

8. Bird boxes for barn owls, swifts – and others?

The Barn Owl Project

The inspiration for the **barn owl project** came from Henry Astor at Bruern Farm. Henry erected seven boxes for barn owls and five are currently inhabited. In 2023, 12 chicks were tagged, and in the previous year 22. His aim is to put boxes up along the Evenlode from Woodstock to Moreton, creating a fabulous wildlife corridor.

Further south in the parish, work is in hand to put up **three more barn owl boxes**, one in Calais field (courtesy of Philip Watson), and the other two in the copse adjacent to the Eco Area. Advice from experts was taken in relation to choosing the right locations and the work is planned for February, 2024. Barn owls may roost in a box one year and then nest there in the subsequent year.

Let's hope the MuW boxes are as successful as those Henry Astor has established at Bruern!

Further information about this initiative - or if you wish to put up nest boxes for **other birds** - please contact Pat Ward.

SOS Save Our Swifts!



Why swifts?

Because they are now in desperate trouble having nested here since at least Roman times. Between 1995 and 2016 we lost over half the population and they are still declining. This is largely due to the demolition of old buildings, replacement buildings lacking suitable provision, and the widespread use of insecticides. (One research suggests that we may have lost 80 % of our insects in recent years).

They are truly remarkable birds - fantastic aerialists and the fastest bird in level flight. They eat, drink, mate and sleep on the wing, only landing to breed. Some can fly at 18, 000 feet over the Himalayas.

Tragically they are now declining at a truly alarming rate but we can make a difference – and it's relatively cheap and easy.

What we did

In the early part of 2023, we installed three nest boxes for swifts on the side of our house with the help of Swift Conservation who advised us on the best type of box for our house, the best position on the wall, and how to maximize our chances of success in attracting swifts to use them.



New swift boxes – take advice on where to locate them

A very knowledgeable and committed volunteer from Swift Conservation, who lives locally, installed the boxes for us in return for the net cost of the boxes. (We volunteered a donation to Swift Conservation for his labour.)

Our boxes (see picture above) were made of wood by John Stimpson, who makes hundreds of boxes each year for Swift Conservation, and painted in a colour of our choice. There are several other types of boxes available, including an ingenious brick with a cavity inside that easily replaces an existing brick to provide a very discreet nest in a brick built wall. *Developers and builders please note!*

Having installed boxes for swifts, it's best to gain their attention; you can get a recording of swift calls from Swift Conservation and play it through an inexpensive portable speaker.

We believe (hope) it worked!

Late in the season we watched several (young?) swifts flying close to our boxes, apparently showing interest. We were excited by this “fly past” and are cautiously optimistic that we will have swifts in our boxes in this coming season when they return in May from their winter stay in central or southern Africa.

More information...

Swift Conservation's website is really helpful; a wealth of information about swifts, their life cycle, how to attract them to nest near you plus a very wide range of swift boxes from which to choose.

Brian Watson, January 2024