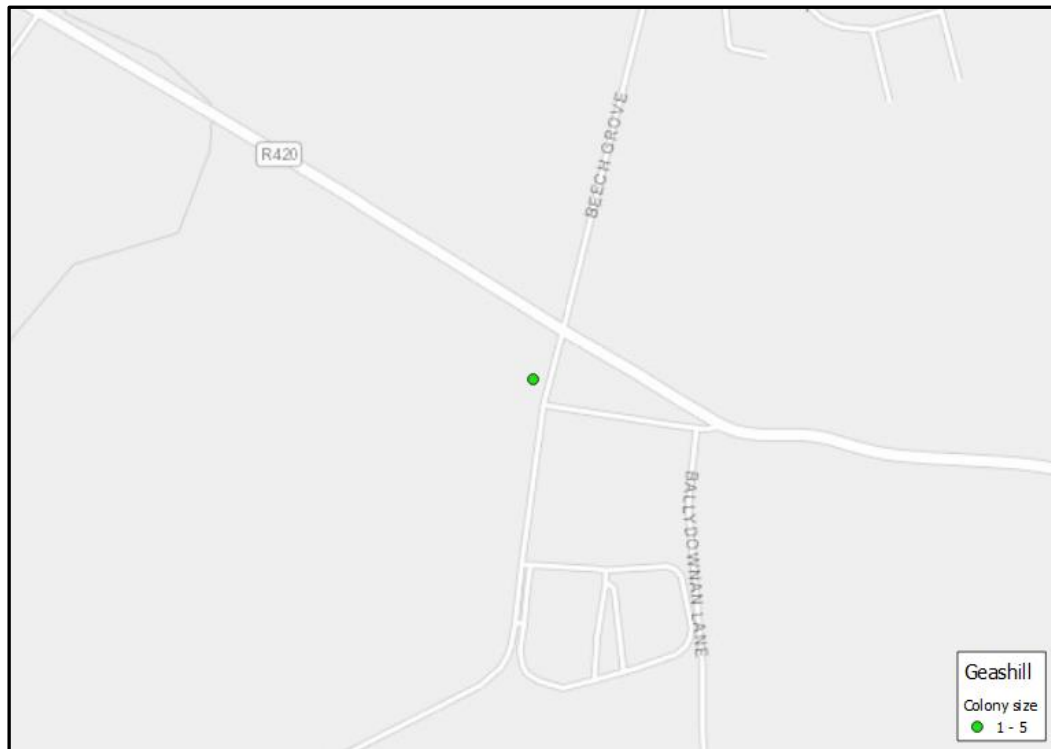


Figure 27. Map showing the location of the confirmed nest site in Geashill.

In 2023, one Swift nest was confirmed in Geashill. To our knowledge this is the first confirmation of Swifts nesting in the village.

Table 47. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Geashill in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
0	1	+1

Table 48. Geashill confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>New location</b>					
1	Main Street opposite the park	0	1		Residential



2023

Table 49. Geashill Swift nest box project locations and colony numbers.

Photo no.	Swift box projects	Cavities	No. occupied	Building type	Caller system?	Caller system on?
2	Geashill National School	3	0	Public	Yes	Yes
3	Private house, opposite 'The High Chapparral' pub	3	0	Residential	No	-



2023



2023

## Horseleap

Horseleap is a small village and townland on the Co. Offaly and Co. Westmeath border.

In 2017, three Swift nest sites were confirmed in Horseleap. Unfortunately, the field surveyor was unable to access the school and church which hosted Swifts in 2017 due to difficulties with site access. As such it was not possible to completely re-survey Horseleap this season.

The fieldworker was able to confirm that the single Swift nest recorded in Horseleap Primary School in 2017 was inactive this season, but further surveying of the school was not possible.

Table 50. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Horseleap in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
3	N/C	N/C

Table 51. Horseleap confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos.	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1b	Horseleap Primary School	1	N/C		Public
2a-2b	Ardnurcher Church	2	N/C		Religious



2017



2023



2017



2023

Cadamstown

Cadamstown is a small village, situated on the Silver River.

In 2017, three Swift nests were recorded in a single building in Cadamstown. Unfortunately, the breeding Swift population has since been lost from this village, with no Swift nests confirmed in 2023 in Cadamstown.

Table 52. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Cadamstown in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
3	0	-3

Table 53. Cadamstown confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1b	St. Luna Church	1	0		Religious



2017



2023

### Shannon Harbour

Shannon Harbour is a small village located on the mouth of the River Brosna where the River Shannon meets the Grand Canal. The village was originally designed as a trans-shipping centre for goods and people on the Grand Canal.

In 2017, two Swift nests were confirmed in Shannon Harbour. By 2023 these Swift nests had unfortunately been lost, and no other Swift nests were confirmed in Shannon Harbour.

Table 54. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Shannon Harbour in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
2	0	-2

Table 55. Shannon Harbour confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1a-1b	Derelict building opposite McIntyre's Pub	2	0	Derelict	Other



2017



2023

### Clonmacnoise

Clonmacnoise is a monastery founded in the 6<sup>th</sup> century on the banks of the River Shannon, and in the vicinity of the Shannon Callows. It is managed by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and includes a Cathedral, two Round Towers, 3 High Crosses and 9 Churches.

In 2017, one Swift nest was recorded in a Round Tower. Unfortunately, this nest has since been lost and no Swift nests were recorded in Clonmacnoise this season.

Table 56. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Clonmacnoise in 2017 and 2023.

No. nests 2017	No. nests 2023	Change
1	0	-1

Table 57. Clonmacnoise confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

No.	Address	Nest nos. 2017	Nest nos. 2023	Change to building	Building type
<b>Previously recorded locations</b>					
1	Clonmacnoise Monastic site	1	0		Public



2017

## Nest site changes

A total of 162 Swift nests were recorded this season, compared to 165 nests in 2017. Swift nests were recorded in 16 localities in 2023, compared to 19 localities in 2017. However, it was not possible to access sites which supported Swifts in 2017 in Horseleap. Thus the 16 localities identified in 2023 should be treated as an absolute minimum, particularly given that in 2023 Swift activity was recorded in Horseleap.

Nest sites were recorded in 62 built structures this season, compared to 75 in 2017, a 17% decline. Of the 75 built structures resurveyed in 2023, 38 had lost some or all their Swift nest sites.

*Table 58. Swift nest sites lost between 2017 and 2023.*

No. locations with some Swift nest sites lost	No. locations all Swift nest sites lost
11	27

Swift nests were recorded in 19 new buildings/ structures this season compared to 2017. In addition, 17 of the 75 structures resurveyed in 2023, gained Swift nest sites, while 15 maintained their Swift nest numbers between survey years.

*Table 59. Swift nest sites gained/ maintained between 2017 and 2023.*

No. of new locations	No. of original locations with increased Swift nest sites	No. of original locations which maintained Swift nest site numbers
19	17	15

### *Reasons for nest site loss*

Of the 38 buildings which had lost some or all their Swift nest sites, it was possible to identify potential reasons for 22 buildings. Renovations accounted for 42% of nest site loss, while dereliction and vegetation encroachment accounted for 16% of losses. The remaining 42% of nests were lost for unidentified reasons.

*Table 60. Reasons for nest site loss.*

Reason	No. buildings	% nest site loss
Renovation	16	42%
Dereliction	4	11%
Vegetation	2	5%
Unknown	16	42%
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100%</b>

### *Building types – nest loss*

Residential buildings accounted for 57% of the overall number of buildings which lost Swift nests between survey years, while 30% were commercial buildings. Public buildings accounted for 8% of buildings which lost Swift nests, and religious and derelict ('other') buildings accounted for 3% respectively.



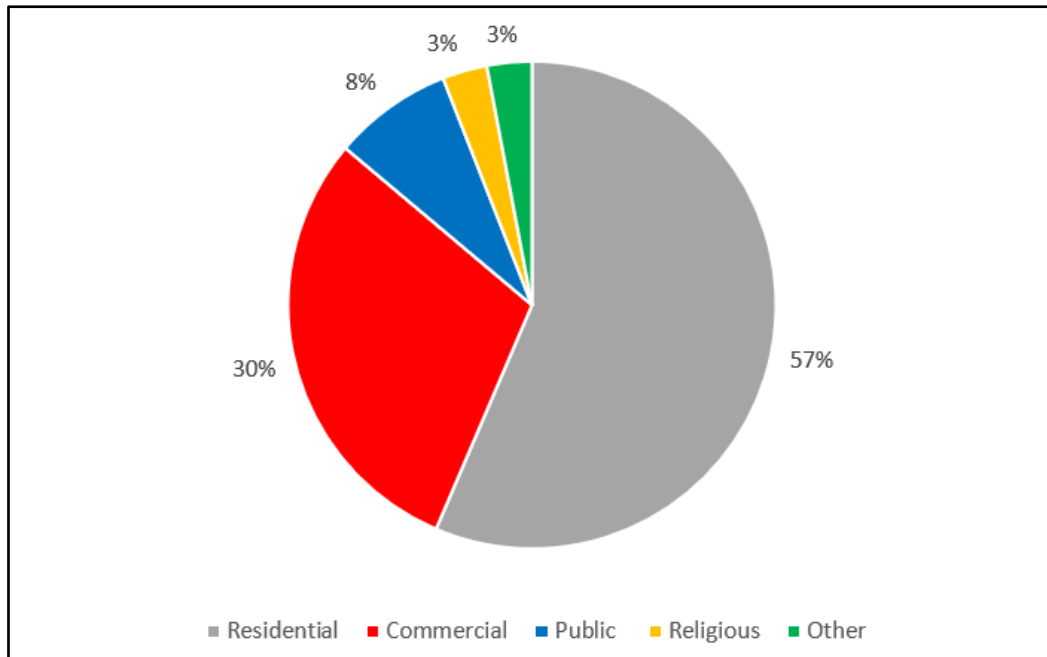


Figure 28. Percentage of building types which lost nest sites between 2017 and 2023.

\*This figure excludes 4 buildings surveyed in 2017, which could not be accessed this season (St. Helen's Court, Banagher; Lock House, Tullamore; Horseleap Primary School and Ardnurcher Church, Horseleap).

#### Building types – nest gain

A combined 63% of buildings which gained nesting pairs of Swifts between 2017 and 2023, were residential and commercial properties. The remaining 37% of buildings with new or expanded colonies were split between public (18%), religious (15%), and other (derelict) (3%).

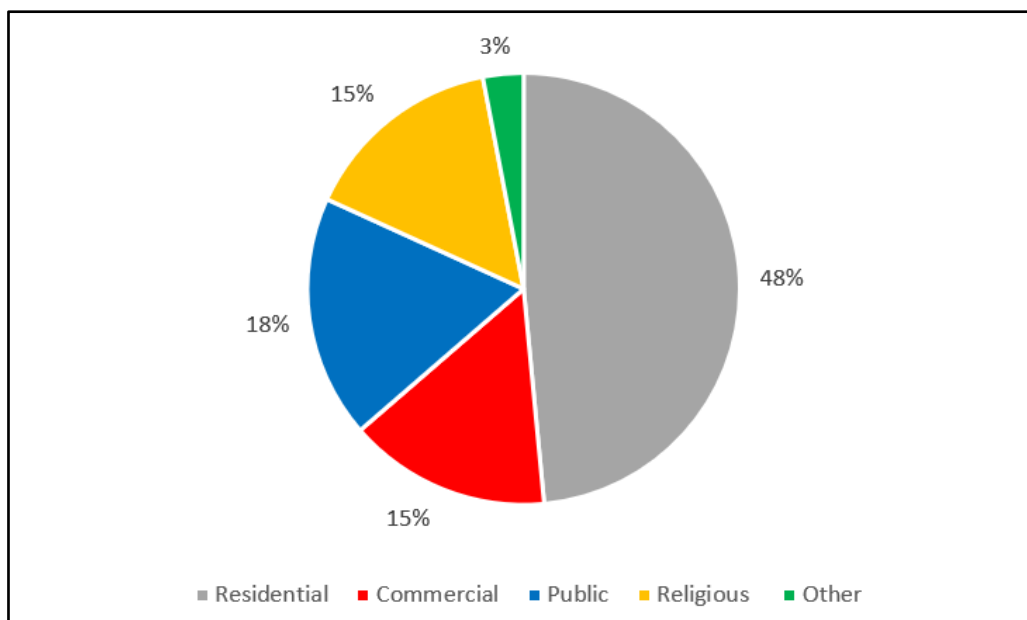


Figure 29. Percentage of building types with newly recorded and expanded Swift nest locations.

## Nest box uptake

Fifteen nest box projects were surveyed. Out of a total of 70 available nest cavities, eight or 11% were occupied by Swifts. Caller systems were observed at three properties and were confirmed as 'in use' at two properties.

Table 61. Nest box schemes.

Locality	Location	Caller system?	Caller system on?	Building type?	Cavities	No. occupied 2023
Birr	Birr Civic Offices	No	-	Public	9	0
Banagher	St. Rynagh's National School	No	-	Public	6	3
Banagher	Banagher Further Education and Training Centre (Main Street)	Yes	Yes	Public	8	4
Banagher	Banagher Further Education and Training Centre (Cuba Avenue)	No	-	Public	3	0
Banagher	Area 51, Main Street	No	-	Commercial	3	0
Banagher	Feeney's Shop, Main Street	No	-	Commercial	3	0
Banagher	Banagher Library, Curraghavarina and Portavolla	No	-	Public	3	0
Banagher	Tourism Office, Main Street	Yes	No	Public	6	0
Edenderry	St. Patrick's Primary School, Gilroy Avenue	No	-	Public	6	1
Daingean	Community Childcare Centre	No	-	Public	2	0
Daingean	'Leoville House', 10 Main Street	No	-	Residential	3	0
Geashill	Geashill National School	Yes	Yes	Public	3	0
Geashill	Private house, opposite High Chapparral pub	No	-	Residential	3	0
Shinrone	Main Street, Wines McNamaras Spirits	No	-	Commercial	6	0
Kilcormac	House next to the Convent	No	-	Residential	6	0
<b>Totals</b>					<b>70</b>	<b>8</b>

Two nest box/ brick projects identified for survey prior to the beginning of the field season, could not be located. These were a nest brick project at Esker Arts Centre, Tullamore, and a nest box project at Sacred Heart Secondary School, Tullamore.

It appears that the boxes from the latter project have been removed by the school, for reasons unknown. It would also appear, despite being a condition of planning for the building, that the nest brick project was not installed at Esker Arts Centre.

## Discussion

Swifts are an integral part of Co. Offaly's biodiversity and heritage, as evidenced by the results of this survey and that undertaken in 2017. Moreover, Offaly County Council was the first County Council to commission a breeding Swift survey, and the first County Council to undertake a re-survey of breeding Swifts, indicating their commitment to the conservation of this species.

The work undertaken this season is particularly timely given the regeneration and renewal projects which are rolling out across the county. While these schemes are vital for many local economies, regeneration work can inadvertently remove Swift nesting habitat. By pinpointing the exact locations of existing Swift nest sites, as this survey and previous work has done, protecting these nest sites, and establishing nest brick and box projects at suitable locations, the Co. Offaly breeding Swift habitat can be secured.

### Overview

The Co. Offaly Swift population overall has remained stable over the last six years, with 165 nests recorded in 2017 compared to 162 nests recorded this season. Given the dramatic decline of the Swift at a national scale in the ten years prior to the initial survey (38% decline between 2006 and 2016), the overall stability of the Co. Offaly population between 2017 and 2023 is extraordinary (Lewis et al. 2019).

That said, nest site loss overall has been quite significant over the 6-year interim between surveys, with just over half of buildings re-surveyed having lost a portion of, or in some cases, the entirety of their former Swift colony. The vast majority (86%) of buildings which partially or completely lost their Swift colonies between 2017 and 2023 were residential and commercial buildings. This isn't surprising given that (i) residential and commercial buildings accounted for approximately three quarters of the properties Swift nests were recorded in, in 2017 and (ii) residential and commercial buildings are considered less secure for nesting Swifts than public or religious buildings, the latter being less subject to renovation and/or sale.

One of the saving graces for the Co. Offaly Swift population has been the ability of Swifts to find new nesting habitat in the county, either at existing or new sites. Given the rapid rate of loss from residential and commercial buildings between 2017 and 2023, it is concerning that 63% of new or expanded nesting locations are in commercial and residential buildings, combined. These nest sites are particularly vulnerable to loss through renovations, which are increasing in part due to the availability of renovation grants. Indeed, 42% of buildings which lost part or all their Swift colony, were recorded as having been renovated between 2017 and this season.

Nest box schemes have been rolled out across many towns in Co. Offaly. This is very much to the credit of all involved and shows the commitment to the Swift population which exists in Co. Offaly and within Offaly County Council. Encouraging Swifts to nest at these locations is key to securing the Co. Offaly Swift population.

Unfortunately, uptake of these nest boxes by Swifts has been quite low, with just 11% of nesting cavities provided occupied by breeding Swifts. Caller systems were present at three out of 15 sites and recorded as 'in use' at two sites. Caller systems are essential for attracting Swifts to new nesting habitat and this may explain the low uptake of Swift nest box projects across the county. Installing

and using caller systems at each existing and new nest box site is a relatively easy step which would make a significant difference to the Co. Offaly Swift population.

### Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown

The largest increase in Swift pair numbers in Co. Offaly was recorded in Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown, with 23 nests recorded in 2017 compared to 32 nests in 2023. This town offers ample nesting opportunities for Swifts. Notable locations include Birr Castle, the Old Train Station, and the Public Library, with the Old Train Station hosting one of the largest Swift colonies in Co. Offaly.

Smaller colonies consisting of only one to two nests are vanishing from Birr, with the population concentrating around Birr Castle, the Old Train Station, the Public Library, and housing estates in the north of the town.

Swifts are highly reliant on commercial and residential buildings in Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown, with 94% of nests recorded in these building types. Both building types are more likely to undergo renovation works in the coming years than public or religious buildings, and thus Swift nests in these buildings are in a precarious position.

Nest boxes have been put up for Swifts at Birr Civic Offices, providing nine potential nesting spaces. Unfortunately, these have not been taken up by breeding Swifts, potentially because no caller system appears to be in use on site. As mimicking the sounds of a Swift colony is vital to the successful establishment of nesting pairs at nest box/ brick projects (Whelan et al. 2019), using a caller system to play the call of Swifts at this site will greatly improve the success of this project.

### Banagher

The Swift population in Banagher has remained stable at 30 nests in 2023, compared to 32 nests in 2017. Nearly half (13 nests) of the Swift population in Banagher is found in public buildings, which is extremely heartening. Seven of these Swift nests are in nest boxes on St. Rynagh's National School and Banagher Further Education and Training Centre.

Banagher is exemplary in terms of the number of nest box projects present in the small town. Seven nest box projects were surveyed, with 32 Swift nesting cavities available, of which seven were occupied by Swifts in 2023.

One of the factors potentially limiting uptake of these nesting cavities is the lack of use of caller systems on site. Using a caller system at each location will greatly improve the success of these projects and go a long way to securing the Banagher Swift population.

### Tullamore

Tullamore supported the third highest number of Swifts this season. Twenty-five nests were recorded compared to 30 in 2017, indicating a slight drop in Swift breeding numbers overall.

The largest single colony loss between 2017 and 2023 was recorded in Tullamore, with a reduction of seven nests at 10 & 11 Church Street, (residential properties), due to renovations. This highlights the vulnerability of Swift nests in privately owned sites, which is particularly pertinent to Tullamore given that 80% of Swift nests in the town are found in commercial and residential properties (16 and 4 nests, respectively). This is particularly concerning given the Tullamore Regeneration Framework

which is to be launched. Regeneration work, which often focuses on commercial buildings, can inadvertently remove Swift nesting habitat. Swift nest box/ brick schemes in Tullamore are essential to mitigate against this potential loss.

One such project which would have helped to secure the Tullamore Swift population was the planned installation of Swift bricks at the Esker Art Centre. These bricks were part of the planning condition for renovation of the building, but unfortunately were not installed during the build. It is extremely disappointing that this work was not carried out and we would strongly advise that alternative and permanent breeding habitat be made available for Swifts in Tullamore.

## Clara

The Swift population in Clara is concentrated in two buildings, with ten Swift nests recorded in the local Church of Ireland and five nests in a building on the Erry Mill campus, a commercial property.

At ten nests, the Swift colony in St. Brigid's Church of Ireland is one of the largest single Swift colonies recorded in Co. Offaly this season. The fact that most nests in Clara are in a religious building, provides some security for these nests. Alerting church officials to the presence of nesting Swifts is essential to safeguarding this population.

The Swift nests in the commercial building on the Erry Mill campus are more vulnerable to loss. A nest box project at a nearby suitable public location could be installed to mitigate for any potential loss.

## Edenderry

The highest overall number of nest losses in a single locality took place in Edenderry, with 24 nests recorded in 2017, compared to 15 nests this season.

The Swift population in Edenderry is highly reliant on residential properties, with 87% of nests found in private homes. All nine buildings which lost nest sites between 2017 and 2023, were residential properties, indicating just how vulnerable these nests are to loss. A nest box project is in place at St. Patrick's Primary School, with one Swift using the boxes. Use of a caller system on site could increase Swift nest box uptake.

## Portarlington

Portarlington hosts one of the largest single colonies of Swifts (nine nests) in Co. Offaly at Portarlington Primary School. See recommendations below, for this site.

## Daingean

An increase in overall Swift numbers was recorded in Daingean between 2017 and 2023, rising from five to eight nests, respectively. The Swift population is spread across the town in small colonies, making it quite vulnerable. Five of the eight nests are found in religious (three) and public (two) buildings, and these may be the easiest nests to protect.

The community in Daingean is very proactive and keen to preserve Swift nest sites, and continued public engagement in this area could go a long way toward helping conserve and expand the Daingean Swift population.

Two Swift nest box projects are in place in the town, one on a private residence and one on a public building, providing five nesting opportunities for Swifts in total. Unfortunately, there was no uptake by nesting Swifts this season, and neither project was using a caller system. Use of a caller system at these sites would greatly enhance the success of these projects.

#### Clonbullogue, Cloghan and Shannonbridge

An overall increase in Swift numbers was recorded in Clonbullogue, Cloghan, and Shannonbridge between 2017 and 2023. Seven nests were recorded in both Clonbullogue and Cloghan, in 2023, increasing from five and four nests respectively. Four nests were recorded in Shannonbridge in 2017, increasing slightly to five nests this season.

All three populations are concentrated in single buildings/ structures. The Cloghan colony is in a residential property, making it extremely vulnerable. The Clonbullogue and Shannonbridge colonies are considered more secure, as they are in a religious and public building, respectively. Alerting relevant authorities to their presence is essential.

Both Clonbullogue and Shannonbridge provide two of the most enjoyable viewing points for Swifts in Co. Offaly. Promoting these towns as destinations for viewing Swifts in the wider birdwatching community may foster local pride and thus protection for these Swift colonies at the community level.

#### Durrow and Killeigh

The Swift population in Durrow has decreased from four to two nests between 2017 and 2023, due to renovations to the Durrow Community Centre. The Durrow Swift colony is now split between the Durrow Community Centre and St. Colmcille Church, with a single nest found in each building.

The Swift population in Killeigh has remained stable between 2017 and 2023, with two nests recorded at Abbey Farm, a residential property.

Colonies in both towns are extremely vulnerable. A peak of 18 Swifts was recorded in Durrow, highlighting the potential of this site in particular for nesting Swifts.

#### Shinrone, Kinnity, and Kilcormac

Swift populations in all three towns and villages have fallen to just a single pair. The most significant decline has occurred in Shinrone, where all six of the nest sites recorded in 2017 have been lost in the intervening years. However, one new nest site was confirmed in a residential property in this town, and a second nest site at the back of a residential property on Main Street is suspected but could not be confirmed due to restricted visibility.

Regrettably, the colony of four Swift nests at McNamara's pub in Shinrone has been lost. The nest boxes provided as a mitigation measure have so far been unsuccessful. A corvid appears to have been nesting on top of the boxes, which may be one reason for the lack of uptake at this site. No caller system was installed at this nest box project.

In 2017, the entire Swift population of Kinnity (three pairs) occurred in a single commercial building. This season, just one pair remains. The Swift population of Kilcormac was concentrated in two buildings, one religious and one residential. This season, just one pair remains, in the Convent of Mercy. A nest box project has been provided on an adjacent residence, but this has not been occupied by Swifts to date. No caller system is installed at the site.

Swifts in all three towns are at serious risk of loss unless mitigation measures and caller systems are provided.

### Geashill

A single Swift nest was discovered this season in Geashill. This appears to be a new nesting location for Swifts in Co. Offaly, as no Swift nests were recorded in this village during the original survey. There is a strong commitment to Swifts in Geashill, with two Swift nest box projects in the village (school and private property).

A caller system is present and in use at the national school. No caller system was observed at the private property. No Swifts were recorded nesting in the nest boxes this season. However, continued use of the caller system at the national school and installation and use of a caller system at the private residence will hopefully yield results in the coming years.

### Horseleap

In 2017 three Swift nests were recorded in Horseleap. This season the fieldworker confirmed that the single nest recorded at Horseleap Primary School is now unfortunately inactive, but it was not possible to access the school grounds to survey for additional nest sites on campus. Access was also restricted at Ardnurcher Church, which supported two Swift nests in 2017. However, given the presence of Swifts overhead in Horseleap, it is very possible that Swift nests persist in this village.

### Cadamstown, Shannon Harbour, and Clonmacnoise

Unfortunately, the Swift populations of Cadamstown (three nests), Shannon Harbour (two nests) and Clonmacnoise (one nest) have all been lost between 2017 and 2023. Given the small sizes of these colonies, they were always at risk. The reason for the loss of nests in Cadamstown and Clonmacnoise is unclear. It is assumed that dereliction is the reason behind the loss of the Swift nest sites in Shannon Harbour.

### General recommendations

Ensure the results of this report are used for the protection of Swifts in Co. Offaly by:

#### Data access and planning

- Publish a link to this report on the relevant section of the council website for public and stakeholder access.

- Make the Swift nest site coordinate data available to relevant personnel in the council (planners/architects) and incorporate it into the council systems to help prevent Swift nest site loss.
- Where locations highlighted within this report are to be developed/redeveloped, the planning application should account for the presence of nesting Swifts for their protection. Where this isn't possible, mitigation measures (preferably nest bricks, but nest boxes will also work) should be used to compensate for loss of nesting space.
- Implement a review of council owned buildings to determine if they're suitable for the installation of Swift nest boxes (i.e., the correct height, aspect, flight path for Swifts).
- Install Swift nest boxes on buildings deemed suitable. Villages and towns with low densities should be prioritised first.
- Use the planning system to ensure that built-in Swift nesting bricks are incorporated into planning conditions for any large building (e.g., school, apartment block, offices, housing estates) or at a minimum that Swift nest boxes are included as a condition of planning for such buildings. These measures can help offset the environmental impact of large-scale developments.
- Include Swift conservation measures in the next County Development Plan (suggested text in Appendices). Include information on providing nest sites for Swifts, (Swift bricks and boxes) into public buildings, renovated buildings, and large-scale commercial developments.
- Encourage any uptake or efforts that follow the guidelines within the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan <https://pollinators.ie/>. Swifts are insectivores and will directly benefit from these initiatives.
- Work with new and retrofitted commercial developments/housing to include a provision for Swift nest boxes where relevant.

### Community engagement

- Engage with community groups and the wider public. Tidy Towns and Men's Sheds are playing an increasingly important role in saving Swifts.



- Encourage local community groups and volunteers to carry out breeding Swift surveys of their areas each summer.
- Resource and support groups and individuals carrying out Swift conservation projects locally such as Men's Sheds, Tidy Towns etc.
- Develop a school programme to educate schoolchildren about the Swift and its conservation needs. This could be a 'trial project' and later rolled out nationwide.
- Develop an initiative to work with businesses to protect and promote Swifts nesting in small businesses and industrial buildings.
- Continue to raise awareness of the conservation measures needed to prevent the future decline of the Swift with all members of the County Council responsible for heritage, planning, environmental management, and administration.
- Distribute the 'Saving Swifts' guide to all relevant persons/ groups. It contains information on installing Swift bricks/ boxes and can be found here <https://birdwatchireland.ie/publications/saving-swifts-guide/>

#### Future surveys

- It is recommended that the county survey is repeated in 5-10 years to assess the Swift population and monitor the success of conservation measures.

## Local recommendations

<p>Birr, Crinkill, and Riverstown</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ninety-four percent of Swift nests in Birr and its environs are in residential and commercial properties.</b> These nest sites are at risk to renovations and are extremely vulnerable. <b>Providing more alternative nesting space is critical to conserving Birr’s Swift population.</b></li> <li>• Examples of suitable sites and areas identified are <b>Birr Civic Offices, Birr Public Library,</b> and buildings in the vicinity of <b>Castle Street,</b> where Swift activity was quite high.</li> <li>• <b>Caller systems should be installed and used</b> at all existing and future nest project sites to maximise success.</li> <li>• <b>Prioritising Swift bricks</b> in suitable new builds and renovations, particularly in areas where Swifts are already nesting is key.</li> <li>• It is recommended that at least <b>three, 24 cavity “built-in” nest brick projects are installed over the next 10 years.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Banagher</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an excellent commitment to nest box projects in Banagher with seven projects in place. <b>Ensuring caller systems are installed and in use</b> at these sites is crucial to their success.</li> <li>• <b>Prioritising Swift bricks</b> in suitable new builds and renovations, particularly in areas where Swifts are already nesting is key.</li> </ul>
<p>Tullamore</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sixty-four percent of Swift nests in Tullamore were recorded in commercial properties,</b> making the population extremely vulnerable. <b>Providing more alternative nesting space is key</b> to conserving Tullamores Swift population.</li> <li>• Suitable buildings include <b>Tullamore Library, Acres Folly, and the Esker Arts Centre.</b></li> <li>• As part of the conditions for planning for the Esker Arts Centre, <b>Offaly County Council committed to providing not less than 20 “built-in” nest bricks</b> at this public building.</li> <li>• It is extremely disappointing that these <b>nest bricks were not provided,</b> as they would have gone a long way toward securing the Tullamore Swift population. We would <b>strongly advise that alternative and permanent habitat be made available for Swifts.</b></li> <li>• <b>Prioritising Swift bricks</b> in suitable new builds and renovations particularly in areas where Swifts are already nesting is key.</li> <li>• It is recommended that at least <b>three, 24 cavity “built-in” nest brick projects are installed over the next 10 years.</b></li> </ul>

Clara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Clara Swift population is concentrated in 2 religious and commercial buildings, making it relatively vulnerable. <b>Protecting these sites is critical.</b></li> <li>• <b>Church officials should be alerted to the presence of Swifts nesting in St. Brigid’s Church</b> to protect this colony.</li> <li>• To mitigate for the potential loss of Swift nests in Clara, <b>Swift nest box projects should be encouraged and facilitated</b> at the community level.</li> <li>• <b>Prioritising Swift bricks</b> in suitable new builds and renovations, particularly in areas where Swifts are already nesting, is key.</li> <li>• It is recommended that at least <b>two, 24 cavity “built-in” nest brick projects are installed over the next 10 years.</b></li> </ul>
Edenderry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Eighty-seven percent of Swifts in Edenderry rely on residential buildings.</b> This is particularly alarming given the high rate of nest site loss recorded in this town between 2017 and 2023.</li> <li>• <b>Nest box projects should be implemented as a matter of urgency</b> on suitable public buildings in Edenderry to mitigate for further nest site loss.</li> <li>• <b>To maximise success, caller systems should be installed and used at all nest project sites.</b></li> <li>• The nest box project at St. Patrick’s National School, Gilroy Avenue has one breeding Swift pair. <b>Use of a caller system at this site should increase occupancy.</b></li> <li>• <b>Prioritising Swift bricks</b> in suitable new builds and renovations, particularly in areas where Swifts are already nesting, is key.</li> <li>• It is recommended that at least <b>three, 24 cavity “built-in” nest brick projects are installed over the next 10 years.</b></li> </ul>
Portarlinton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portarlinton hosts the second largest single Swift colony in Co. Offaly, with nine nests at St. Michael’s National School.</li> <li>• This building may be in need of renovation. <b>Protecting the existing nest sites in this building is key.</b></li> <li>• Renovations provide an opportunity for <b>installation of a large Swift brick project, consisting of at least 36 cavities.</b> This would secure the Swift population in Portarlinton.</li> <li>• <b>Nest brick cameras</b> could be installed at the same time, providing an <b>educational resource</b> for students. Should such renovation works be</li> </ul>

	<p>carried out, Offaly County Council is urged to support and encourage such a project.</p>
Daingean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a lot of love <b>for the Swift in the Daingean community</b>. This should be capitalised on through <b>nest box and brick projects at suitable buildings in the town</b>.</li> <li>• In addition, two nest box projects already exist in Daingean. There has been no uptake of these boxes by Swifts and caller systems were not installed at either site.</li> <li>• <b>Installing and using caller systems will significantly improve the chances of success and should be used at all existing and future projects</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Prioritising Swift bricks</b> in suitable new builds and renovations, particularly in areas where Swifts are already nesting, is key.</li> <li>• It is recommended that at least <b>one, 24 cavity “built-in” nest brick project is installed over the next 10 years</b>.</li> </ul>
Clonbullogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Clonbullogue Swift population is concentrated in a single religious building, making it relatively vulnerable. <b>Protecting this site is critical</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Church officials should be notified</b> of the presence of Swifts nesting in St. Kevin’s Church.</li> <li>• St. Kevin’s Church provides <b>one of the most enjoyable locations for watching Swifts in Co. Offaly</b>, as the building is quite low allowing close views of the birds. It is recommended that this site is promoted among the birdwatching community as a <b>"Swift observation destination."</b></li> <li>• To mitigate for the potential loss of Swift nests in Clonbullogue, <b>Swift nest box projects should be encouraged and facilitated</b> at the community level.</li> <li>• <b>Prioritising Swift bricks</b> in suitable new builds and renovations, particularly in areas where Swifts are already nesting, is key.</li> <li>• It is recommended that at least <b>one, 24 cavity “built-in” nest brick project is installed over the next 10 years</b>.</li> </ul>
Cloghan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Swift population in Cloghan is concentrated in a single building, placing it at risk if the building is renovated.</li> <li>• To mitigate for this at least one <b>"built-in" nest brick project</b> is recommended within the next five years.</li> <li>• If this is not possible, an external <b>Swift box project</b> should be approved at a suitable public building such as a school.</li> </ul>

Shannonbridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Conservation engineers should be alerted to the presence of nesting Swifts in the Shannon Bridge</b> to protect this population from restoration work.</li> <li>• This site provides spectacular views of Swifts in flight and could be <b>promoted as a key site for Swift observation</b> among the birdwatching community.</li> <li>• To mitigate for the potential loss of Swift nests in Shannonbridge, <b>Swift nest box projects should be encouraged and facilitated</b> at the community level.</li> <li>• <b>Prioritising Swift bricks</b> in suitable new builds and renovations, particularly in areas where Swifts are already nesting, is key.</li> </ul>
Durrow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three Swift nests were lost at Durrow Community Centre between 2017 and 2023 due to renovations, an <b>example of how easily a colony can be reduced or lost</b>.</li> <li>• At now just two nests the Durrow Swift population is extremely vulnerable.</li> <li>• To mitigate for the potential loss of Swift nests in Durrow, <b>Swift nest box projects should be encouraged and facilitated</b> at the community level as a matter of urgency.</li> <li>• <b>Prioritising Swift bricks</b> in suitable new builds and renovations, particularly in areas where Swifts are already nesting, is key.</li> </ul>
Killeigh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At just 2 nests, the Swift population in Killeigh is extremely vulnerable, despite its persistence between 2017 and 2023.</li> <li>• <b>A nest box project with a caller system</b> is urgently required to secure this population.</li> <li>• <b>Prioritising Swift bricks</b> in suitable new builds and renovations, particularly in areas where Swifts are already nesting, is key to the long-term survival of the Killeigh Swift population.</li> </ul>
Shinrone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All nests recorded in 2017 were lost by 2023, with one new nest recorded in a residential property this season.</li> <li>• There is a nest box project with 6 cavities on McNamara’s pub. A corvid has built a nest on top of one of the nest boxes. <b>Under licence from the National Parks and Wildlife Services, this corvid nest should be removed, and the gap between the nest boxes and eaves should be blocked</b> to prevent further corvid nesting activity.</li> <li>• <b>A caller system should be installed on McNamara’s pub</b> prior to the breeding season <b>and used</b> from late April to mid-August to increase the success of the nest box project.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A second nest box project with caller system</b> is urgently required to secure this population.</li> <li>• <b>Prioritising Swift bricks</b> in suitable new builds and renovations, is key.</li> </ul>
Kinnity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2017, three nests were recorded Kinnity, in a single building. In 2023, just one nest remains.</li> <li>• Nests were lost due to wall climbing plants covering the entrances. The <b>final nest is extremely vulnerable</b> to the same fate.</li> <li>• The Kinnity Swift population will be lost if preventative measures, such as <b>Swift nest boxes with caller systems</b>, are not installed within the next few years.</li> <li>• Longer term, <b>“built-in” nest brick projects should be considered</b> for any suitable public buildings.</li> </ul>
Kilcormac	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With just one confirmed nest site, the Kilcormac Swift population is extremely vulnerable.</li> <li>• <b>Nest boxes and caller systems should be installed on suitable public buildings as a matter of urgency</b> to ensure the population is not lost.</li> <li>• There is a nest box project in Kilcormac on a residential building. No caller system was observed on site. The <b>owners should be approached about installing and using a caller system</b> to increase their chances of success.</li> <li>• Longer term, <b>“built-in” nest brick projects</b> should be considered for any suitable public buildings.</li> <li>• It is suspected that there is a second unconfirmed Swift nest in Kilcormac. It would be worthwhile asking a community group or the homeowners to <b>report any sightings of a Swift nest at this site</b> (see Site based results).</li> </ul>
Geashill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Geashill has a strong community that is excited about attracting Swifts to the village.</b> There are two Swift box projects in the village, one in Geashill National School and one in a private residence.</li> <li>• A caller system is in place and in use at Geashill National School. <b>Geashill National School should be encouraged to continue this great work and expand the project if possible.</b> A nest box with a camera could also be installed as an <b>educational tool.</b></li> <li>• No caller system was observed at the nest box project on the private residence. The <b>owners should be approached about installing and using a caller system</b> to increase their chances of success.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once the Geashill Swift population is established, the <b>next available opportunity for "built-in" Swift brick projects should be taken</b> to establish a large colony.</li> </ul>
Horseleap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Due to restricted access, it was unfortunately not possible to completely re-survey Horseleap this season.</li> <li>Engagement with the Horseleap community, as well as church officials and the principal of Horseleap Primary School prior to the 2024 breeding season to try and <b>establish the presence or absence of breeding Swifts in the village</b> would be valuable.</li> </ul>
Cadamstown, Shannon Harbour, and Clonmacnoise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All three localities lost their Swift populations between 2017 and 2023.</li> <li>Approaching community groups and OPW site managers about establishing nest box projects in the future would be of value. However, in the first instance securing existing populations in Co. Offaly should be a more immediate priority.</li> </ul>

## Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to Offaly County Council Biodiversity Officer Ricky Whelan and Heritage Officer Amanda Pedlow, for their support throughout. We thank the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage for funding this project through the National Parks and Wildlife Service under the National Biodiversity Action Plan (2017-2021).

Special thanks to Anton Krastev, Ricky Wheelan and Brian Caffrey who were the authors of the 2017 County Offaly Swift Survey report. Their work was crucial to the success of 2023 Swift survey.

Thanks to all volunteers and local supporters who helped with locating the nests and spread their knowledge about the conservation efforts underway for the Swift. Special thanks to Tim O'Rourke, Pat Foley, Malachy Mangan, Therese Kelly, Allison Delaney, Holly Breen & Nessa.

Thank you to all staff at Birdwatch Ireland who supported this research.

Lastly, special thanks go to all the kind people of Co. Offaly who approached me during the survey visits to their towns and villages. Thank you for your kindness, pleasant chats, jokes, and appreciation for the Swift.



*Figure 30. Examples of community involvement. Tim, Malachy & Malachy (Daingean), Pat Foley (Geashill), Therese (Banagher).*



## References

- Antonov, A. & Atanasova, D., 2002a. Breeding biology of the alpine swift *Apus melba* in Sofia, Bulgaria. *Avian Science*, Volume 2, pp. 1-8.
- Balmer, D.E., Gillings, S., Caffrey, B.J., Swann, R.L., Downie, I.S. & Fuller, R.J. 2013. *Bird Atlas 2007-11: the breeding and wintering birds of Britain and Ireland*. BTO Books, Thetford.
- BirdLife International, 2021. Species factsheet: *Apus apus*. [Online]
- Chantler, P. & Driessens, G., 1995. *Swifts, A Guide To The Swifts and Treeswifts of the World*. Robertsbridge, East Sussex: Pica Press.
- Colhoun, K. & Cummins, S., 2013. Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2014-2019. *Irish Birds*, Volume 9, pp. 523-544.
- Cutcliffe, A. S., 1951. Notes on the breeding habits of the swift. *British Birds*, Volume 44, pp. 47-56.
- Gilbert, G., Stanbury, A. & Lewis, L., 2021. Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 4: 2020-2026. *Irish Birds*, Volume 43, pp. 1-22.
- Henningsson, P., Johansson, L. C. & Hedenstrom, A., 2010. How swift are swifts *Apus apus*? *Journal of Avian Biology*, Volume 41, pp. 94-98.
- Holmgren, J., 2004. Roosting in tree foliage by the Common Swift *Apus apus*. *Ibis*, Volume 146, pp. 404-416.
- Huxley, L., 2017. *We Are Swifts - We Are in Trouble*, Mayo: Carra Books.
- Krastev, A., Wheelan, R., Caffrey, B., 2017. *Offaly Swift Survey 2017*, Birdwatch Ireland.
- Lack, D., 1956. *Swifts in a Tower*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd.
- Lewis, L. J., Coombes, D., Burke, B., O'Halloran, J., Walsh, A., Tierney, T. D. & Cummins, S. 2019. *Countryside Bird Survey: Status and trends of common and widespread breeding birds 1998-2016*. *Irish Wildlife Manuals*, No. 115. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Ireland.
- Linnaeus, C., 1758. *Systema naturae per regna tria naturae :secundum classes, ordines, genera, species, cum characteribus, differentiis, synonymis, locis*. Stockholm: Laurentius Salvius.
- Lynas, P., Newton, S. F. & Robinson, J. A., 2007. The status of birds in Ireland: an analysis of conservation concern 2008-2013. *Irish Birds*, Volume 8, pp. 149-166
- Majkusiak, J., 2022. *The breeding biology of the Common Swift (*Apus apus*) in Ireland – the most north-westerly edge of the nesting habitat*, MSc thesis, ATU, Galway.
- Møller, A. P., 2020. Quantifying rapidly declining abundance of insects in Europe using a paired experimental design. *Ecology and Evolution*, Volume 00, pp. 1-6.
- Newton, I., 2007. Weather-related mass mortality events in migrants. *Ibis*, Volume 149, pp. 453-467.
- O'Connor, R., 1979. Egg weights and brood reduction in the European Swift (*Apus apus*). *Condor*, Volume 81, pp. 133-145.

Oloś, G., 2017. Is "banging" an antipredator behavior in Common Swift (*Apus apus*)?. *Ornis Fennica*, Volume 94, pp. 45-52.

Perrins, C., 1971. Age of the First Breeding and Adult Survival Rates in the Swift. *Bird Study*, Volume 18(2), pp. 61-70.

Tigges, U., 2007. The Phenology of the Common Swift *Apus apus* in Eurasia and the Problem of Defining the Duration of their Stay. *Podoces*, Volume 2(2), p. 127–140.

Thompson, D., Douglas-Home, H., Furness, R. & Monaghan, P., 1996. Breeding success and survival in the common swift *Apus apus*: a long term study on the effects of weather. *Journal of Zoology*, Volume 239(1), pp. 29-38.

Whelan, R., Hayes, W. & Caffrey, B., 2019. *Saving Swifts, Wicklow: BirdWatch Ireland*.

Whelan, R., Krastev, A., Hayes, W. & Caffrey, B., 2018. A study of the distribution and density of Swift *Apus apus* nest sites in four neighbouring counties (Laois, Offaly, Westmeath and Tipperary). *Irish Birds*, Volume 11, pp. 100-101.

## Supporting information

Suggested policy wording – County Development/Heritage Plan documents or similar

It is illegal under The Wildlife Act 1976 (+ amendments) to intentionally kill or cause harm to nesting bird species. Therefore, to comply with Irish legislation and to follow best practice the following actions should be carried out within the respective situations outlined below.

BirdWatch Ireland are happy to supply further steer and recommendations if needed at any point and can be reached at [Swifts@birdwatchireland.ie](mailto:Swifts@birdwatchireland.ie)

### **When working on buildings where Swifts are nesting (during nesting season):**

Avoid working on the building while Swifts are nesting (end April – end August inclusive), if work must take place, it must be limited to areas where Swifts will not be affected (internal work) or disturbed. Wholesale removal of roof structures and masonry is to be avoided always within the nesting season.

Do not block nest access with scaffold and don't net or wrap areas where Swifts are nesting.

### **When working on buildings where Swifts are nesting (outside of nesting season):**

Preserve the Swifts nest access holes or make new ones to match the old exactly.

If existing nest entrances can't be retained, mitigation by erection of externally fixed specialised Swift nest boxes should be made.

### **When working on new builds or renovations to buildings that don't have Swifts nesting:**

At the planning stages for all new public buildings (over 5 metres) built-in Swift bricks (preferable) or externally fixed Swift nest boxes should be incorporated.

At the planning stages of all new private buildings (over 5 metres) built in Swift bricks or externally fixed Swift nest boxes should be considered.

## Swift nest boxes and bricks in use

There are a myriad of Swift bricks (integrated into fabric of wall) and Swift nest boxes (externally fitted) available commercially. Within the available options many can be rendered over or painted to match the building. Pages 22-27 of the Saving Swifts guide offer further case studies where both bricks and boxes have been used at a range of sites/building types.



Figure 31. A row of Swift nest boxes installed at Mullingar Courthouse. Photo: Richella Duggan.



Figure 32. Installing Swift boxes as part of the fabric of the wall. Photo: Lynda Huxley (Swift Conservation Ireland).

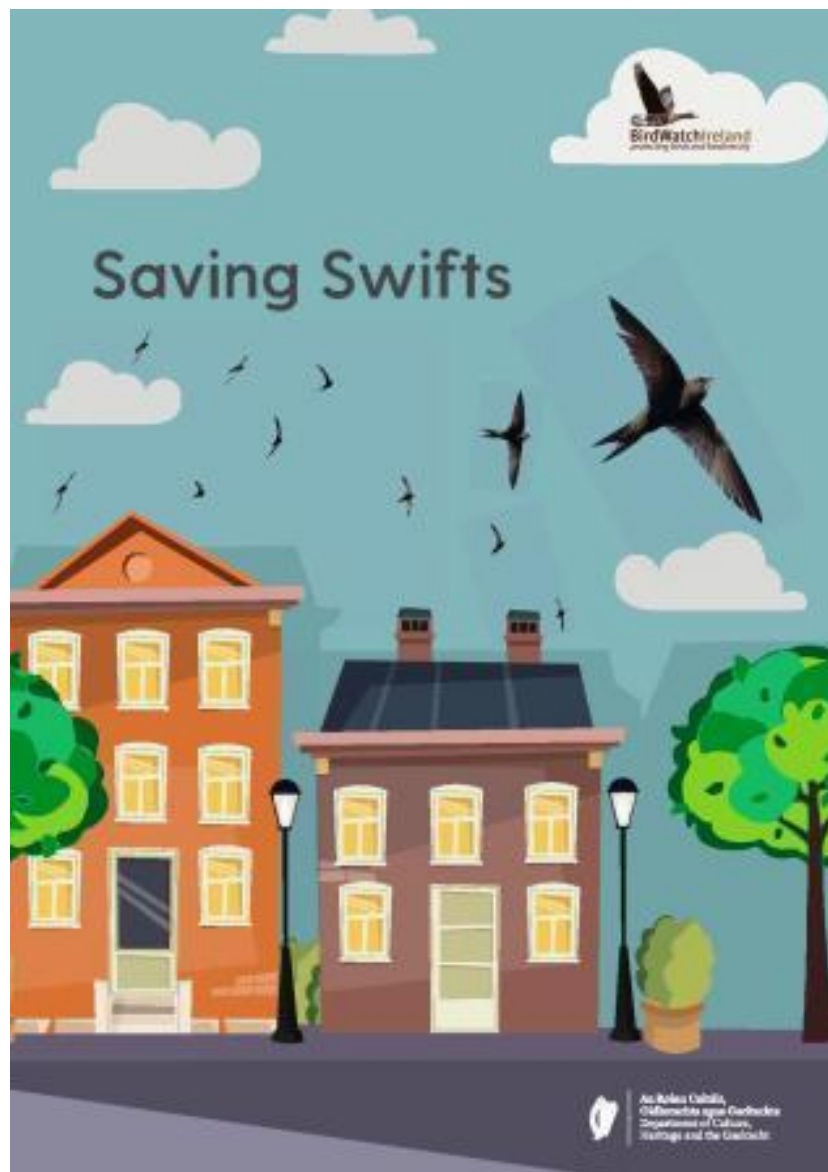


*Figure 33. Swift Bricks installed during build phase in Nothing Hill, London.*



*Figure 34. A Swift Brick installed in a newly erected redbrick wall. Photo: [www.birdbrickhouses.co.uk](http://www.birdbrickhouses.co.uk).*

## BirdWatch Ireland 'Saving Swifts' guide

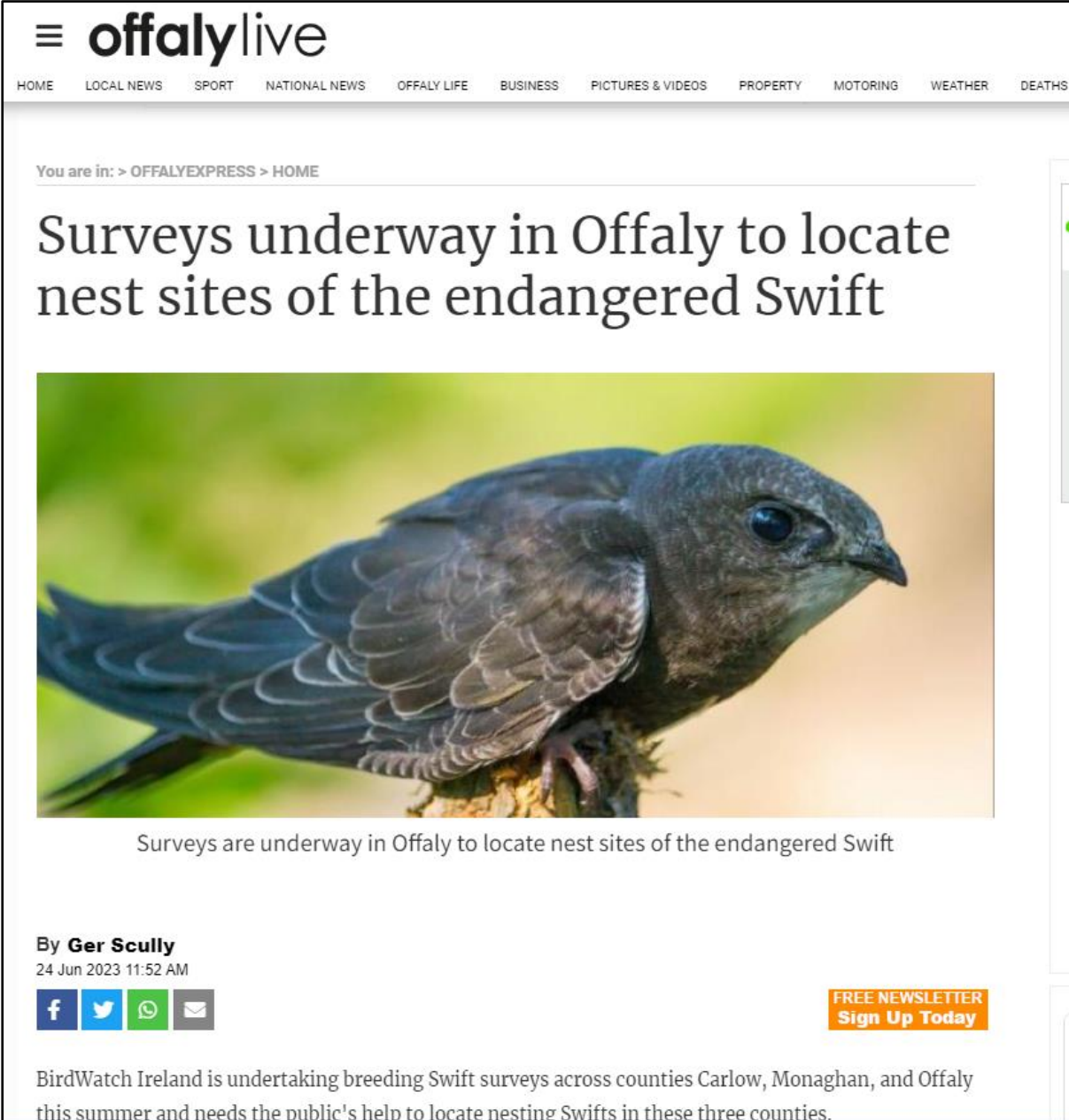


The BirdWatch Ireland 'Saving Swifts' guide is available as a free download here:  
<https://birdwatchireland.ie/publications/saving-Swifts-guide/>.

The guide is a one stop shop for anyone who is motivated to help conserve Swifts at their own home or on a larger scale, such as community and county scale projects.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Project promotion



The image is a screenshot of a news article on the Offaly Live website. At the top left is the 'offalylive' logo with a hamburger menu icon. A navigation bar contains links for HOME, LOCAL NEWS, SPORT, NATIONAL NEWS, OFFALY LIFE, BUSINESS, PICTURES & VIDEOS, PROPERTY, MOTORING, WEATHER, and DEATHS. Below the navigation bar, a breadcrumb trail reads 'You are in: > OFFALYEXPRESS > HOME'. The main headline is 'Surveys underway in Offaly to locate nest sites of the endangered Swift'. Below the headline is a photograph of a Swift bird perched on a small nest. Underneath the photo is a sub-headline: 'Surveys are underway in Offaly to locate nest sites of the endangered Swift'. The author is listed as 'By Ger Scully' with a timestamp of '24 Jun 2023 11:52 AM'. Below the author information are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Email. To the right of these icons is a 'FREE NEWSLETTER Sign Up Today' button. At the bottom of the article, the text reads: 'BirdWatch Ireland is undertaking breeding Swift surveys across counties Carlow, Monaghan, and Offaly this summer and needs the public's help to locate nesting Swifts in these three counties.'

**offalylive**

HOME LOCAL NEWS SPORT NATIONAL NEWS OFFALY LIFE BUSINESS PICTURES & VIDEOS PROPERTY MOTORING WEATHER DEATHS

You are in: > OFFALYEXPRESS > HOME

## Surveys underway in Offaly to locate nest sites of the endangered Swift



Surveys are underway in Offaly to locate nest sites of the endangered Swift

By **Ger Scully**  
24 Jun 2023 11:52 AM

[f](#) [t](#) [w](#) [e](#)

**FREE NEWSLETTER**  
**Sign Up Today**

BirdWatch Ireland is undertaking breeding Swift surveys across counties Carlow, Monaghan, and Offaly this summer and needs the public's help to locate nesting Swifts in these three counties.

Figure 35. Coverage on Offaly Live.

The screenshot shows the website for Midlands 103. The navigation bar includes links for Home, News, On Air, Obituaries, Local, Win, and Events. The main content area features a green header with the station's logo and a title 'Ours To Protect - Week 19'. Below this is a sub-header 'Swifts in Ireland' and a paragraph of text describing the birds. A 'Listen back:' section contains a media player interface with a play button, a progress bar at 0:00 / 0:00, and volume controls.

Figure 36. Radio Interview with 'Midlands 103' on the programme 'Ours to Protect'. Aired 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

The screenshot displays the podcast page for 'In Your Nature'. The title 'In Your Nature' is prominent at the top, followed by the episode title 'In Your Nature Ep 43 - Swift Conservation'. Metadata includes the date 'SEPTEMBER 15, 2023', 'SEASON 7', and 'EPISODE 6'. A central player area shows a cover image of a swift, a play button, the episode title, and a waveform. The duration '00:00 | 48:22' is shown below the waveform. At the bottom, there are sections for 'LISTEN ON' with logos for various platforms (iHeartRadio, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Amazon Music, etc.) and 'SHARE EPISODE' with social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and a link icon.

Figure 37. Appearance on the BirdWatch Ireland podcast 'In Your Nature'. Released 15<sup>th</sup> September 2023.





Swift  
Photo: Ben Andrew / rspb-images.com

## Saving Swifts

There is much that local communities and individuals can do to help protect Swifts in towns and villages across Ireland. **Tara Adcock** reports

Summer is upon us, and with summer come Swifts – one of the most startling and energetic birds to grace our skies during the summer months.

Weighing all of ~40 grammes, this sickle-shaped bird boomerangs its way from sub-Saharan Africa, where it overwinters, to breed here in Ireland. Arriving from late April to early May, Swifts start to head south again in mid-August.

Ireland may be the westerly extent of the Swifts' breeding range, but it is not its most northerly. Swifts breed as far north as the Arctic Circle and as far east as northern China.



Swift at wall with internal nest boxes (known as Swift traps) in the Netherlands.  
Photo: Xochermit (Wikimedia Commons)



**New appointment**

We are pleased to announce that Tara Adcock has been appointed BirdWatch Ireland's new Urban Birds Project Officer. She takes over the role from Ricky Whelan, who recently moved to Offaly County Council to work as their Biodiversity Officer.

Tara has worked for BirdWatch Ireland since 2018, principally focusing on waterbirds and terns within an urban context, and is fascinated by the interface between urban spaces and wildlife.

However, the distance this bird travels is far from the most remarkable thing about it. Scientists have proven that these birds spend the vast majority of their lives on the wing – feeding, sleeping, even mating in the air and typically only come to ground when nesting.

These birds are built for life on the wing. Their long, thin, sharply winged and streamlined bodies make them perfectly aerodynamic. Swifts are intrinsically linked with our built environment. Long ago, they would have nested in tree cavities, sea caves and cliff faces, like their cousin the Alpine Swift. However, as we began building houses, churches, etc. the Swift moved in alongside us, nesting in crevices in the stone and brickwork and under eaves. It can be argued that, more than any other species in Ireland bar Feral Pigeons, the Swift is a truly urban bird.

While urban spaces have provided homes for Swifts for centuries, recent innovations in building technology have made their reliance on these built spaces problematic. In the last decade or so, we have become increasingly good at sealing our buildings, making them more energy efficient but squeezing out the Swift in the process. This means that many new or recently renovated buildings have no space for nesting Swifts. This is thought to be one of several factors leading to the drastic decline of the Swift in Ireland.

We're not trading in hyperbole when we say 'drastic decline'. Data collected for the Countywide Bird Survey (CIB) by volunteers, National Parks and Wildlife Service rangers and BirdWatch Ireland staff, showed a whopping 58% decline between 1998 and 2016. That means we lost 58% of our Swift population in just 18 years! This decline landed the Swift on the Birds of Conservation Concern 1.

Ireland red list, meaning that it is in danger of extinction here if we don't act fast.

However, there is hope. There are several organisations across the island of Ireland working tirelessly to try to reverse these declines. Swift Conservation Ireland, Dublin Swift Conservation Group, Northern Ireland Swift Group, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in Northern Ireland, and BirdWatch Ireland are all putting their shoulder to the wheel, alongside fantastic local community organisations and residents, to try to save the Swift.

The principal focus currently is on finding existing Swift nest sites. In BirdWatch Ireland County Swift Surveys have been carried out since 2017, with 14 counties as well as Dublin city and South Dublin surveyed so far, and with Monaghan, Offaly and Carlow to be surveyed this year.

Finding and protecting Swift nest sites is one of the most crucial steps in halting the decline of the Swift. The reason for this is that Swifts are extremely faithful to their nest site. If a nest site is lost, its Swifts won't find another to breed in that season. They simply will not breed.

Given the rapid rate of decline of this species and the inelasticity of its nesting behaviour, the loss of each breeding pair and nest site has dire consequences for the Irish Swift population.

The second thing which BirdWatch Ireland and other Swift conservation groups do is engage with local communities. We share ways in which individuals and communities can help existing Swift populations and bolster the number of Swifts breeding in their area. This is crucial to conserving this species.

And this is where you come in. There are loads of practical things that we can all do in our own homes and our local communities to help the Swift. Below is a breakdown of practical steps we can all take to help save this species (but for more information see the [Saving Swifts](#) guide on the BirdWatch Ireland website):

- 1 Record any Swift nest sites you find on the [National Biodiversity Data Centre Swift portal](#) at [www.birdwatchireland.com/swifts/records](#). This can be done by individuals or through local community surveys.
- 2 Carry out renovations or construction work on houses or public buildings with nesting Swifts **outside** the breeding season, i.e. between September and April.
- 3 Ensure existing nest sites remain accessible, i.e., don't plaster over them or block them if replacing facias, soffits or gutters.
- 4 Put up Swift nest boxes or Swift bricks in your home or local area.



Swift  
Photo: Piotr Rak


These should be:

- north-facing (but can be oriented east or west if shaded)
- placed under eaves to protect the nest from the elements
- at least five metres off the ground
- free of obstacles below or in front of them
- inaccessible to cats. Make sure there is no way for cats to climb near to nest sites.

- 5 When installing nest boxes or nest bricks, use a tape lure (essentially a speaker that plays the calls of Swifts) to attract Swifts looking for nest sites to your building. A licence from the National Parks and Wildlife Service is required and can easily be applied for on their website.
- 6 Contact your local Heritage or Biodiversity Officer and/or BirdWatch Ireland about buildings in your area with nesting Swifts that may be at risk due to disrepair or renovation.
- 7 Undertake a Swift nest box project, installing Swift nest boxes or Swift bricks at suitable locations on buildings in your community.
- 8 Petition your local authority through the County Development Plan to install Swift nest boxes or bricks in new building developments such as schools, libraries and public offices.
- 9 Garden for nature. Swifts are insectivores, i.e., they eat insects. Dig a pond, even a small one, and avoid using pesticides. Let nature be messy and plant native plants in your garden or on your balcony or public space, to give insects and thus Swifts a fighting chance. Insect declines are undoubtedly a factor in the decline of the Swift population, and we need to fight this decline on all fronts – both in terms of housing and food.

The plight of the Swift in Ireland is unusual. The fact that it lives not only in urban spaces but in our buildings means that it is one of the few rapidly declining Irish species that we can all pitch in and help save. With government and community buy-in and individual actions, there is still very much hope for this incredible bird. ■

Figure 38. Promotion of Swift conservation measures and the 2023 Swift County Surveys in BirdWatch Ireland's magazine, 'Wings'.




**BirdWatch Ireland**

June 8 · 🌐

...

(TA) The 2023 Swift Survey Team has assembled! Peter Phillips (left) will be surveying #CountyMonaghan for Common Swift nest sites, and Jarek Majkusiak (middle) will be surveying counties #Offaly and #Carlow for nesting Common Swifts this summer. They both have a lot of ground to cover so if you want to give them a hand, please email [swifts@birdwatchireland.ie](mailto:swifts@birdwatchireland.ie).

Thanks to [Monaghan County Council](#), [Offaly County Council](#), [Carlow County Council Community Information](#) and [The Heritage Council](#) for supporting this work!



👍 Boost this post to reach up to 1710 more people if you spend \$14.

Boost post

👤 Ricky Whelan, Mark Collins and 108 others

💬 16 comments 5 shares

Figure 39. Facebook post promoting the three 2023 Swift County Surveys including Co. Offaly.

**Biodiversity Week 2023 Event**

***Swift Walk***  
***in Tullamore***

With: Tara Adcock – BirdWatch Ireland

Thursday May 25<sup>th</sup> @7:30pm

Meeting outside Tullamore Library

For more info email: [biodiversity@offalycoco.ie](mailto:biodiversity@offalycoco.ie)



Figure 40. Advertisement for a Swift Walk in Tullamore, Co. Offaly, organised by Offaly County Council Biodiversity Officer Ricky Whelan for Biodiversity Week and led by BirdWatch Ireland, to promote the Co. Offaly 2023 Swift Survey.