Alfriston School and Berwick Church Swift Conservation Project 2017

Four swift nest boxes have been made by children from Alfriston Primary School using marine plywood. They were installed behind the louvres in the upper part of the flint tower of the church on 2nd May 2017, around the time that Swifts arrive back in the U.K. from their winter migration to sub-Saharan Africa.

A recording of the swift call, a screeching sound, is played in the early in the morning to try and attract swifts to these new boxes. It may be a couple of years before the birds establish their territory and use the nest boxes.

The project is a response to the decline in swift numbers in the U.K. thought to be a result in the decline in suitable nesting places. This is a result of improvements to old buildings and new building design. Swifts nest in gaps in the roof of a building or crevices in a wall. The population was estimated at 80,000 in 1990 and is thought to have declined by 50% since then.

SWIFT MIGRATION

This is one of the longest migration journeys in the world at about **14,000 miles** to Equatorial and Southern Africa and back every year.

About **115 coloured swifts** were made by children from Alfriston Primary School to celebrate the project. Some are decorated with colours to represent the countries which the swifts fly over in their migration – France, Spain, Morocco, Mali, Nigeria, DR Congo… some are decorated with spots to represent bead-making in Africa, and others with stained-glass pattern.

SWIFT FACTS

- After leaving the nest a swift will fly for 3 years without touching the ground. They sleep on the wing, one half of the brain asleep and one eye shut at a time.
- The fastest record for swift flight is 69 mph.

Bringing up baby

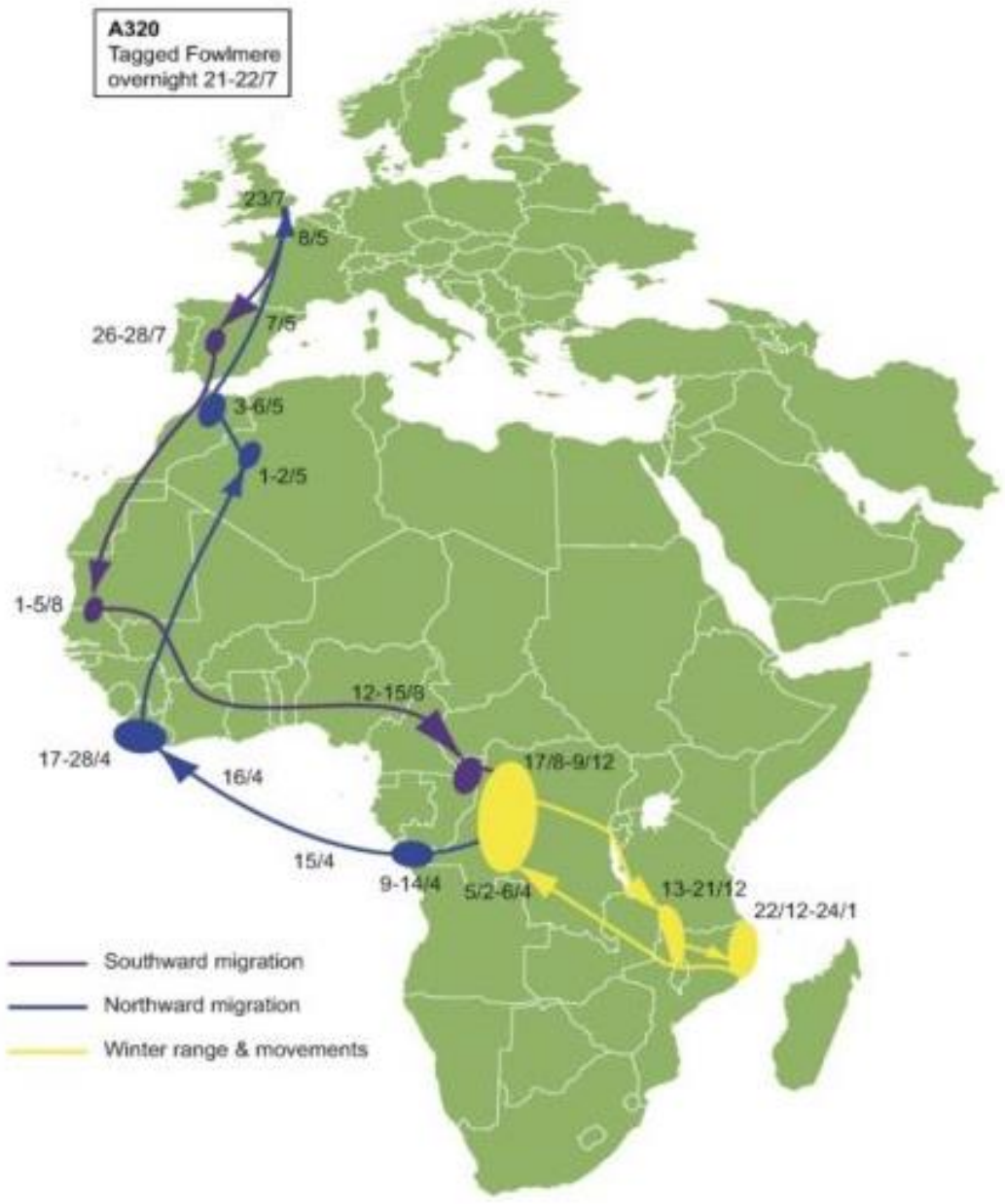
- It seems they really can mate on the wing – but they will also mate in their nest holes. No other bird is known to mate on the wing (apart from some other swift species)
- They have a clever adaptation. Food can be scarce in bad weather – the chicks can go cold and torpid and survive for days without food, then regain weight rapidly once supplies resume. Most baby birds can't do this and would simply die within hours. Only one other kind of bird can lose temperature control and become torpid each night – the hummingbird. This saves energy. The nearest relatives to the swift family are hummingbirds.
- The length of time the babies spend in the nest will vary, depending on how good the food supply has been, and can vary by up to three weeks – this is different to birds like robins and blackbirds which leave when they are a certain age, no matter how well they've grown.

INSPIRATION FOR THE PROJECT

The project was inspired by a someone who was attending a funeral in 2016. The church was too full to accommodate everyone and the person was standing outside on the ancient mound behind the church - *'3 or 4 swifts came early in the service, during the second verse*

of the first hymn. They did not fly past fast, screeching as swifts so often do. Rather they came slowly and quietly. When they were directly over the church, they hung there fluttering gently. It seemed they had come to listen. Then, suddenly, they soared away high into the sky. I had an overwhelming sense that they had come to show their respect and they conveyed that sense that they had come almost to take her to be happy and safe in the heavens above.'

SWIFT MIGRATION MAP



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