

Swifts – a personal reflection from Ellen Williams, Môn Gwyrdd Youth Forum

Swifts are important to me as one of the first species that sparked by interest in birds. Before I learnt about curlew and chough and dippers and warblers, I learnt about swifts. Once you know what to look for, this bird is unmistakable and easy to spot with its soaring flight pattern and sickle-shaped wings. Their penchant for insects makes them excellent pest controllers of aphids, mosquitoes and flying ants, minimising the need for pesticides, which can impact non-target species. Their calls are difficult to miss and bring life by signifying summer's arrival. To me, swifts also represent community connection and I am able to bond with people in my community over our desire to watch and protect swifts.



As a species that seems to enjoy nesting in the eaves of buildings, it's accessible to those living in urban environments and therefore provides new chances for people to connect with wildlife where opportunities may be fewer. I personally was schooled in Caergybi, a small island off the coast of Anglesey. It was here that I noted with enthusiasm that swift boxes had been added to some of the old port buildings and could be seen from a nearby street in the old town. Watching them flit about the sky at dusk and soar over the rooftops is a magical experience. It was in Caergybi where I witnessed by favourite memory of swifts. I was taking part in a swift walk/survey with North Wales Wildlife Trust when we stopped to watch a nest where swifts were known to be breeding. Our group observed as a young swift poked its head out from under the roof and examined us for a while before taking off for the first time. I learnt that newly fledged chicks don't land for two to four years once they've fledged so that bird is still likely flying around without having landed since we saw it that day. They feed, sleep, and even mate on the wing before they eventually land to breed at a nesting site.

Some birds stop coming to the UK due to a lack of nesting sites. If our swifts continue to decline at their current rate, the turn of our seasons would feel notably different in our neighbourhoods. If a law was passed to protect them, I think that could only be a good thing by preventing the decline in their populations. Since swifts return to their nest site year on year they may not even breed at all that year if they cannot access their nest. By providing nest sites in reasonable places across Wales, we would give swifts a fighting chance. If nest sites could be created or protected by law, then there may still be a chance for us to save our swifts.