



Monaghan County Swift Survey 2023

Prepared by: Tara Adcock, Peter Phillips, and Brian Caffrey.



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**An Roinn Tithíochta,
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Executive Summary

- Twenty-two localities (villages and towns) were surveyed.
- Swifts were present in eleven localities and confirmed nesting in nine villages and towns.
- A total of 199 Swift nests were confirmed across Co. Monaghan.
- Monaghan, Carrickmacross, and Ballybay are the county strongholds for Swifts.
- Residential or commercial properties accounted for 63.5% of nest locations, while 36.5% of nests were in religious or public buildings.
- Co. Monaghan has both suitable nesting and foraging habitat for Swifts. However, Swifts are no longer present in some localities or at critically low levels. Swifts may disappear locally if action is not taken.
- **Key actions to be taken** – install nest boxes at suitable locations, and nest bricks in new developments through the planning process. Caller systems need to be used to attract Swifts to these sites. These initiatives will work best if the local communities are involved.

Introduction

The Common Swift, *Apus apus*, is a small migratory bird which arrives in Ireland from southern Africa in May and departs by mid-August. It is the only Swift species in Ireland, although Alpine Swifts are observed very occasionally but no breeding attempts have been recorded. Swifts pair for life and are also site faithful, returning to the same nesting site each year. They are mostly an urban species, preferring to nest in crevices in old buildings and in the eaves of houses, or in natural gaps in stonework. As a colonial species, they will usually nest in groups or colonies. Swifts spend most of their life in the air, where they will sleep, drink, eat and mate, landing only to return to the nest. Thus, Swifts will never be seen perching on telephone wires or fences. Swifts feed on small, airborne invertebrates they catch in flight. Reaching speeds of up to 110km/h, they are one of the fastest bird species in flight. During the breeding season, they can spend hours in flight catching food for their young. Swifts can carry food in their throat where it forms a ball, called a 'bolus'.



Figure 1: Swift in the hand.

Similar enough in appearance to House Martins, Sand Martins and Barn Swallows, there are a few key differences to look for, when trying to identify Swifts. Swifts have a short tail, unlike Swallows which will have a long, forked tail. In flight, Swifts will appear nearly all dark from underneath, with just a small patch of white on their chin. Swallows possess a creamy white belly and breast, House Martins have a white underbelly and wings, and Sand Martins have a white throat and belly with a brown band across the breast. Perhaps the most iconic feature of Swifts are their long, sickle-shaped wings, resembling a boomerang. These can be observed from quite a distance away and are different in shape when compared to the shorter, thicker wings of these similar species.

In recent decades, Swift numbers have been in decline throughout many parts of their range, giving much cause for concern. In Ireland, the recent Bird Atlas 2007-11 shows there has been a 26% loss in range since 1970 and a severe decline in abundance since 1990 (Balmer *et al.*, 2013). The Countryside Bird Survey (CBS) monitors trends in relative abundance of birds in Ireland and likewise, has shown a decline of almost 58% in the breeding population between 1998-2016, and one of the largest declines in distribution of any species, almost 53% from 1972-2016 (Lewis *et al.*, 2019). As a result, Swifts are now of conservation concern in Ireland and are Red listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (Gilbert *et al.*, 2021).

Anecdotally it has been noted that numbers locally are in decline, mirroring the national and international trends. Reasons for the decline of Swifts are not fully understood, but it is thought the loss of available nest sites due to renovations of old buildings and modern building techniques, restricting the availability of suitable nesting cavities, is a significant factor.

A negative correlation between climate change (increased temperatures) and breeding performance has been noted (Rajchard *et al.*, 2006). However conflicting results from similar studies (Thomas *et*

al., 1996), highlight the need for more long-term research on this topic to better understand the factors affecting Swift numbers and how we can help them effectively.

It has been documented that Swifts will nest in artificial nest boxes, thus allowing for populations to be maintained, notably where renovations to buildings have reduced nest site availability (Schaub *et al.*, 2016). Swifts are long-lived and faithful to their nest sites from year to year, and it is known that an individual pair will not readily move to a newly provided colony. Newly available sites are most likely to be occupied by new pairs if they are attracted to the area by other birds. Therefore, it is essential that any provision and placement of alternative nest sites must be guided by information on where Swifts are currently nesting. In relation to the protection of existing nest sites the Wildlife Act (1976), affords protection to all actively nesting birds and to interfere or disturb any nest is unlawful. However, it's important to note that despite EU legislation, under Irish law Swift nest colonies are not afforded any legal protection outside of the breeding season, even at nesting colonies where it is known that Swifts return to the same nest sites year on year. It is therefore important that Swift conservation efforts are conducted in partnership with site owners/developers to ideally retain nest sites or mitigate for any loss of sites.

The 2023 County Monaghan Swift Survey acts to quantify the level of Swift nesting activity across the county, providing baseline figures for future work. The survey work has highlighted areas where nesting Swift populations are found and in need of urgent conservation action. The survey has identified to site level the largest and most important Swift nesting sites that act as source populations within the county and further afield. These sites need to be treated with the upmost sensitivity during any renovation or redevelopment works to ensure existing Swift nest sites are retained. This is particularly important considering Regeneration Plans which have been drawn up for certain areas within Co. Monaghan. The survey team has made a special effort to include local community groups and residents in the project, to help establish a local network of Swift champions in the county.

Project Aim and Objectives

Aim:

To undertake a detailed survey of Swifts in towns and villages across Co. Monaghan to establish a baseline of the distribution of nesting Swifts in the county. The data collected will allow planners and decision makers to effectively manage Swifts at site level, helping to conserve this important part of Co. Monaghan's urban and natural heritage.

Objectives:

- Carry out a survey of Swifts across Co. Monaghan to locate nesting colonies.
- Engage volunteers, community groups and local people to encourage the development of local Swift projects in Co. Monaghan, through training and advice.

Methodology

Swift surveying

Towns and villages (localities) were identified for Swift fieldwork prior to the season, which ran from early-June to early-August. Survey visits were typically carried out during fine to moderate weather to increase chances of encountering Swifts. Where possible fieldwork was conducted before 11am and after 6pm in line with daily peak Swift activity.

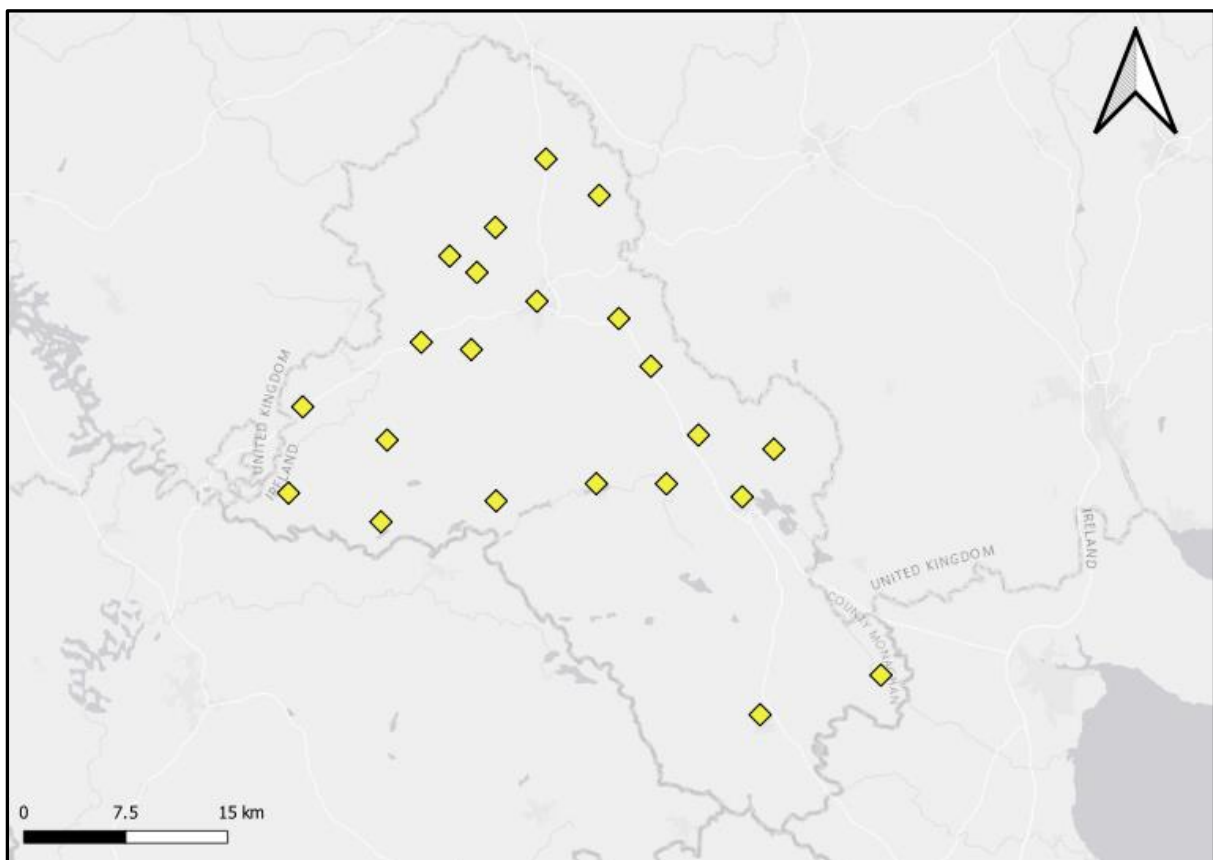


Figure 2: Localities selected for the Co. Monaghan Swift Survey.

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.

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. In addition, local community groups were contacted via the Co. Monaghan Biodiversity Officer, for assistance with surveying and to engage with members of the community about their local Swift colonies.

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 **22 localities** in Co. Monaghan were surveyed for this project. Of the 22 localities surveyed, Swifts were recorded in **eleven**, with nesting sites **confirmed in nine localities**.

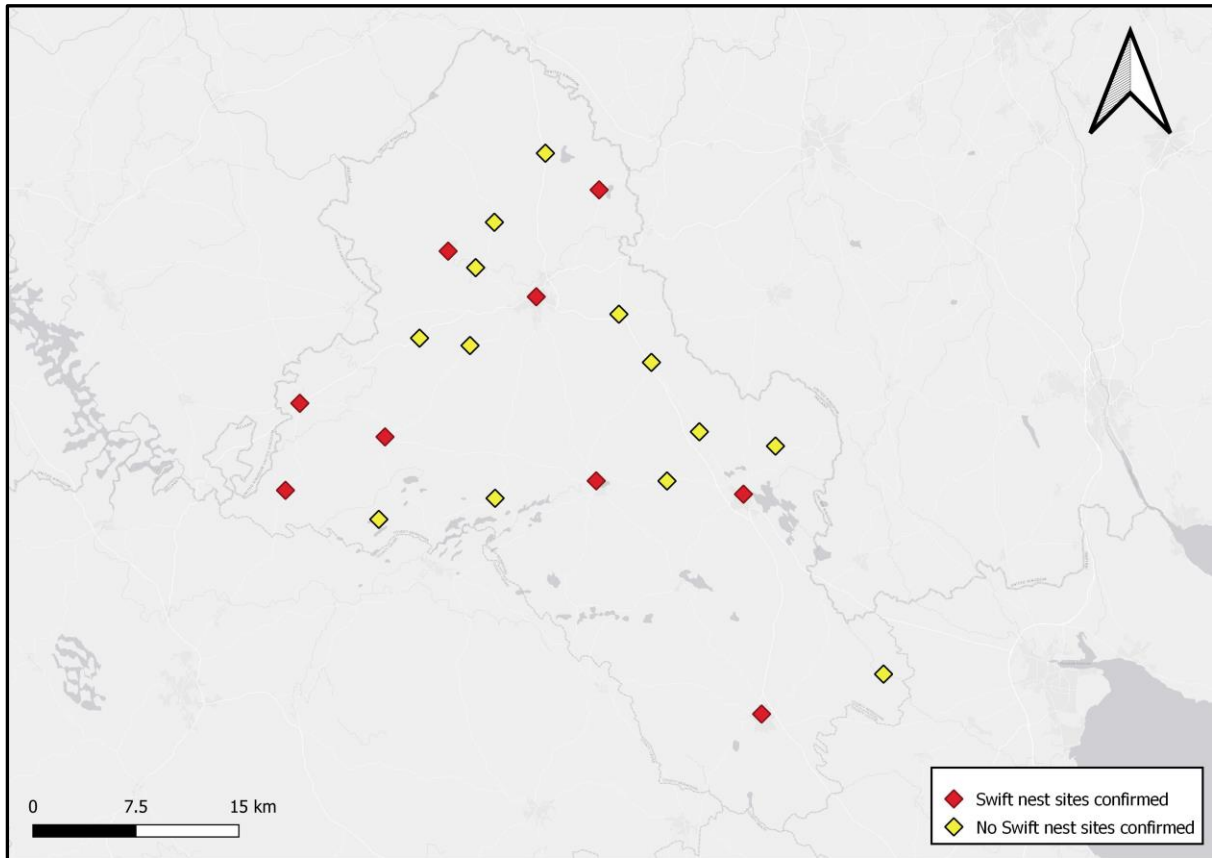


Figure 3: Localities selected for the Co. Monaghan Swift Survey.

A maximum count of **215 Swifts** was recorded (max peak count of all areas combined) and **199 nests** were confirmed. Swifts were recorded in Inniskeen and Rockcorry, however due to restricted access, no nest sites could be confirmed. The overall results of the Co. Monaghan Swift Survey 2023 are presented in Table 1, below.

Table 1: Summary information for all towns and villages surveyed during the 2023 Monaghan County Swift Survey.

No.	Town/Village	Swifts present	Peak number of Swifts	Nests present	Number of nests
1	Monaghan	Yes	70	Yes	74
2	Carrickmacross	Yes	35	Yes	43
3	Ballybay	Yes	30	Yes	41
4	Castleblaney	Yes	20	Yes	17
5	Clones	Yes	25	Yes	12
6	Glaslough	Yes	12	Yes	6
7	Newbliss	Yes	9	Yes	3
8	Scotstown	Yes	9	Yes	2
9	Scotshouse	Yes	1	Yes	1
10	Inniskeen	Yes	2	None confirmed	0
11	Rockcorry	Yes	2	None confirmed	0
12	Annyalla	No	0	No	0
13	Balinode	No	0	No	0
14	Castleshane	No	0	No	0
15	Clontibret	No	0	No	0
16	Doohamlet	No	0	No	0
17	Drum	No	0	No	0
18	Emyvale	No	0	No	0
19	Oram	No	0	No	0
20	Smithborough	No	0	No	0
21	Three Mile House	No	0	No	0
22	Tydavnet	No	0	No	0
		Total	215	Total	199

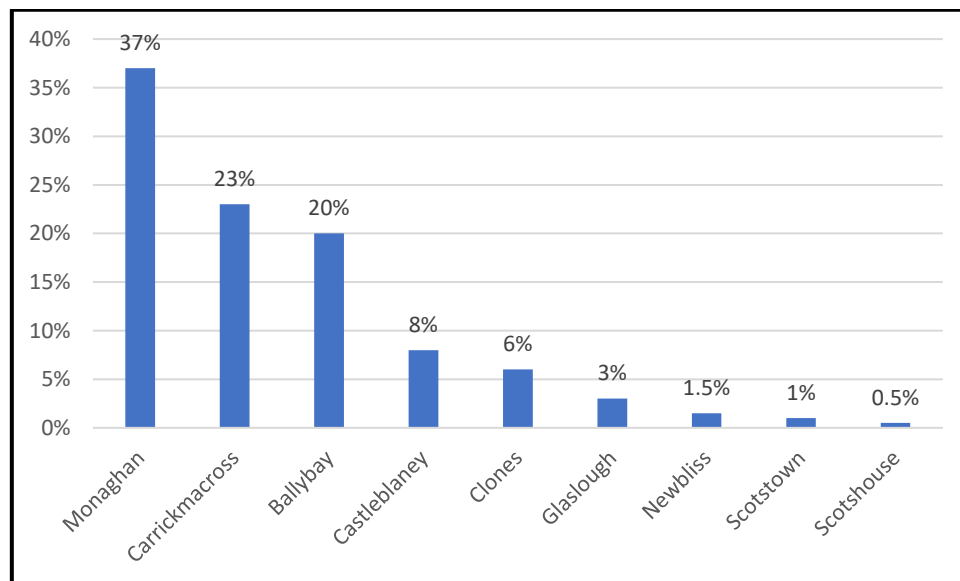


Figure 4: Percentage of Swift nests found in each locality in Co. Monaghan.

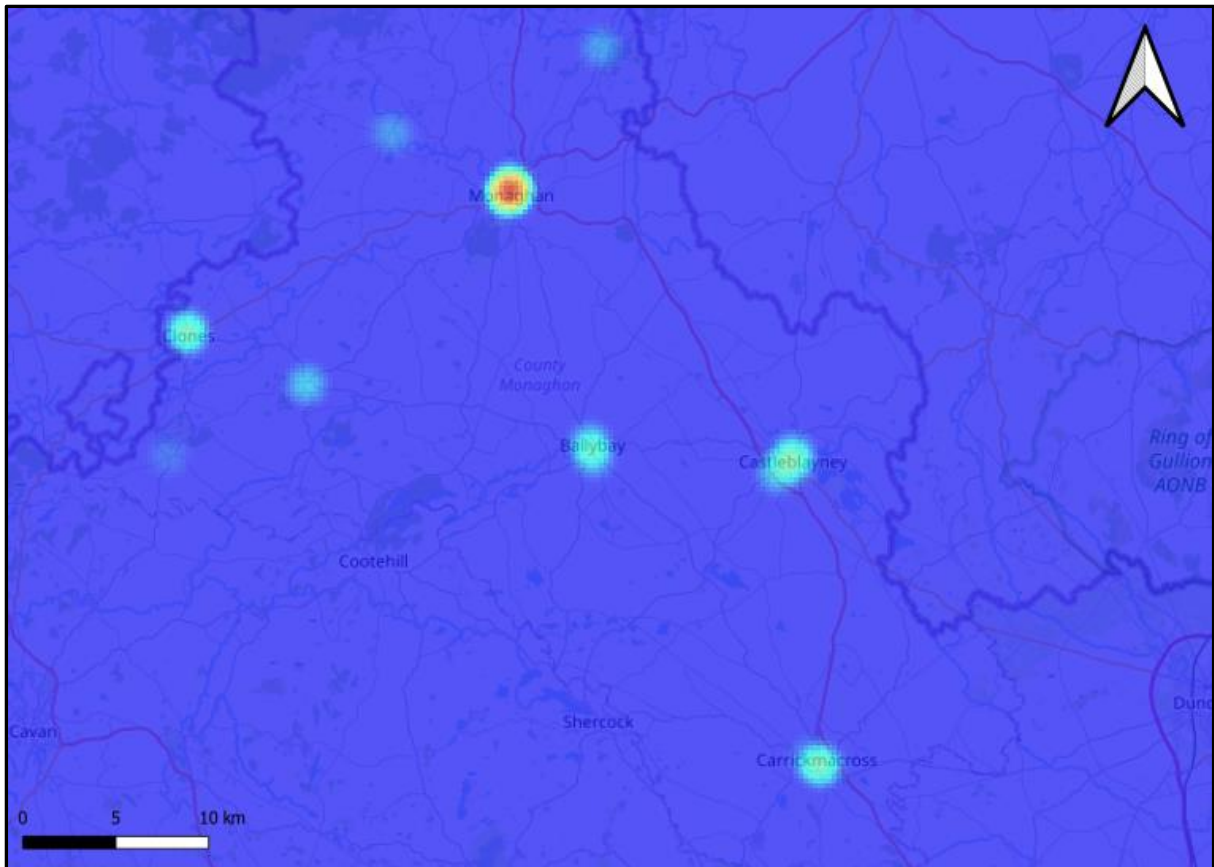


Figure 2: “Heat Map” depicting the locations of confirmed Swift nest sites in Co. Monaghan – warmer colours showing areas of higher nest density.

Building Type Distribution

Swift nest sites were concentrated around **82 structures**. Of the 199 nests recorded, 63.5% were in commercial (53 nests) and residential properties (73 nests). The remaining 36.5% of nests were in public (52 nests) and religious buildings (21 nests).

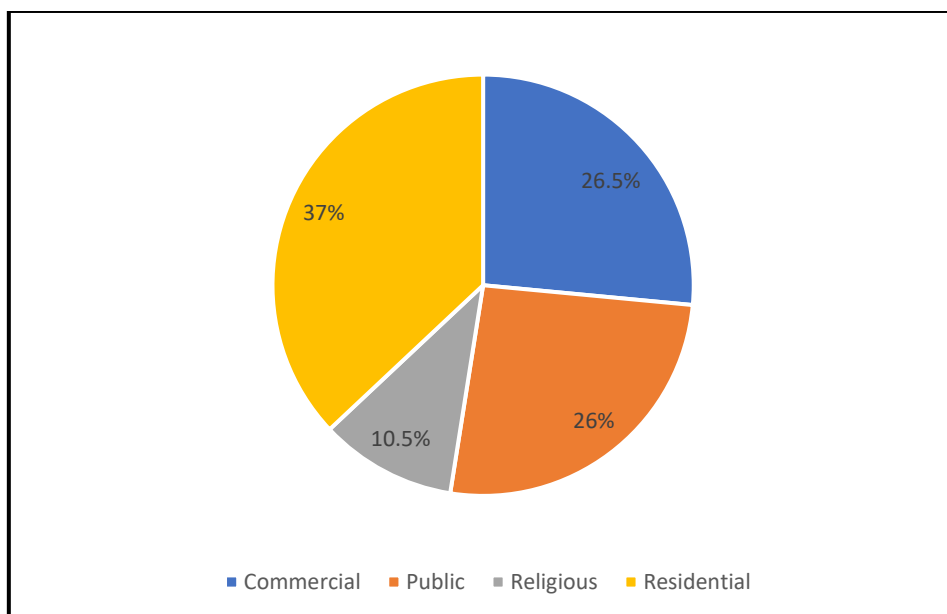


Figure 6: The percentage of Swift nests in each building type across Co. Monaghan.

Monaghan had the greatest diversity of building types used by nesting Swifts, with residential and commercial buildings the predominant building categories overall.

Most Swifts in Carrickmacross were recorded nesting in public buildings, with the vast majority of these found in Carrickmacross Workhouse which supports a significant colony.

Most Swift nest sites in Ballybay were recorded in commercial and religious properties (19 and 18 nests respectively), with the remaining 4 nests located in residential buildings.

Commercial or residential properties predominated for the final six towns/villages, with Castleblaney the only locality of these six, to have Swifts nesting in a public building (4 out of 17 nests).

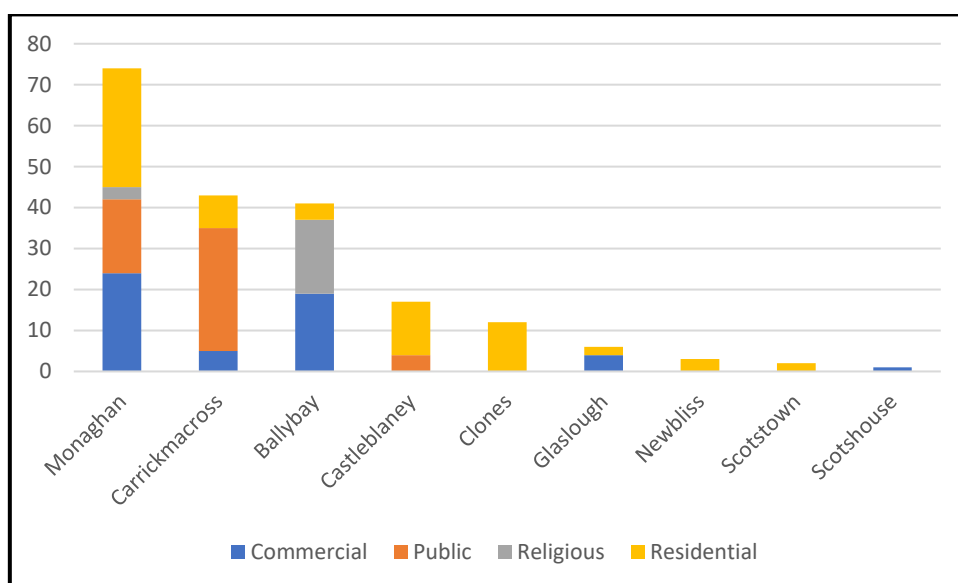


Figure 7: The number of Swift nests in each building type per locality.

Aspect

Of the 199 Swift nest sites confirmed in Co. Monaghan this season, 43 were south-facing, representing 22% of the overall nest sites recorded. West-facing nest sites were similarly prevalent, with 39 west-facing nest sites confirmed (20%). North-facing nests were the least commonly recorded representing just 6% of the overall nests confirmed.

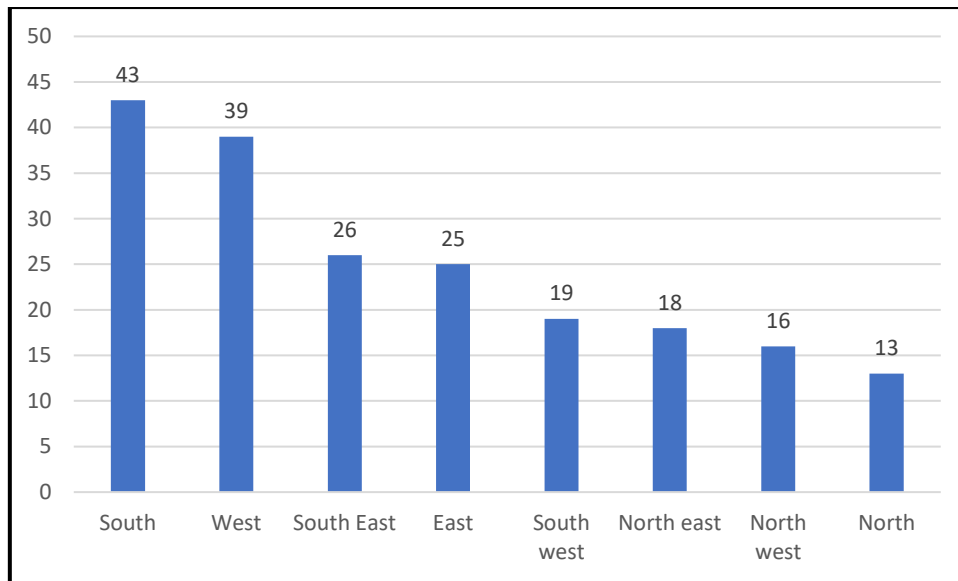


Figure 8. Approximate orientation of nest sites

Site Based Results

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

Monaghan

Monaghan is the county town of Co. Monaghan. It is the largest town in the county. The Ulster Canal runs through it, linking the River Blackwater with the River Erne. It is situated on the N2 road between Derry and Dublin. The town of Monaghan had a population of 7,678 as of the 2016 census.

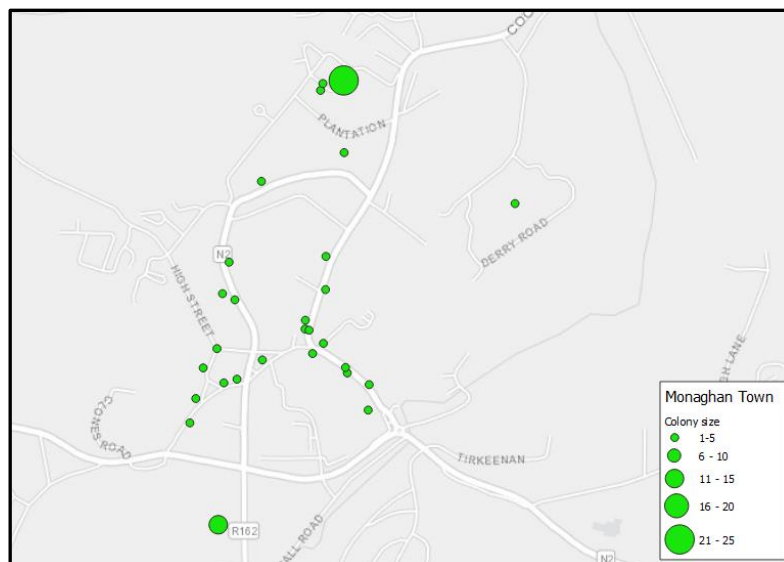


Figure 9: Map showing location of confirmed nest sites in Monaghan, scaled for colony size.

Seventy-four Swift nest sites were confirmed in Monaghan, across four building type categories.

Table 2: The number of Swift nests confirmed in Monaghan by building type.

Building Type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	24
Public	18
Religious	3
Residential	29
Total	74

A peak of 70 Swifts was recorded over the town on the 17th of July. This figure has been used as the peak figure for Swift numbers in Monaghan.

Carrickmacross

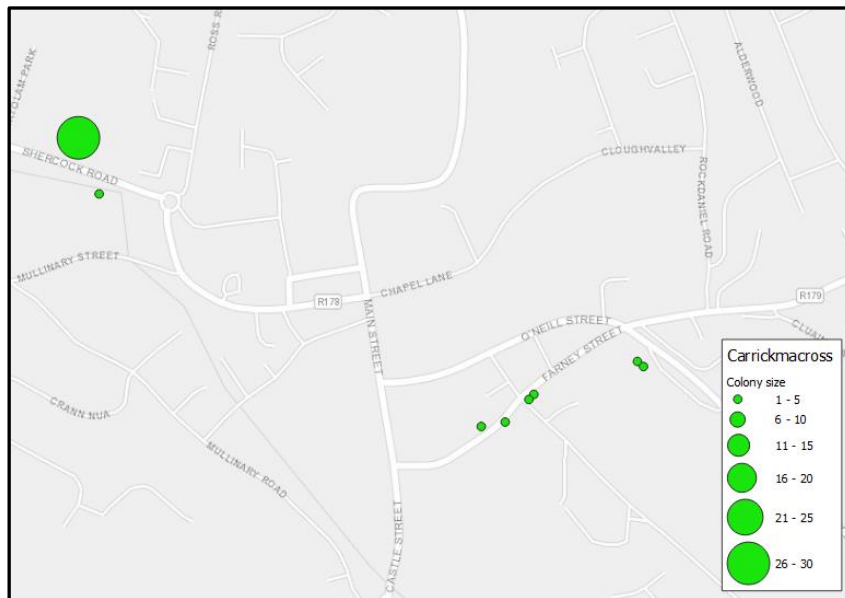


Figure 10: Map showing location of confirmed nest sites in Carrickmacross, scaled for colony size.

Carrickmacross is the second largest town in Co. Monaghan, with a population of 5,032 in the 2016 census. Originally a market town, its development began around the castle of the Earl of Essex, which was built in 1630. The town grew in size during the 18th and 19th centuries, although the Great Famine of the 1860s led to a significant decline in the population.

Forty-three Swift nests were confirmed in Carrickmacross.

Table 3: The number of Swift nests confirmed in Carrickmacross by building type.

Building Type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	5
Public	30
Residential	8
Total	43

Ballybay

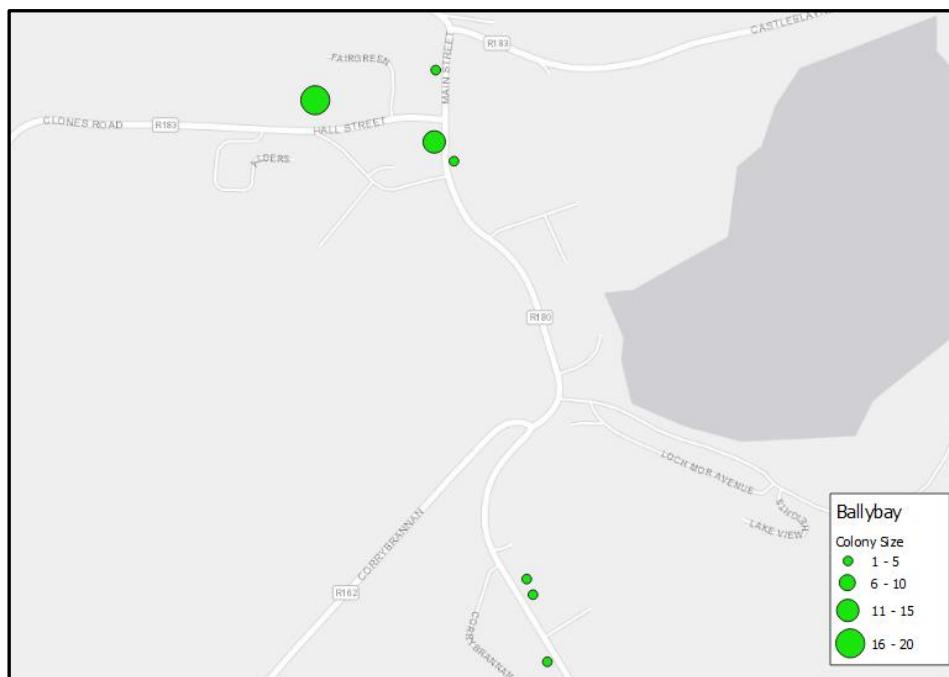


Figure 11: Map showing the locations of Swift nest sites in Ballybay, scaled for colony size.

Ballybay is a small town in the centre of Co. Monaghan, Ireland, with a population of 1,241 in 2016. It lies beside Lough Mór and a short distance from Lough Minor.

Forty-one Swift nest sites were confirmed in Ballybay.

Table 4: The number of Swift nests confirmed in Ballybay by building type.

Building Type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	19
Religious	18
Residential	4
Total	41

Castleblayney

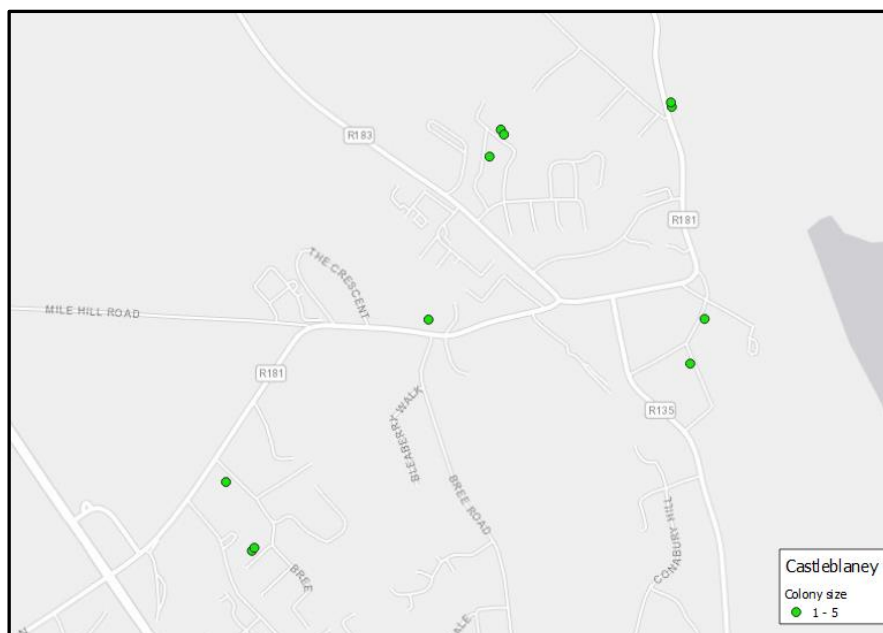


Figure 3: Map showing the location of Swift nest sites in Castleblayney, scaled for colony size.

Castleblayney lies on the Monaghan/ Armagh border with a population of 3,607 as of 2016. It is situated west of Lough Muckno, the largest lake in Co. Monaghan. The River Farne flows from Lake Muckno, heading east to Dundalk Bay where it meets the Irish Sea. Mullyash, the highest point of elevation in Co. Monaghan, lies a few kilometres to the north-east.

Seventeen Swift nests were confirmed in Castleblayney.

Table 5: The number of Swift nests confirmed in Castleblayney by building type.

Building Type	Number of Swift nests
Public	4
Residential	13
Total	17

Clones

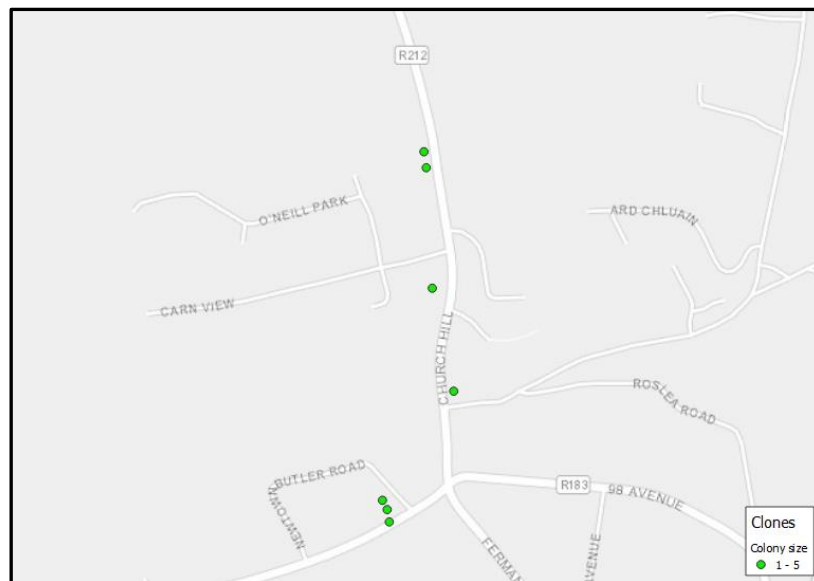


Figure 13: Map showing location of nest sites in Clones, scaled for colony size.

Clones is a small town in Co. Monaghan with a population of 1,680 as of the 2016 census. Clones lies on the Monaghan/ Fermanagh border. Its local economy was impacted by the Partition of Ireland in 1921, which effectively removed its economic hinterland, Fermanagh. The economic legacy of this partitioning is still felt in the town today. As such, a redevelopment plan has been rolled out for Clones by the government of Ireland to regenerate the local economy.

The Finn River which originates in Co. Fermanagh, flows just south of Clones. The Lucky River, a small stream, flows to the north, west and south-west of Clones, where it meets the Finn River south-south-west of Clones.

Twelve Swift nest sites were confirmed in Clones, all of which were recorded in residential properties.

Table 6: The number of Swift nests confirmed in Clones by building type.

Building Type	Number of Swift nests
Residential	12
Total	12

Glaslough

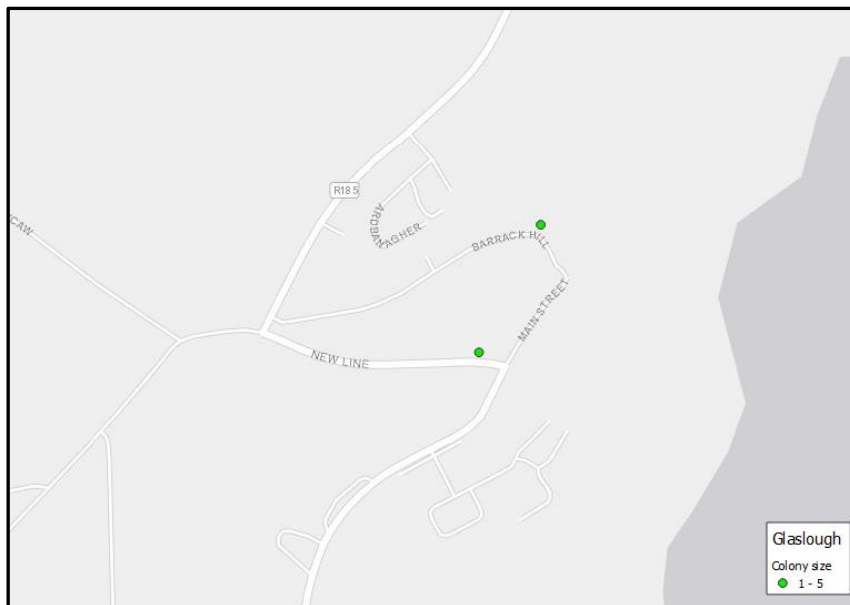


Figure 14: Map showing location of nest sites in Glaslough, scaled for colony size.

Glaslough is a small village and townland on the Republic of Ireland/ Northern Ireland border. Glaslough had a population of 453 people as of the 2016 census.

Six Swift nest sites were confirmed in Glaslough, in commercial and residential properties.

Table 7: The number of Swift nests confirmed in Glaslough by building type.

Building Type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	4
Residential	2
Total	6

Newbliss

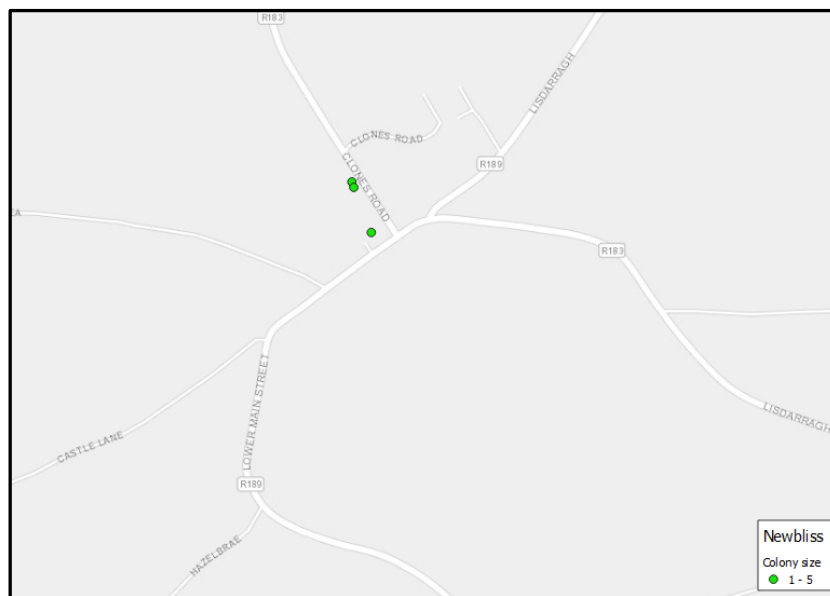


Figure 15: Map showing location of nest sites in Newbliss, scaled for colony size.

Newbliss is a small village and townland in Co. Monaghan, with a population of 327 as of the 2016 census. In Irish, its name, Cúil Darach, translates as the corner of the Oak trees, and the village/townland was originally referred to as Lisdaragh or Lios Darach meaning ringfort abounding in oak trees.

Three Swift nest sites were confirmed in Newbliss, all located in residential properties.

Table 8: The number of Swift nests confirmed in Newbliss by building type.

Building Type	Number of Swift nests
Residential	3
Total	3

Scotstown

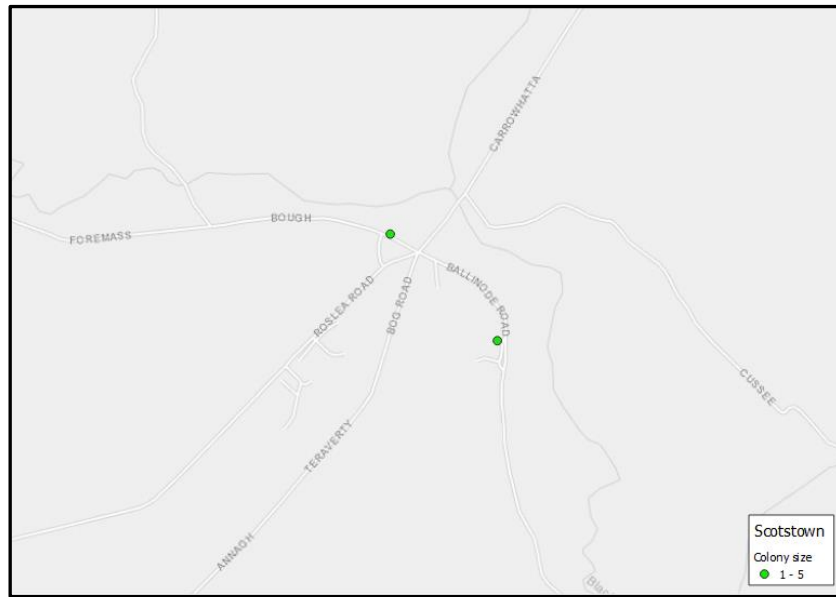


Figure 16: Map showing location of nest sites in Scotstown, scaled for colony size.

Scotstown is a small village on the border of counties Monaghan, Cavan, and Fermanagh. It had a population of 361 as of the 2016 census.

Two Swift nest sites were confirmed in Scotstown, both within residential properties.

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

Building Type	Number of Swift nests
Residential	2
Total	2

Scotshouse

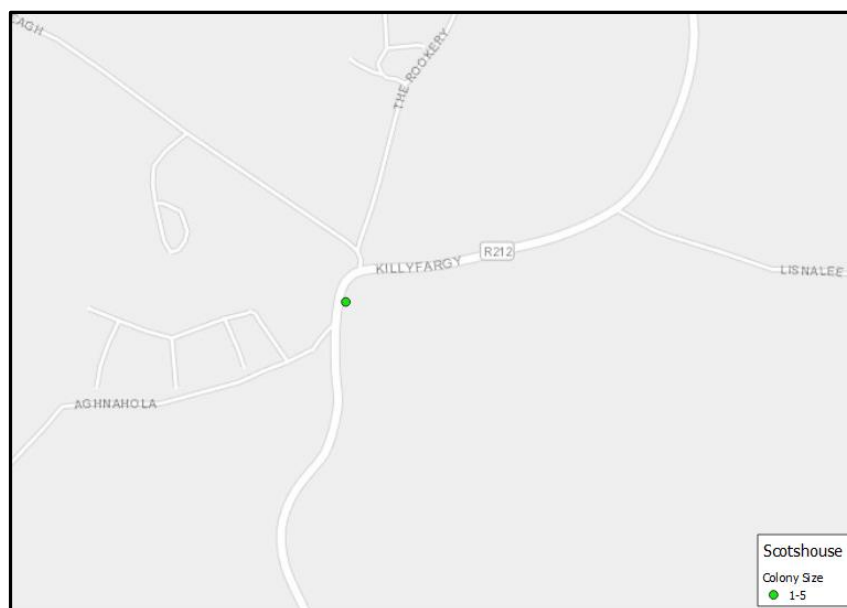


Figure 17: Map showing location of nest sites in Scotshouse.

Scotshouse is a small village on the borders of counties Monaghan, Cavan, and Fermanagh, with a population of 220 as of the 2016 census.

One Swift nest site was confirmed in Scotshouse in a residential property (apartment above the Connolly Gala).

Rockcorry and Inniskeen

Two pairs of Swifts were recorded in both Rockcorry and Inniskeen. In both villages, Swift activity centred around single residential properties, with the nest sites thought to be located at the backs of the buildings where they were unfortunately out of view, and unfortunately could not be confirmed.

Promotion

Community Engagement

Swifts are very much an urban species. Their reliance on our built environment means that community led Swift projects are crucial to the future of this species. In addition, local knowledge is key to identifying existing nest sites.

As such, the field surveyor organised meetups and events with several community groups and individuals. We would like to thank Patricia McCreesh, Monaghan Biodiversity Officer, for her help and support with this work.

Table 10: Community engagement.

Date	Group/ Individual	Locality
14/06/2023	Patrick Gleeson, local resident	Castleblayney
14/06/2023	Castleblayney Tidy Town	Castleblayney
05/07/2023	Gerard Murray, Lough BirdWatch Ireland Branch	Clones
12/07/2023	Patricia McCreesh, Monaghan Biodiversity Officer	Inniskeen
18/07/2023	George Watson, Castle Leslie	Glaslough
18/07/2023	Monaghan BirdWatch Ireland branch	Monaghan
25/07/2023	Ballybay Tidy Towns	Ballybay
25/07/2023	Ballybay Men's Shed	Ballybay
25/07/2023	Monaghan Tidy Towns	Monaghan
25/07/2023	Monaghan Men's shed	Monaghan
25/07/2023	Tom McEntee, local resident	Monaghan
26/07/2023	Carrickmacross Workhouse	Carrickmacross

Interested members of the community were also engaged with at every opportunity during field survey work.

Project Promotion/Awareness Raising

Promoting the Co. Monaghan Survey work is another key aspect of this project and every opportunity to do so, was taken.

Coverage to date:

- Radio interview with 'Northern Sound' aired on the 19th of June 2023.
- Media release issued late June, with coverage in the Dundalk Democrat and online on Louth Live.
- Promoted in the BirdWatch Ireland Spring edition of magazine 'Wings'.
- Promoted on the BirdWatch Ireland Facebook Page.
- Promoted by BirdWatch Ireland Twitter posts throughout season.
- Promoted on the BirdWatch Ireland website.
- Promoted on the Twitter platform 'Monaghan Swifts' created by Peter Phillips.
- Promoted on 'Mooney Goes Wild' which aired on the 14th August 2023.

PR examples are shown in the Appendix section of this report.

Discussion

The results of this survey prove that Swifts are a significant part of Co. Monaghan's urban biodiversity, with Swifts recorded in 11 of the 22 localities surveyed, and Swift nest sites confirmed in 9 villages and towns. The localities represent a good spread of locations around the county, although Swift nest abundance is weighted toward Monaghan, Carrickmacross, and Ballybay, which collectively support 80% of Co. Monaghan's Swift population.

Monaghan County Council is to be commended for funding and supporting this survey, which is the first step in establishing a Swift Conservation Plan for the county. Undertaking this survey work is timely, given the Regeneration Schemes which have rolled out across several localities in Co. Monaghan including Ballybay and Clones. Regeneration work can inadvertently remove Swift nesting habitat. By pinpointing the exact locations of existing Swift nest sites, as this survey work has done, protecting these nest sites, and establishing nest brick and box projects at suitable locations, the Co. Monaghan Swift population can be secured. Co. Monaghan has the potential to become a flagship county for Swifts in Ireland if the right measures are taken.

Monaghan

As the largest of the towns surveyed, it is not surprising that Monaghan, with 74 nests, supports the highest number of Swifts overall.

There are two excellent strongholds for Swifts in Monaghan - the Old Workhouse, Belgium Park with 23 nests, and St. Louis Secondary School with 15 nests, together representing 51% of Monaghan Swift population.

The remaining 36 Swift nests recorded in Monaghan are well distributed across the locality and range in colony size from 1-3 pairs. Six of these nest sites are in public and religious buildings, with the remaining 30 nests in commercial and residential properties.

Public and religious buildings offer the best opportunity for Swifts. These buildings are less likely to be sold or renovated than residential or commercial properties, and Swifts are generally in safe hands when landowners are aware of their presence.

The most important colony in public or religious buildings in Monaghan is the St. Louis Secondary School colony, the second largest Swift colony in the locality. This site represents the best opportunity in Monaghan for maintaining and growing an existing colony.

Most Swift nests in Monaghan are in commercial or residential properties (72%). The most important colony overall is found in the Old Workhouse in Belgium Park, a series of residential units, which support ~ 1/3 of Swift nest sites in the town. As these are privately owned buildings, this colony will most likely be very difficult to protect. To mitigate for the potential loss of Swift colonies in privately owned buildings, nest brick and nest box projects should be rolled out at public buildings and buildings under construction across Monaghan.

The newly constructed library off the North Road offers the perfect location and opportunity for mitigating against the potential loss of the Old Workhouse Swift colony. The library is:

- Approximately 200m from the Old Workhouse, Belgium Park.
- A very large public building, with enormous potential for multiple nest boxes.
- Swift nest boxes are to be installed here under planning conditions stipulated by Monaghan County Council.

This building alone could secure the future of Swifts in Monaghan. Not installing these nest boxes represents a missed opportunity for Monaghan County Council on several fronts:

- Installing nest boxes can offset the environmental cost of the build for Monaghan County Council.
- A Swift colony in a library is an educational resource for the community.
- This can provide positive publicity for Monaghan County Council.
- Most importantly, if done right, it can secure the future of Swifts in Monaghan.

It is strongly advised that nest boxes are installed on this building as per the conditions of planning.

Carrickmacross

Carrickmacross supports the second highest numbers of Swifts in Co. Monaghan. There is a strong reliance by Swifts on public buildings in Carrickmacross, with 70% of Swift nests found in just two publicly owned properties.

It is heartening that such a large proportion of Carrickmacross' Swifts are in public buildings. When relevant public and/or religious landowners are made aware of their presence, these colonies tend to be in safe hands.

The importance of public buildings for the future of Swifts is demonstrated by renovation work carried out at Carrickmacross Workhouse. As the landowners were aware of, and sympathetic to the Swifts nesting in the building, they made a conscious effort to maintain many of the existing Swift nest sites and 26 pairs currently nest in this building alone, following renovation work.

The remaining 30% of confirmed Swift nest sites in Carrickmacross are in residential and commercial properties, several of which are vacant and in need of renovation. These nest sites are very vulnerable. To maintain and grow the population, nest boxes and nest bricks should be installed at suitable sites (see recommendations).

Ballybay

Ballybay, is the fifth largest locality surveyed, but supports the third highest number of Swifts overall, punching above its weight.

In Ballybay, Swift nest sites are relatively evenly split across commercial and religious buildings with a smaller proportion found in residential properties.

Just under half of the Swift population (18 nests) are in the Ballybay Temperance Hall. The owners may not be aware of Swifts nesting in the building. To secure the future of these 18 nests, the owners should be located and engaged with.

More than 50% of the Ballybay Swift population is in commercial and residential properties. The bulk of these nest sites (15) are found at the back of four businesses on Main Street. Typically, the backs of buildings are not renovated as quickly as street facing sides, and this may explain how this Swift colony has survived.

However, all nest sites found in commercial and residential properties in Ballybay are still vulnerable to loss, particularly as the Ballybay Regeneration Scheme continues to unfold.

As mentioned above, Ballybay punches above its weight in terms of its Swift population. Ballybay is nearly one third the size of Castleblayney and slightly smaller than Clones (2016 census). However, as of 2023, Ballybay supported 24 more pairs of Swifts than Castleblayney and 29 more Swift pairs than Clones.

Although baseline figures do not exist for Swift populations in Co. Monaghan prior to this survey, these results strongly suggest that both Castleblayney and Clones have lost a significant proportion of their Swift colonies. This highlights how easily the Ballybay Swift population may be lost.

To maintain and grow the Ballybay Swift population, Swift nest box and brick projects should be rolled out. The Ballybay Men's Shed and Tidy Towns have been engaged with by the field surveyor this season and are very keen to assist with Swift conservation in their local town.

Castleblayney and Clones

Castleblayney and Clones support similar numbers of Swifts, and both towns are within distance of freshwater bodies, suitable foraging habitats for this species.

Four of the seventeen Swift nest sites confirmed in Castleblayney are in a public building, St. Mary's Hospital, with the remaining Swift nest sites distributed in residential properties across much of the town. Anecdotal evidence from residents in Castleblayney suggests that the renovation of St. Mary's Hospital led to the loss of a significant proportion of Castleblayneys Swift population.

All 12 nest sites confirmed in Clones are in residential properties in the north of the town, centred around Rosela Terrace, Church Hill, and Newtownbutler Road. Nest brick projects for new builds and nest box projects for existing buildings are required in both towns to secure the future of Swifts in Castleblayney and Clones (see recommendations).

The Swift populations in both Castleblayney and Clones are at a very real risk of being lost, and **immediate action is advised for these localities.**

Glaslough, Newbliss, Scotstown & Scotshouse

Swift pair numbers are very low in these four towns (Glaslough 6 pairs; Newbliss 3 pairs; Scotstown 2 pairs; Scotshouse 1 pair).

In each of these villages, Swifts are in either residential or commercial properties. Colonies in residential and commercial buildings are always considered vulnerable as they exist at the mercy of the home or business owner and can vanish where renovations or repairs are made without provision for Swifts. Thus, it is **nest box or nest brick projects in each of these villages is urgently required.**

Recommendations

There was a lot of enthusiasm for Swifts and Swift projects shown by various Co. Monaghan Tidy Towns and Men's Shed groups, as well as residents throughout the survey. This should be seized upon to promote ownership of and responsibility for the protection of Swift colonies in respective localities. Monaghan County Council has demonstrated its commitment to the protection of Swifts in the county through the commission of this survey.

Around the county there is good knowledge on birds and biodiversity as well as a strong voluntary ethos. Good examples of this can be seen in the BirdWatch Ireland Monaghan Branch, Tidy Towns groups, Men's Sheds and other groups making positive efforts for Swifts and biodiversity. This momentum should be captured to push ahead with the recommendations made below.

General Recommendations

Ensuring the results of this report are used for the protection of Swifts in Co. Monaghan:

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.

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.
- Resource and support groups and individuals carrying out Swift conservation projects locally such as Men's Sheds, Tidy Towns etc. Encourage these groups to census their local Swift nesting population annually.

- Develop a school programme to educate schoolchildren about the Swift and its conservation needs.
- 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 to repeat the whole county survey in 5-10 years to assess the Swift population and monitor the success of conservation measures.

Local Recommendations

Monaghan	<p>Prioritise swift bricks in suitable new builds and restoration work (nest boxes), particularly in areas near where Swifts are already nesting.</p> <p>Liaise with Emer Brennan (Monaghan Tidy Towns) and the Men's Shed at St Davnet's to build Swift boxes for public buildings in Monaghan. As well as the new library, other suitable public buildings include the Garda station, opposite the library, the Education and Training Board building and the Motor Tax office on Market Street. Prioritise other buildings close to existing Swift nesting colonies.</p>
Carrickmacross	<p>Great work has been done by Kevin Garlan and the Carrickmacross Workhouse team to preserve Swift nest sites in the restored Carrickmacross workhouse. This building can be further enhanced by restoring access to nesting Swifts on the front right-hand side of the building. There is also room for several Swift nest boxes at the rear of the building.</p> <p>Further gains could be made by adding Swift nest boxes to existing public buildings and schools in the town with the help of Carrickmacross Tidy towns and Men's Shed. Ten Swift nest boxes constructed and erected per year would help grow the population.</p>
Ballybay	<p>Ballybay Tidy Towns, through Olivia Duffy, and Ballybay Men's Shed have offered to help build and erect swift nest boxes. Ten-fifteen boxes per year would be advisable.</p>

	<p>There are several suitable public buildings for Swift nest boxes in Ballybay. The building on the grounds of the Presbyterian Church should be maintained for Swifts. The church should be contacted and made aware of the buildings' importance for Swifts in Ballybay.</p>
Castleblayney	<p>Castleblayney Tidy Towns and Men's Shed have already made and erected several Swift nest boxes close to St Mary's Hospital. It would be advisable to continue putting up nest boxes in and around this building as it was previously the site of a larger Swift colony before restoration work was completed (<i>per Partick Gleeson</i>). Other public buildings that might attract Swifts include the old Fire Station and school buildings. A minimum of 10 boxes built and erected per year would be a good starting point.</p>
Clones	<p>The Swift population in Clones is found only in privately owned property, and thus is very vulnerable to being lost. Nest box projects are urgently needed on public buildings in the town and nest brick projects should be urgently considered for buildings under construction in Clones. An aim of 10 Swift nest boxes to be put up per year is recommended. Clones Tidy Towns and Men's Shed should be approached.</p>
Glaslough	<p>There are two beautiful historic buildings holding small numbers of breeding Swifts in Glaslough. Attempts should be made to contact Tidy Towns to increase public awareness and erect boxes in the town. Castle Leslie estate has shown great interest in helping to increase the number of nesting opportunities for Swifts and help protect birds already nesting on their property. If a local Men's Shed group exists, it might be able to help build some Swift boxes. It is recommended to build and put up 50 Swift nest boxes over the next 10 years.</p>
Newbliss	<p>The Swift population in Newbliss is confined to two residential properties. Swift nest box projects are urgently required here to prevent losing the town's Swift population. Bringing the local Tidy Town group and other community groups on board is key.</p>
Scotstown & Scotshouse	<p>Urgent action is required in both Scotstown and Scotshouse to bolster the Swift populations before these are lost. Nest box projects could be designed with the local Tidy Towns groups.</p>
Inniskeen & Rockcorry	<p>Swift nest sites were not confirmed in either of these towns, although it is suspected that at least one pair of Swifts is breeding in each town. Again, nest box projects coordinated through the Tidy Towns groups are urgently required in these towns to save and bolster the local Swift populations.</p>

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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

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 is 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 18: A row of Swift nest boxes installed at Mullingar Courthouse. Photo: Richella Duggan.



Figure 19: Installing Swift boxes as part of the fabric of the wall. Photo: Lynda Huxley (Swift Conservation Ireland).



Figure 20: Swift Bricks installed during build phase in Nothing Hill, London.



Figure 21: A Swift Brick installed in a newly erected redbrick wall. Photo: 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.

NEWS

Survey underway to record swift numbers in Monaghan

JUN 19, 2023 16:04

BY NEWS NORTHERN SOUND



Figure 22. Radio interview with Northern Sound released on the 19th of June about the County Monaghan Swift Survey.

You are in: > DUNDALKDEMOCRAT > HOME

Survey underway in Monaghan to locate nest sites of the endangered Swift

BirdWatch Ireland carrying out surveys in three counties



Survey underway in Monaghan to locate nest sites of the endangered Swift

Figure 23. Coverage in the Dundalk Democrat and Louth Live.



Figure 24. Promotion of Swift conservation measures and the 2023 Swift County Surveys in BirdWatch Ireland's magazine, 'Wings'.

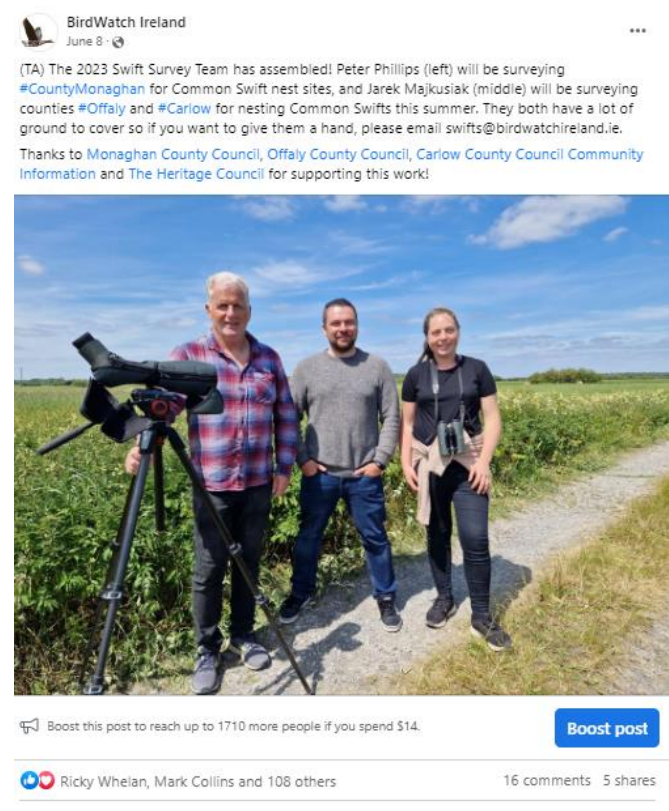


Figure 25: Facebook post promoting the three 2023 Swift County Surveys including Co. Monaghan.



Figure 26. Twitter post from the 'Monaghan Swifts' Twitter handle promoting the project and nest boxes.



Figure 27. BirdWatch Ireland Twitter post promoting all three 2023 County Swift Surveys and calling on the public for help surveying and records.