

London's Swifts

Roof Repairs & Re-Roofing with Swifts

Follow these simple guidelines to comply with the law and keep Swifts safe and breeding in your roof.



Holes cut in the facing boards let the Swifts reach their nests in the eaves of this chapel
Photo © Mark Glanville



A Swift entering a roof via a displaced pantile. The nest is on the roofing felt below
Photo © Bill Ball

Follow these rules when working on roofs where Swifts are nesting

- 1. Do not work on the roof while the Swifts are nesting (May to August)**
- 2. Leave existing Swift nest places undisturbed by any works**
- 3. Preserve the Swifts' access holes or make new ones to match the old exactly**

Repairing & renewing roofs without destroying nests

Repairs and re-roofing are unavoidable, but where there are Swifts nesting it usually means the end for them breeding there. The new roof almost always denies them access to the holes, crevices and open eaves where they used to nest, and then the colony is finished. This is happening at an alarming rate all over the UK and Europe. The result is we are losing our Swifts fast; 53% have vanished from South East England in the past 12 years alone, never to return as there are ever fewer places left for them.

But it doesn't have to be like this. With just a little foresight, planning and care you can preserve the Swifts' nest places for them and you and your children can revel in their flight and calls for ever after. Below we show you how to keep Swifts breeding safely in your building. NB please remember that any interference with the Swifts, their nests or their eggs and chicks is an offence under both UK and EU legislation.

Where the Swifts will be nesting

Eaves - in "open" eaves, under the bottom row of tiles, above the gutter, just inside the roof-space

Holes - in holes in walls where pipes have been removed

Flashings - on brick ends or in holes under loose flashings on chimneys and skylights

Gables - behind barge boards and gables, on the brick ends

Tiles - under loose or displaced tiles, on the roof timbers or felt

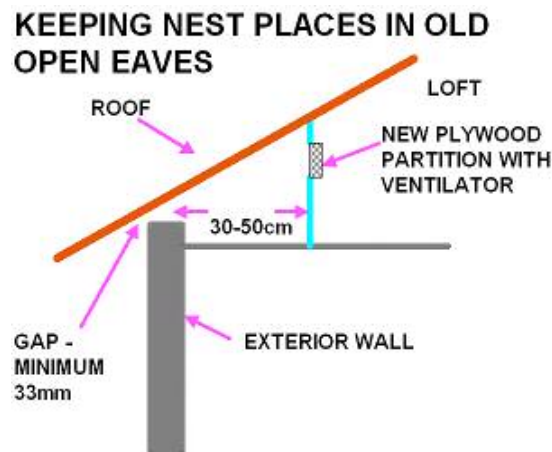
Pointing - in voids behind gaps between stones or bricks where the pointing has washed out

How to save their nests and let them breed safely

Never re-roof where and when there are Swifts nesting (usually end of April to beginning of August)

Eaves nests- leaving the eaves open is the simplest & best solution or cut slots in the soffit or facing boards to match the old entrances

If you have to, install a ventilated plywood partition at least 30cm inside the loft to enclose the Swift nest areas and make the loft area usable, as shown below.



Hole nests - where they are not going to be a problem just leave old holes. You can fit a tile into the pointing above to form a ledge to keep the rain out, or else fit a Swift Brick to provide an alternative nest place.

Behind flashings - offset or lengthen flashings and ridge/end tiles to let the Swifts back in without affecting weatherproofing.

Inside gables - either leave well alone or else fit simple wooden nest places behind the bargeboards.

Under tiles - reinstate the tiles keeping the old gaps where the Swifts gained entry exactly where they were. You can do this easily by inserting wedges.

Inside voids behind defective pointing - just leave un-pointed the access to where the Swifts are nesting.

NB - don't treat the Swifts' area with insecticides - it may harm them.

If none of the above are possible - consider installing nestboxes or "nest bricks" instead.

Some examples of saving Swifts' nest places:

Swifts breed inside the eaves of this hotel at the Escorial, in Spain. Access slots (seen as dark lines at the top of the wall) are left free for them to enter and also to ventilate the roof space.

Photos © Edward Mayer & GBN Nederland



Swifts nest under the tiles on the brick ends of this roof. Repairs would evict them, but leaving the bricks as they are and fitting deeper tiles, offset to maintain the Swifts' access from below, will provide weather proofing and still let the Swifts nest.



A Swift nest on a gable brick end, exposed when the barge boards were removed. Swifts can nest in very restricted places.

Photos © Graham Roberts / SOS



The gable brick ends shown exposed on the left have been fitted with bargeboards containing staircase type nest boxes. These will be faced with a plank with entrance holes cut for the Swifts to access the new nest places inside.



A Schwegler "Swift Brick" inserted into previously open eaves to provide a replacement Swift nesting place. The roof of this NHS hospital had to be sealed to meet hygiene requirements, but the Swifts' nests were saved.



Plastic soffits and gutters have been fitted to this re-roofed house. Holes have been cut in the soffits close to the wall to provide access for the Swifts to their nests in the eaves.

Photos © Raymond Fulton & Julian Dowding



For more advice and help contact London's Swifts

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