

15) The 'Zeist' design Swift Nest Box by John Stimpson

Installation Instructions:

The Swift nest box has been produced by John Stimpson for many years and is based on a successful design used in the town of Zeist, in the Netherlands. It is manufactured from new weather-proof plywood and is well treated after assembly to ensure longevity. Swifts are long-lived species and highly nest-site-faithful birds, so it is essential that their artificial nesting places are long lasting for many, many years. The Swift nest box is only 450 mm (18") wide x 190 mm (7½") high x 210 mm (8¼") deep and weighs just 1.3 Kg (3 lb) therefore does not put undue loading on the building. The boxes can be positioned approximately 500 mm (20") between the boxes, which give ca. 1 Metre (40") between the entrance holes.

Planning your Installation:

When first planning your installation, think how many boxes you may eventually want? Then position the minimum of three or four with this in mind. Adding more boxes in future years when you have been successful will increase your colony size.

Nest Box Location:

It is important that the wooden boxes are placed where it is not possible for the mid-day or afternoon sun to directly hit the box. Otherwise, the birds, especially the young, inside the box will suffer and may well die from over-heating. Ideally boxes should be installed on north, north-west, north-east and/or east facing walls. A south-west and/or south-east facing wall is acceptable provided the eaves/soffit are wide enough to shelter the box from the sun. For a small additional cost a recent adaptation is now available in the form of a white PVC roof panel. This white panel reflects heat away from the box and permits these boxes to be positioned under eaves on south, south-west and/or south-east facing walls.

Although these boxes are water-proof, it is preferable that they are placed under eaves if at all possible, so they are not exposed to the weather. The fitting of a piece of roofing felt to the two top panels will increase the weather protection. Additional weather-proofing with a water-based or wax-based wood preservative, on the exterior of the box only, will prolong the life of the boxes if sited in exposed and/or open positions. Never use spirit based preservative and/or traditional Coal-Tar Creosote and/or Creosote substitute. Swifts have an excellent sense of smell and would be deterred from using your nest boxes due to chemical odours. (In July 2003, it became an offence for the general public to purchase and/or use Coal-Tar Creosote).

Ideally there should be a clear flyway in front of the installed boxes and they should be placed at a minimum of 4 Metres above the ground, or preferably higher.

It is also preferable to avoid places with lots of tall trees, telephone wires and/or power-lines. Unfortunately Swifts tend to collide with them! Your chances of success are greatly improved if there are Swifts already nestling in the neighbourhood.

Installation:

To install the boxes, firstly remove the single retaining screw in the front with the entrance hole. This is the only dismantling necessary and will permit removal of the large roof panel giving access to the rear of the box. It is a good idea to place a concave nest 'cup' in the bottom of the box, at the opposite end to the entrance hole into the box. Position the centre of the 'cup' 90 mm (3.5") from the right wall and glue in position with a small amount of water-proof PVA wood glue to prevent movement. Swifts invariably use them when provided.

Decide where to place the retaining screws in the box/wall, so that the roof of the box is flush with the eaves, then drill two holes through the back of the box, marking the wall and fix to the wall with suitable plugs and fixing screws/bolts (not supplied) with a 'penny'/repair washer (not supplied) under the screw/bolt head inside the box to spread the load.

Playing 'Swift Calls' to attract Swifts:

In order to encourage Swifts to find your nest boxes it is a very good idea, no, it is virtually essential to regularly play 'Swift Calls' between the last week in April through to mid July. A complete proven sound system, operating from a 240 volts AC electrical supply, can be supplied with a small but affective speaker placed either on the back of the box opposite the entrance hole. Alternatively the speaker can be placed in an open window, or on the ground, below the boxes, but it must be protected from any rain/water. Playing the 'Swift Calls' can work at almost any time of the day, but early mornings and evenings usually prove to create more interest and the best responses. Once full occupation of all nest boxes has taken place the 'Swift Calls' sound system should then be switched off until the following year.

All electrical items as might be recommended or supplied for any 'Swift Call' system installation **MUST** be inspected and PAT Test Certified by a qualified Electrician from the venue user or their representative before commencing use.

Swifts may nest in the first year. However, even with the 'Swift Calls' sound system, it may take two or three years before you are successful, but the end result is well worth the effort.

Once you have successfully attracted your first pair of Swifts, others will follow soon after, and you will have endless enjoyment from a squadron of 'black-arrows' giving displays every day through the summer until it is time for them to migrate south again in late summer only to return in the following spring.

The Society offers a consultation service and is willing to provide a free survey to any site in Essex, commercial and/or private and give recommendations if the site is suitable for Swift nest boxes and what can be installed. Installations can also be supervised and in some instances, provided suitable lifting equipment is available/provided (i.e. cherry picker, scissor lift platform or scaffolding tower); we can undertake the installation of Swift nest boxes and 'Swift Calling' sound systems. If further information is required please contact the Society's Secretary by e-mail – Info.EBwS@gmail.com

The Society can provide, as a package, the 'Zeist'-type design Swift nest boxes, concave nest 'cups' and 'Swift Calls' sound system. Or the Swift nest box and nest 'cup' can be ordered direct from John Stimpson by e-mail – j.stimpson1@btopenworld.com or telephone 01353 740451. The 'Swift Calls' sound system can also be obtained from the Swift Conservation website – www.swift-conservation.org

Reference: John Stimpson