

Securing a future for Bromley's swifts: the 2019 RSPB Bromley Swift Survey

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Swifts are the Olympians of the animal world. No other bird can reach such fast speeds and travel for years without touching down. These incredible birds nest in nooks and crannies under the eaves of our buildings, performing their aerial acrobatics over our borough's summer skies.

Sadly, across the UK and in Bromley, swift numbers have halved in the last two decades, in part because there are far fewer places for them to nest in new or refurbished buildings.

In 2018, the RSPB Bromley Local Group launched their first Bromley Swift Survey. Over 120 local volunteers took part searching for these endangered birds in their neighbourhood. They did it all again in 2019 and we can now reveal the results.

Thanks to our volunteers, over these two summers we have surveyed almost 90% of the places where swifts might be nesting in the borough. This is an incredible effort – our volunteers collectively spent over 1,200 hours, making this one of the country's largest local swift surveys.

We have now pinpointed many of the most important places for swifts, for example in Eden Park in Beckenham and in Plaistow and Mottingham. Unfortunately, we have also discovered that there are now large parts of the borough where they have all but disappeared including the town centres of Bromley and Orpington.

In 2019 we found new nests, which now have better chances of being protected. However, the number of surveyors who encountered swifts decreased, which is concerning as this is a good measure of the health of our borough's swift population.

Thankfully, there is an easy solution to swifts' plight – making sure that new development contains integral swift nest bricks (bricks with cavities in which these birds can nest). There is an important role for the Council to play in providing clear guidance for planners and developers to make sure that new development in the borough includes swift bricks and, where it doesn't, requiring their installation through planning conditions.

There are also things that everyone can do to help:

- Put up a swift nest box on your property. They are available from as little as £14 (see swift-conservation.org for more information). Avoid south facing walls and make sure they are fitted at least 5m high
- Create a swift café in your garden. Planting nectar-bearing plants is a great way to help urban wildlife of all kinds, including insect-eating swifts. The RSPB's website has lots of advice: rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife
- Take part in our 2020 Bromley Swift Survey. We will give you a local area to survey and ask you to take a few short walks over the summer and let us know where you see any swifts
- Join our team of volunteer Swift Champions who are encouraging the installation of swift bricks and boxes in their local area.

If you would like to take part in our survey this year for the first time, join our team of Swift Champions or would like any more information about the RSPB Bromley Swift Project, please email bromleyrspbrecords@gmail.com. For more information about the RSPB Bromley Local Group visit rspb.org.uk/groups/bromley

Together, we can save our borough's swifts and preserve one of the quintessential sights and sounds of summer.