County Meath Swift Resurvey 2024



Final Report Prepared by:
Kathryn Finney Project Manager
Fieldworkers Peter Phillips, Annie Birtwistle and Kieran Kelly.

BirdWatchIreland
protecting birds and biodiversity

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Corresponding author: kfinney@birdwatchireland.ie

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Due to privacy considerations for the large body of volunteers, Tidy Towns groups and residents who assisted with the report, the photographs have been redacted in line with GDPR best practice. Specific locations and addresses of houses where Swift nests have been found have been redacted to protect the privacy of all residents (both human & avian) .

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Executive Summery

- This survey builds on work carried out in 2019 by BirdWatch Ireland and commissioned by Meath County Council.
- Thirteen towns and villages in County Meath were resurveyed in 2024.
- Nest sites were confirmed in 11 towns/villages in 2024, compared to 10 towns/villages in 2019.
- The number of confirmed nests increased by 126 nests, from 260 during the 2019 survey, to 386 this year. The 2024 resurvey focused on known nesting locations, and it is likely that this in part resulted in more nests being identified at these locations.
- The number of confirmed nests increased in all town/villages, save for Enfield between survey years.
- Two thirds of all breeding Swift are located in only three towns, Trim, Dunshaughlin and Navan.
- Populations at several towns are considered extremely vulnerable, due to their reliance on a very small number of buildings or private residents such as Athboy, Duleek and Dunboyne.
- Fifty one percent of all new nests were located in existing buildings, the remainder were in new locations, with Trim recording the most new nesting locations.
- Of the 386 nests recorded during the 2024 resurvey, 71% were in residential properties.
- Thirty eight percent of all Swift nests in County Meath were in houses with a “Jerkinhead roof” style
- Twenty-three nest box projects were surveyed. Of 165 available nesting cavities, 5 (3%) were occupied by Swifts. Caller systems need to be put in place at many sites.
- Protecting existing nests particularly on residential buildings is imperative if Swifts populations are to be retained in County Meath.
- Providing additional nesting space through nest box / bricks is recommended as providing the best opportunity for protecting Swift nest sites in County Meath.
- This survey should be repeated within the next five years to monitor Swift population dynamics in County Meath.

1. Introduction

The Common Swift, *Apus apus*, (referred to as 'Swift'), is a migratory bird belonging to the family Apodidae. It winters in Sub-Saharan Africa; however, its breeding range is widespread across North Africa, Europe, and Central Asia (Chantler & Driessens, 1995). In Ireland, Swifts breed throughout the country, except for the north-west territory of Co. Mayo and coastal islands (Balmer, et al., 2013; BirdLife International, 2021).

Swifts have adapted to a broad range of habitats, however they are often concentrated in populated areas, where they take advantage of the built environment to nest. The decrease in ancient forests, where swifts used to nest in tree cavities, likely resulted in their transition to nesting in buildings (Holmgren, 2004).
Swifts Latin name Apus Apus means "footless" - sleeping, eating, bathing and even mating on the wing, they rarely touch the ground unless injured or fallen from the nest. They seldom perch (Holmgren, 2004), only landing and sleeping on the nest when breeding. They are also the fastest birds in level flight.

Swifts are commonly mistaken for the Barn Swallow, House Martin, or Sand Martin but do not share the same genealogical tree. They have a streamlined body, long wings, and a short, forked tail and their dark plumage and piercing screech distinguish them from these other species. The Swift is a monomorphic species, and visual identification of the sexes is impossible outside of the breeding season (Chantler & Driessens, 1995).



Figure 1. Swift in hand (Birdwatch Ireland).

In Ireland, the breeding season begins in the last week of April or the first week of May (Tigges, 2007; Majkusiak, 2022). The nest cup is constructed using airborne materials carried by the wind, such as dried pieces of vegetation or feathers (Cutcliffe, 1951; Lack & Lack, 1951). Swifts lay one clutch, unless eggs are lost and are single brooded (O'Connor, 1979; Thomson, et al., 1996). A completed clutch typically contains between one and three eggs (O'Connor, 1979). Incubation lasts between 19 and 21 days and chicks fledge 36 to 49 days after hatching. The adults depart the nest within a few weeks of chicks fledging (Lack, 1958; Majkusiak, 2022).
Swifts are long-lived birds, fully grown when fledging they reach reproductive maturity in between one and four years old (Perrins, 1971; Thomson, et al., 1996). Breeding pairs form life-long bonds and return to the same nest each year (Lack, 1956). They often breed in colonies (Antonov & Atanasova, 2002), although, solitary breeders are frequent.

Social behaviours specific to this species include "banging" and "screaming parties" (Lack & Lack, 1951; Oloś, 2017). "Banging" describes the practice of non-breeding Swifts flying up to occupied or unoccupied Swift nest cavities and holding onto or brushing against them. A "screaming party" is the term used to describe a tightly packed formation of Swifts that flies above and near the nests' locations, emitting loud vocalizations. "Screaming" Swifts fly very fast, with the fastest horizontal speed of 111.6 km/h recorded during this aerial display (Henningsson, et al., 2010).

Swift conservation in Ireland is a multi-faceted and complex issue. A migratory bird, it spends most of the year outside of Ireland. The issues it encounters during migration and at wintering sites are likely to affect both survival rates and fitness (Newton, 2007; Boano, et al., 2020). Within Ireland, nesting opportunities have decreased as buildings are modernised and new building techniques eliminate the gaps and crevices used by Swifts (Huxley, 2017). Older buildings such as stone houses, churches, or clock towers are frequently either renovated or demolished (Whelan, et al., 2019). Across Europe insect populations are in sharp decline, and this correlates with a decrease in numbers of many insectivore bird species, including Swift (Møller, 2020).

In Ireland Swifts are Red listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland, due to declines in their breeding population (Gilbert, et al., 2021). Within Europe they are now classified as “Near Threatened” with extinction (BirdLife International, 2021). The decline in Swift populations in Ireland has led to the creation of several community-led projects such as the Northern Ireland Swift Group, Swift Conservation Ireland, Dublin Swift Conservation Group, and community led projects facilitated by BirdWatch Ireland (Huxley, 2017; Swift Conservation Ireland, 2020, Whelan et al. 2019). All four groups work to preserve the species by setting up Swift nest box projects, education, and surveying.

Determining Swift populations and confirming the number of nests is often difficult. Swifts nest almost exclusively in urban areas and there can be challenges in securing access to the most optimum locations from which to survey them. Nesting locations are confirmed when Swifts are observed visiting their nest site. However, the nesting season is very short, and Swifts only return to their nest with any frequency when feeding chicks. In addition, the frequency of nest visits is highly dependent on weather conditions and time of day.

The County Meath Swift Resurvey 2024 aimed to provide an updated population estimate for Swifts in Co. Meath and quantify the changes since the initial County survey in 2019 (Meade et. al. 2019). Comparison of results between surveys will help inform future conservation efforts. All towns and villages with confirmed Swift activity in 2019 were revisited in 2024. The survey has highlighted where nesting Swift populations are found and in need of urgent conservation action. It has identified the largest and most important Swift nesting sites that act as source populations. These sites need to be treated with the upmost sensitivity during any renovation or redevelopment works to ensure existing Swift nest sites are retained. 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.

2. Project Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the project was to re-survey towns and villages in Co. Meath where Swift activity was confirmed during the 2019 Co. Meath Swift Survey.

The projet aimed to:

- Provide an updated baseline population estimate for Swifts in Co. Meath.
- To quantify any changes in the Co. Meath Swift population between 2019 and 2024.
- To assess uptake by Swifts of known nest box projects across the county.
- To engage with local individuals and communities to encourage participation in the survey and increase local awareness and appreciation of Swifts and biodiversity through Swift events.
- To provide Meath County Council, local groups, and individuals with updated recommendations and support to help conserve and increase their local Swift colonies based on the results of the repeat survey.

The data collected will allow planners and decision makers to effectively manage Swifts at site level, helping to conserve this important part of Co Meath's urban and natural heritage.

3. Methodology

3.1 Swift Surveying

Fieldwork to survey for Swifts was carried out between the 10th of June and the 9th of August 2024. Survey visits were carried out during periods of fine to moderate weather to increase chances of recording Swifts. Surveying was mainly carried out between the hours of 08:30 to 13:00, and 18:00 to 22:30, in line with peak Swift activity.

All twelve locations with confirmed Swift activity in 2019 were resurveyed for the presence of Swifts and to confirm nesting locations. An additional village, Ratoath was also surveyed due to reports of Swifts in the locality. See Figure 2 and Table 1.



Figure 2. Map showing locations of towns/villages surveyed.

During the field season, the number of return visits was determined by (i) the scale of Swift activity, (ii) the size of the locality and (iii) how widely the Swift colony was dispersed. The more dispersed the Swift colony, the more time was typically required to accurately survey the area. See Table 1.

Table 1. Locations surveyed and number of times surveyed.

No	Town/Village
1	Dunshaughlin
2	Trim
3	Navan
4	Athboy
5	Kells
6	Dunboyne
7	Oldcastle
8	Slane
9	Duleek
10	Enfield
11	Kildalkey
12	Oldbridge
13	Ratoath

Nest 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 and also for calling (screaming) Swifts which were searching for a nest site. 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. Each photo was uploaded on the ArcGIS Survey123 mobile app, in addition to information such as the number of Swifts present, building type, number of nests present, and orientation of the nest. Arrows were added to each photograph marking the exact nest location, and each photograph numbered. All nest sites are included in the "Site Based Results" section of this report.

3.2 Swift Nest Box Projects

Swift nest box projects were identified for surveying, by contacting the BirdWatch Ireland Meath branch, local groups and individuals. See Table 2 below for locations.

Table 2. List of Swift nest box projects identified for survey prior to the 2024 Co. Meath resurvey.

Town	Location
Dunshaughlin	Church of Ireland
Trim	[XX] Castle Close
	St Josephs Nursing Home
	St Mary's School, Patrick St
	Castle Street
	[XX] Saint Loman's street
	[XX] Saint Loman's Street
	[XX] Saint Loman's Street
	[XX] Saint Loman's Street
	Swift Cultural Centre
	House outside Trim[XX]
Dunboyne	[XX] Courthill Drive and [XX] private house [XX]
	Church of Ireland
Navan	Navan Library
	St Annes School, Fairgreen
	Educate Together , Commons Rd
	Private house [XX]
	Buvinda House
Athboy	Private House [XX]
Kells	Private House [XX]
	Church of Ireland beside the Round Tower
Slane	Community Centre
Enfield	St Mary's Primary School, Johnstown Rd

3.3 Citizen Science

One of the keys aims of the project was to encourage local communities to engage in Swift conservation, thereby providing for ongoing locally led Swift conservation action.

Several local groups, known Swift enthusiasts, local birdwatchers and BirdWatch Ireland branch members and volunteers were contacted and invited to help with survey work in their local area. Active effort was made to meet with these local groups to recruit new citizen science contributions; this was supported by raising awareness of Swifts and the County Meath Resurvey through social media platforms, local events and directly contacting local organisations and individuals.

The general public was also encouraged to provide information on Swift nest site locations.

4. Results

4.1 Survey Results

A total of 13 towns/ villages were surveyed during the 2024 County Meath Swift Resurvey. Localities were chosen based on confirmed Swift activity or breeding during the 2019 survey. One additional village Ratoath was surveyed due to reports of Swift activity this year.
Of the 13 towns/villages surveyed, breeding Swifts were confirmed in 11 towns/villages.

A maximum count of 368 Swifts was recorded (max. peak count of all areas combined) and 386 nests were confirmed during the 2024 County resurvey. An additional six nests were recorded at a private residence outside Trim as part of the nest box survey (four in nest box cavities and two in the building). Results have not been included in the analysis below because they were outside the Trim survey area. All other results are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Results for towns and villages surveyed during 2024 Meath County Swift Resurvey.

No	Town/Village	Number of times surveyed	Swifts present	Peak number of Swifts	Nests present	Number of nests 2024	Number of nests 2019	Number increase/ decrease
1	Dunshaughlin	2	Yes	40	Yes	86	77	9
2	Trim	4	Yes	68	Yes	94	59	35
3	Navan	8	Yes	65	Yes	73	58	15
4	Athboy	5	Yes	36	Yes	29	17	12
5	Kells	5	Yes	50	Yes	24	14	10
6	Dunboyne	3	Yes	22	Yes	24	10	14
7	Oldcastle	3	Yes	40	Yes	35	8	27
8	Slane	10	Yes	23	Yes	9	8	1
9	Duleek	5	Yes	14	Yes	9	6	3
10	Enfield	2	Yes	4	Yes	2	3	-1
11	Kildalkey	2	Yes	4	Yes	1	0	1
12	Oldbridge	2	No	0	No	0	0	0
13	Ratoath	3	Yes	2	No	0	0	0
Total No. nests						**386**	**260**	**126**

The number of confirmed nest increased by 126 nests, from 260 during the 2019 survey, to 386 this year.

Trim held the highest density of confirmed nest sites (n.94), 24% of all nests in the county, followed by Dunshaughlin with 22% of confirmed nests. Combined these two towns contain nearly half of County Meath's breeding Swift. When Navan is included, two thirds of all breeding Swift are located in just three towns. See Figure 3 below.

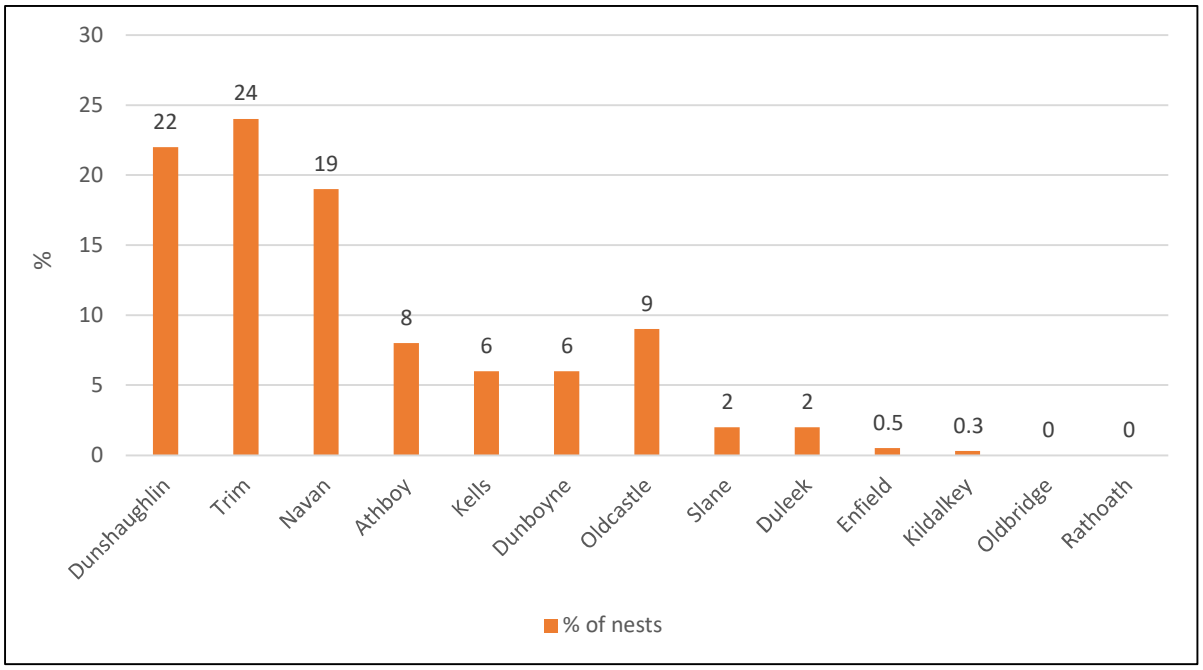


Figure 3. Percentage of County Meath Swift nests found in each town/village.

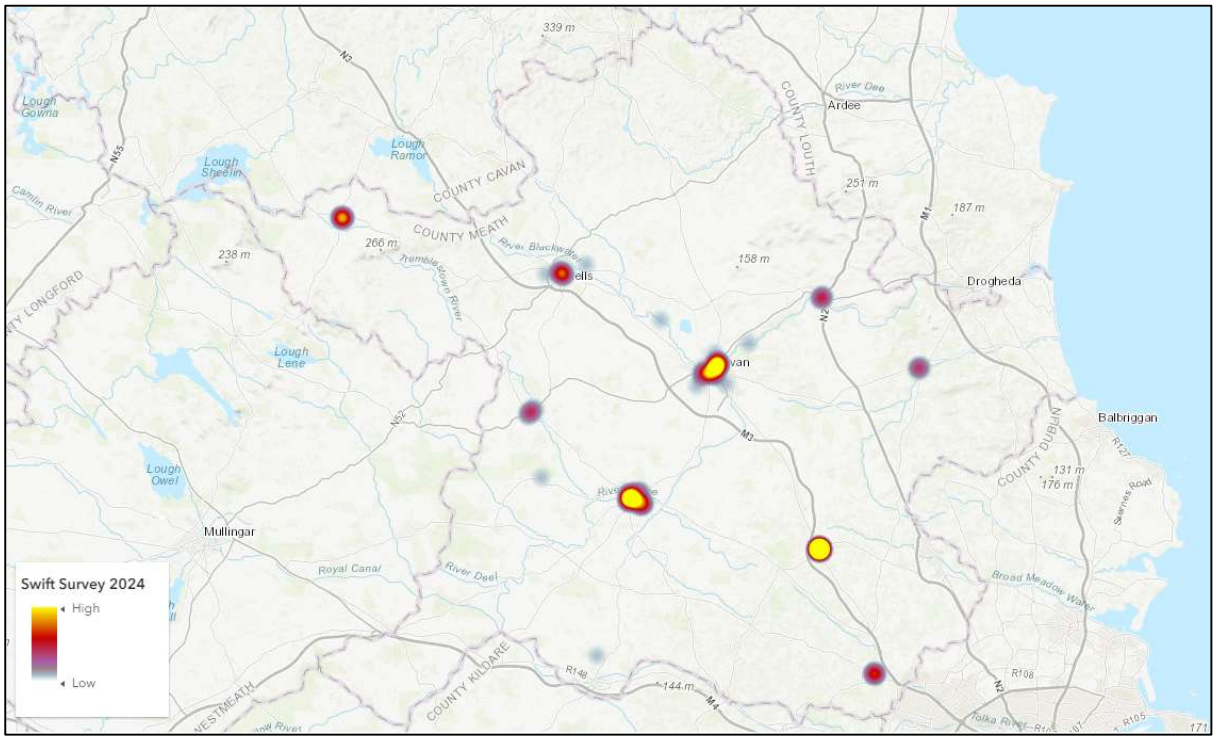


Figure 4. Heat map of confirmed Swift nest locations in Co. Meath, warm colours showing areas of high nest density.

Breeding Swift populations have increased between survey years, with 49% more nests recorded in 2024. The number of confirmed nests increased in all town/villiges, save for Enfield between years. See Figure 5.

The 2024 resurvey focused on known nesting locations, and it is likely that this in part resulted in more nests being identified at these locations. 51% of all new nests were located in existing buildings. However, it is evident that the population at some towns/villages has increased between survey years, with the highest number of new nests recorded in Trim. recording the most new nesting. See Figure 6.

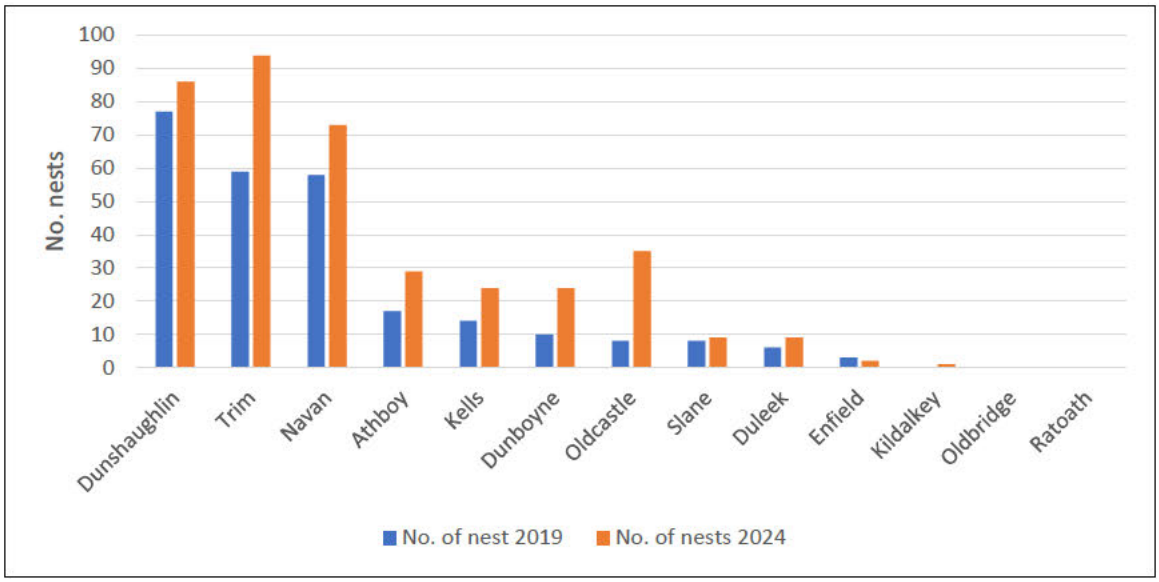


Figure 5. Comparison of the number of confirmed nests in towns/villages in 2019 and 2024.

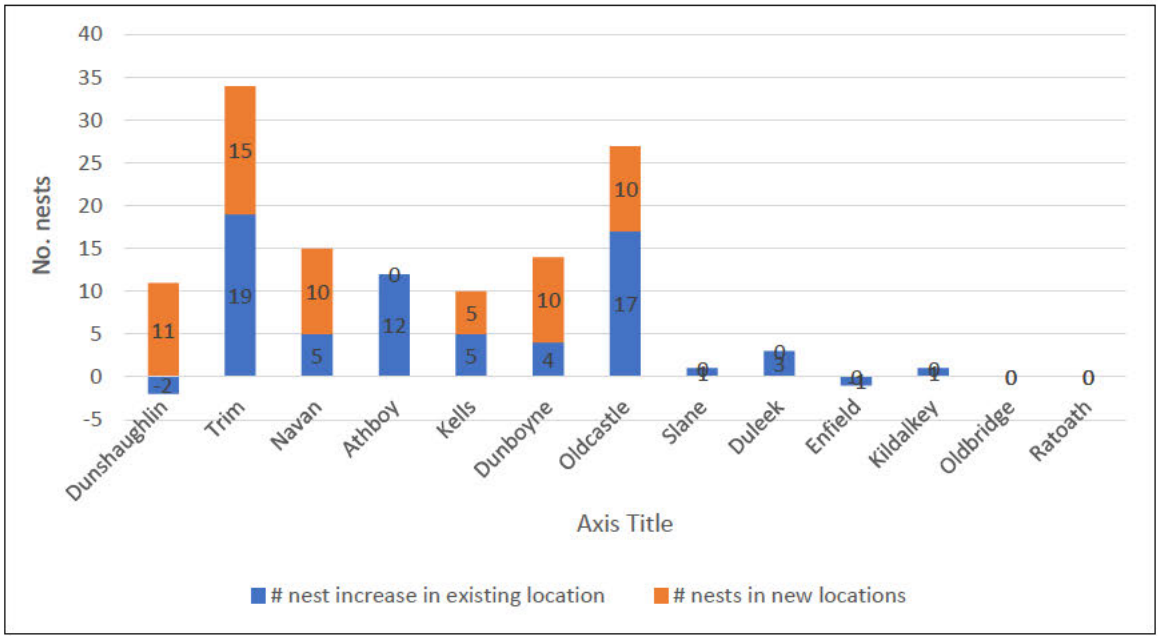


Figure 6. Number of <u>new</u> Swift nests found in existing or new locations by town/village 2024.

The percentage increase in number of confirmed nests between survey years was highest in Oldcastle at 338%, followed by Dunboyne at 140% and Athboy and Kells at 71%. A large proportion of the increase in Oldcastle was found in an existing coloney. It is possible that this colony at Gilsen school was underrecorded during the 2019 survey. See Figure 7 below.

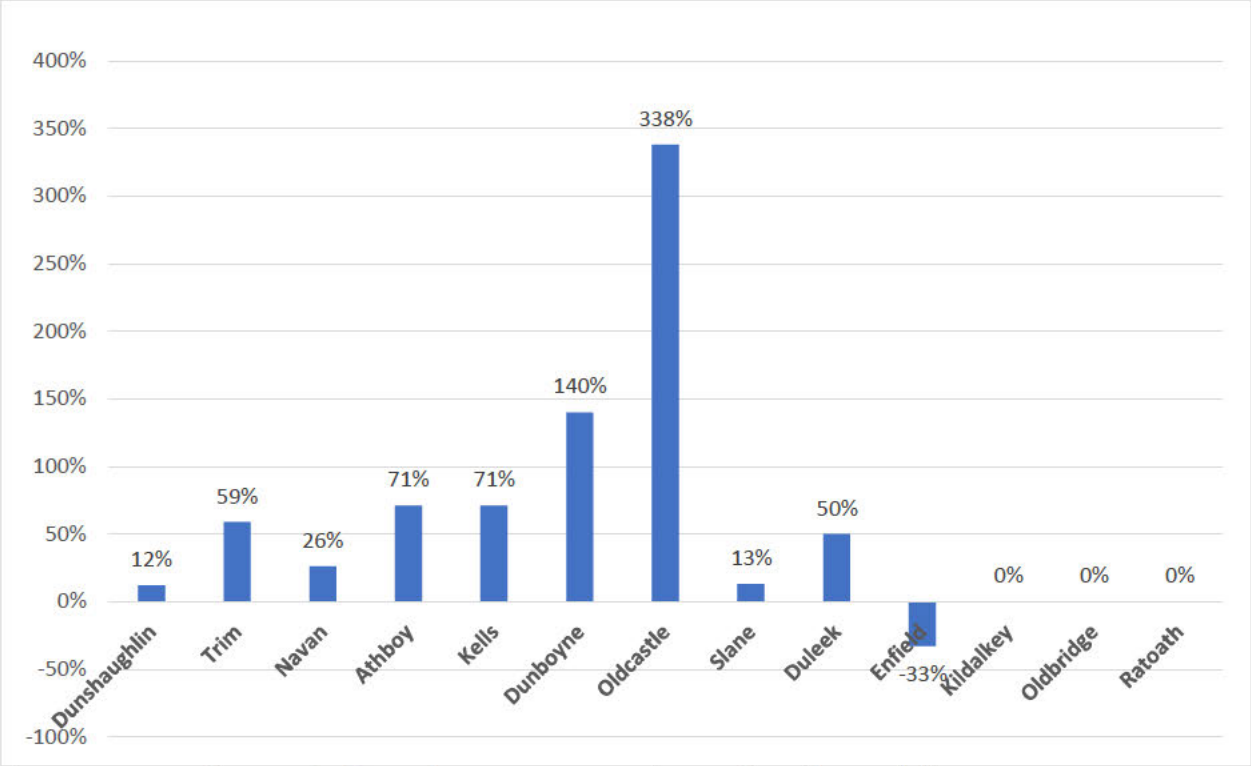


Figure 7. Percentage increase of swift nests between survey years (2019 and 2024) by town/village.

* Kildalkey recorded an increase in the number of nests from 0 to 1. This cannot be represented on this graph as it is a percentage increase of infinity, therefore it has been represented as 0.

4.2 Building Type Distribution

Of the 386 nests recorded during the 2024 resurvey, 71% were in residential properties (276 nests). The remaining 29% of nests were scattered at low densities throughout other building categories, with public building holding the second highest density at 16% (63 nests), followed by commercial (31 nests), religious (10 nests), and heritage (6 nests). See Figures 8 and 9 below.

In 2019 residential properties accounted for 76% (n.198) of nests, with public buildings accounting for just 10% (n27), commercial 7% (n.19) and religious and heritage sites 3% each (n.8). Between the

two survey years, Swift nesting populations have increased in public and commercial buildings, although the changes have been small.

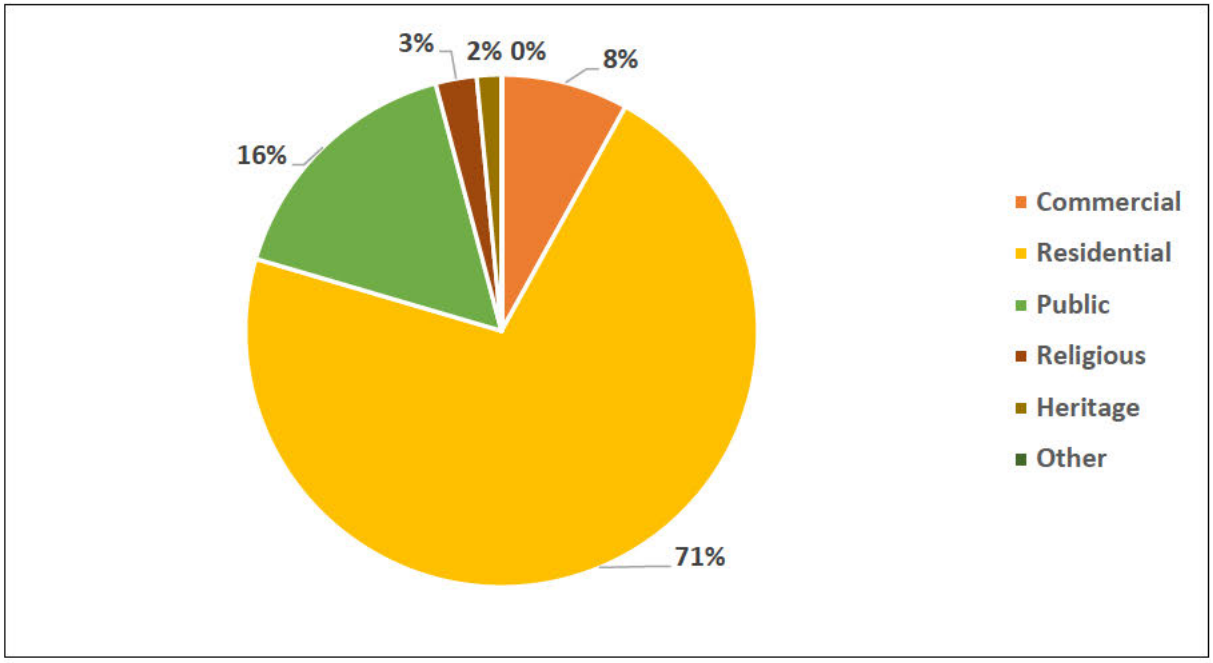


Figure 8. The percentage of Swift nests in each building type in Co. Meath in 2024.

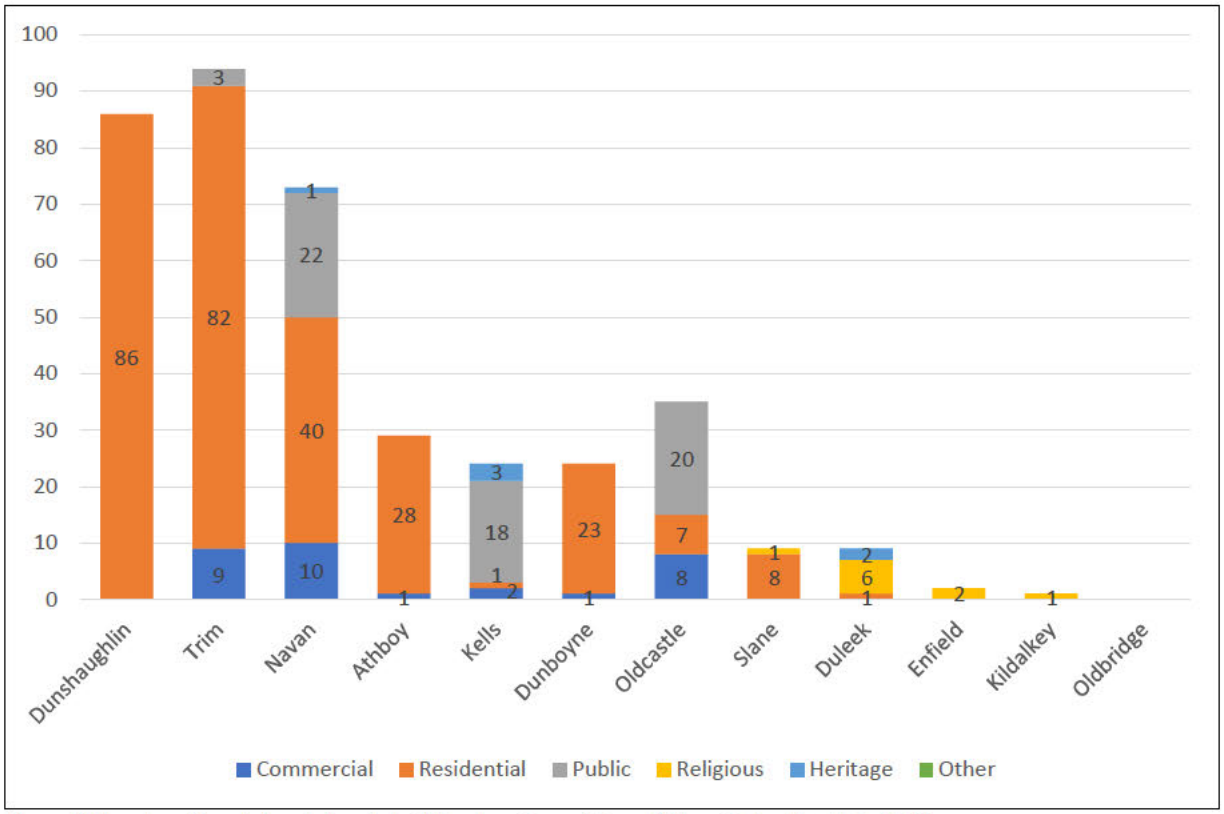


Figure 9. Number of nests in relation to building type in each town/village in Co. Meath in 2024.

Two thirds of all Swift nests were located in Trim, Dunshaughlin and Navan this year and 82% of nests were found in residential buildings.

Over a third of all Swift nests in County Meath (38%) were located in houses with a "Jerkinhead roof" style found in a number of estates, in Dunshaughlin, Navan and in Trim.

4.3 Aspect

There was a relatively even distribution of nest aspect or orientation across the 386 confirmed nests. Nest sites in a westerly aspect were marginally more frequent than all other aspects, with southerly aspects least frequent. See Figure 10 and 11 below.

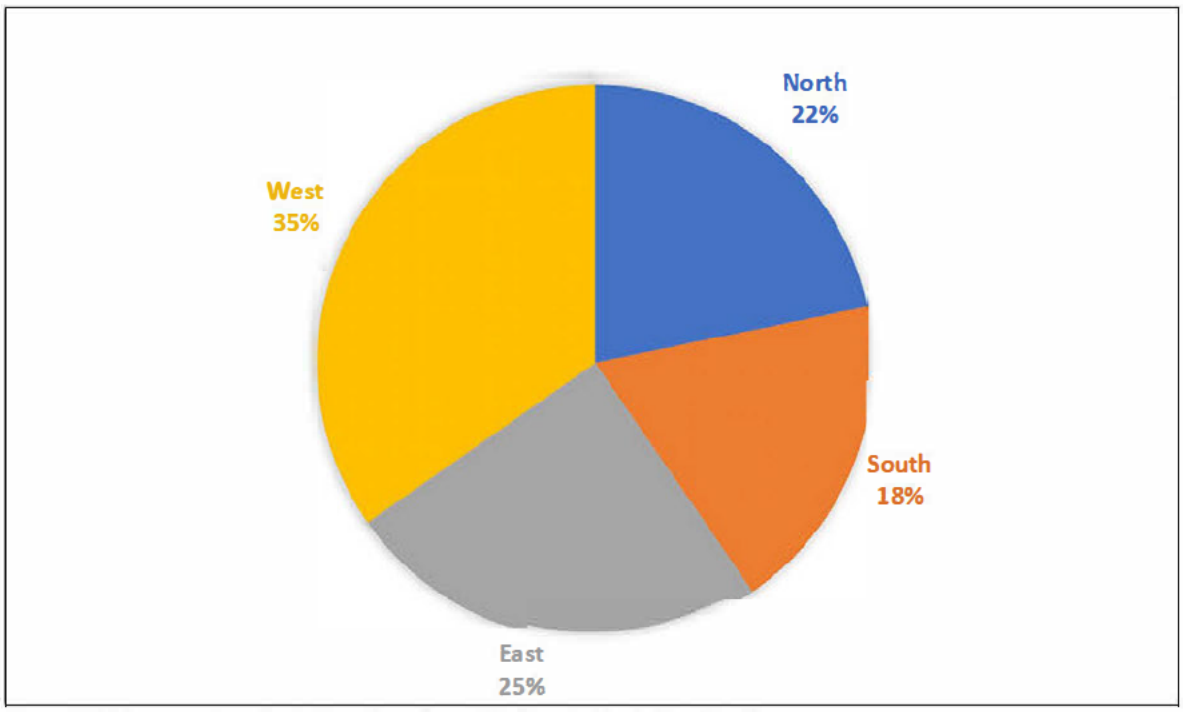


Figure 10. The aspect or orientation of confirmed Swift nest sites in Co. Meath.

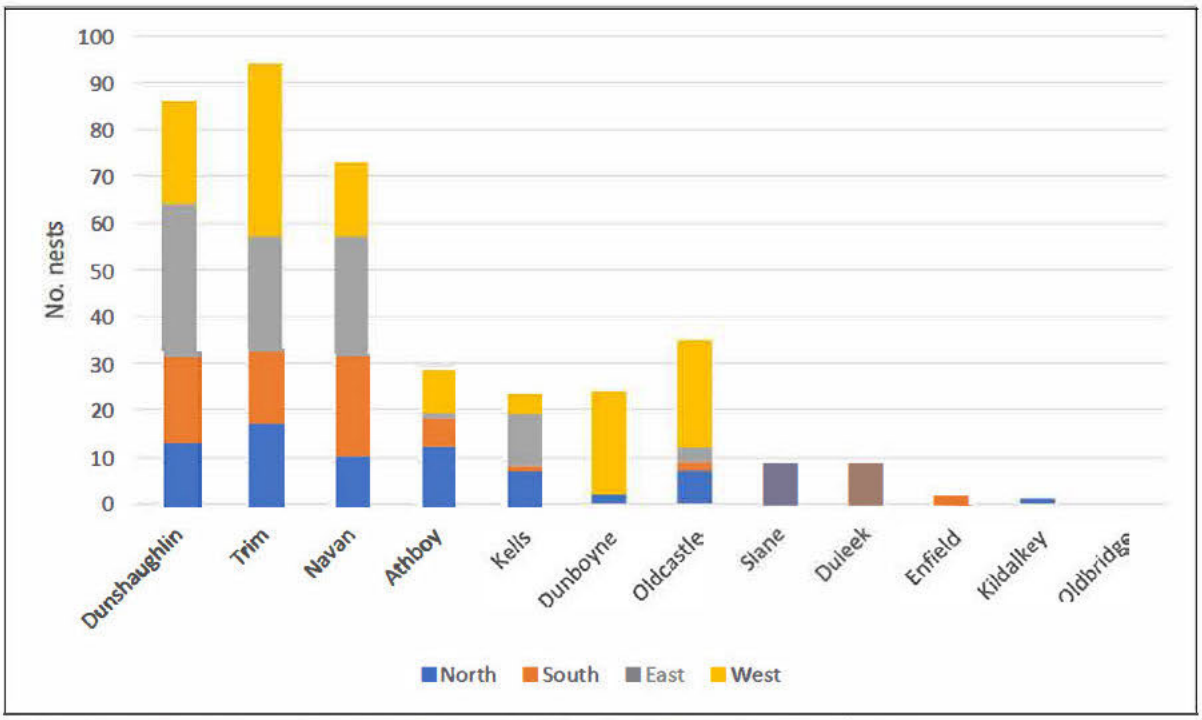


Figure 11. The aspect or orientation of confirmed Swift nest sites in Co. Meath by town/village.

4.4 Site Based Results

Site based results are presented below for each town/village with confirmed breeding Swift.

4.4.1 Dunshaughlin

Dunshaughlin is a medium-sized town in south-east Meath close to the Dublin border (population: 6,644, according to the 2022 census).

In 2019 a total of 77 Swift nests were confirmed, with a peak count of 75 Swifts. Eighty-six nests were located by the 2024 resurvey, an increase of nine nests. As in 2019 all nests were located in properties in 'Ardlea' housing estate, on the northern edge of the town. This colony is the largest Swift colony in County Meath and one of the largest in Ireland. Ardlea has c90 buildings all of which have the "Jerkinhead roof" style. As in 2019, a total of 45 of these houses contained breeding Swift in 2024, although there were some changes in exact locations and numbers.

This estate contains the only Swift colony in Dunshaughlin and any work to the roof structures of these properties could exclude nesting Swifts. This has occurred at several properties between the 2019 and the 2024 survey, and consequently Swifts no longer nest in these houses (number [XX], [XX], [XX] and [XX].

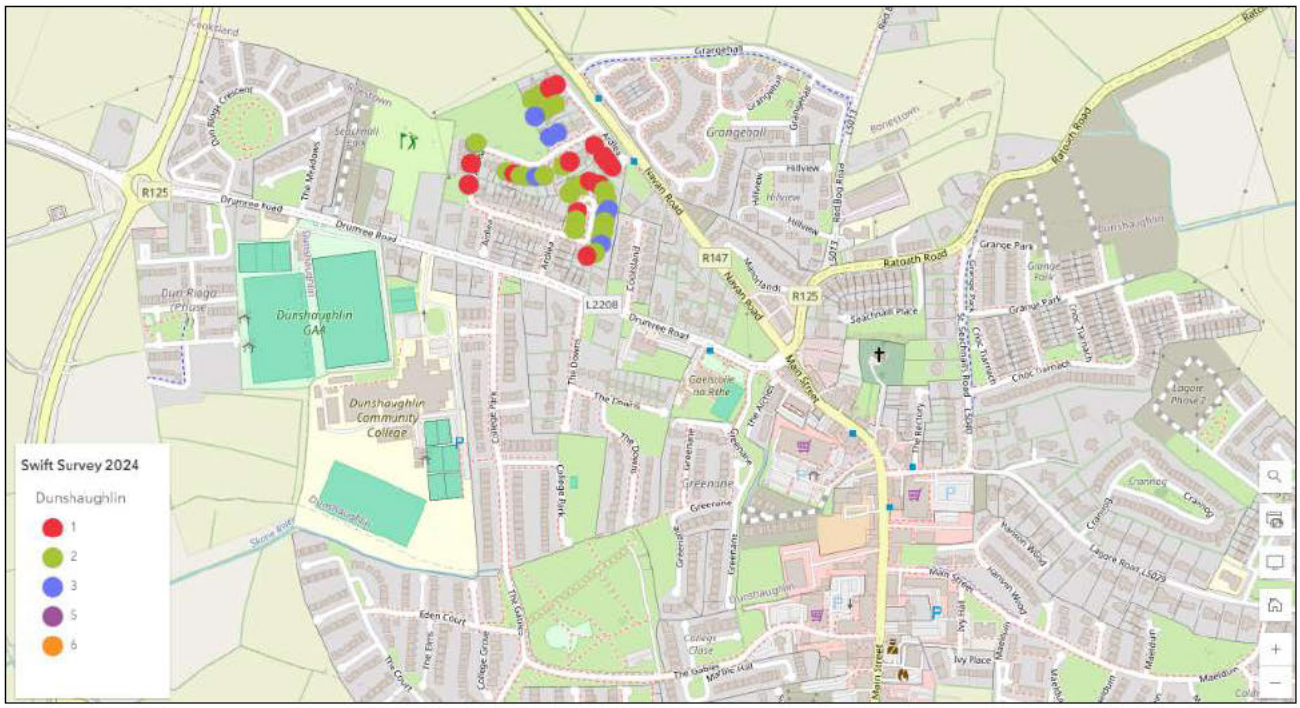


Figure 12. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Navan.

In 2019, 77 Swift nests were confirmed in Dunshaughlin. This has increased to 86 nests as of the 2024 breeding season. Eighty seven percent of the Dunshaughlin population was confirmed in the same buildings as in 2019, with the remaining population found in seven new nesting locations. All nests are in residential buildings.

Table 4. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Dunshaughlin in 2019 and 2024.

No. nests 2019	No. nests 2024	Change
77	86	+9

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

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	0
Residential	86
Public	0
Religious	0
Heritage	0
Other	0

Table 6. Dunshaughlin confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

Photo no.	Address	2019 No. Nests	2019 Peak Swift Count	2024 No. Nests	2024 Peak Swift Count	2024 Building Type	2024 Change to Building	Change
Previously recorded locations								
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	20	1	1	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	22	1	1	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	20	3	3	Residential		1
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	20	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	20	0		Residential	New Roof Works	-2
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	20	0		Residential	New Roof Works	-1
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	20	3	3	Residential		2
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	20	3	3	Residential		2
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	20	1	1	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	3	20	1	1	Residential		-2
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	20	0		Residential	New Roof Works	-1
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	20	0		Residential	New Roof Works	-1
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	20	1	1	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	20	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	20	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	20	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	20	3	3	Residential		2
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	20	2	2	Residential		1
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	20	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	20	1	1	Residential		-1
1	[XX] Ardlea	3	30	2	2	Residential		-1
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	20	1	1	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	30	2	2	Residential		1
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	30	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	30	2	2	Residential		1
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	10	1	1	Residential		-1
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	10	1	1	Residential		-1
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	10	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	10	2	2	Residential		1
1	[XX] Ardlea	3	2	3	3	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	6	2	2	Residential		1
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	10	2	2	Residential		1
1	[XX] Ardlea	3	10	2	2	Residential		-1
1	[XX] Ardlea	4	15	3	3	Residential		-1
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	15	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	20	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	4	25	2	2	Residential	non visible	-2
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	20	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	3	45	3	3	Residential		1
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	20	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	75	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	2	20	2	2	Residential		0
1	[XX] Ardlea	1	20	1	1	Residential		0
New locations								
1	[XX] Ardlea	0		1	1	Residential		1
1	[XX] Ardlea	0		1	1	Residential		1
1	[XX] Ardlea	0		2	2	Residential		2
1	[XX] Ardlea	0		2	2	Residential		2
1	[XX] Ardlea	0		3	3	Residential		2
1	[XX] Ardlea	0		1	1	Residential		1
1	[XX] Ardlea	0		1	1	Residential		1
Total No.		**77**		**86**				**+9**



2019



2024



Figure 13. Example picture of houses in Dunshaughlin showing the "Jerkinhead" roof design which is typical of the properties where Swift nest sites were also found throughout the estate.

4.4.2 Trim

Trim is a large town (population: 8,563 according to the 2022 census) which is located in the south of the county and is situated on the River Boyne.

In 2019 Trim had the second highest number of confirmed Swift nests in Meath, with 59 nests. The 2024 resurvey located a total of 94 Swift nests, an increase of 35 nests. Trim now holds the highest number of breeding Swifts in County Meath.

As in 2019 the area around Trim Castle, Castle Street and St Loman's Street held high numbers of Swift nests as did the residential estates on the edge of town, Castle Close and Hamilton Place.

Eighty seven percent of confirmed nest sites in Trim are in residential buildings, which are more likely to be renovated, and it is important that these nests sites are adequately protected.

An additional six nests were recorded at a private residence outside Trim as part of the nest box survey (four in nest box cavities and two in the building). Results have not been included in the analysis below because they were outside the Trim survey area.

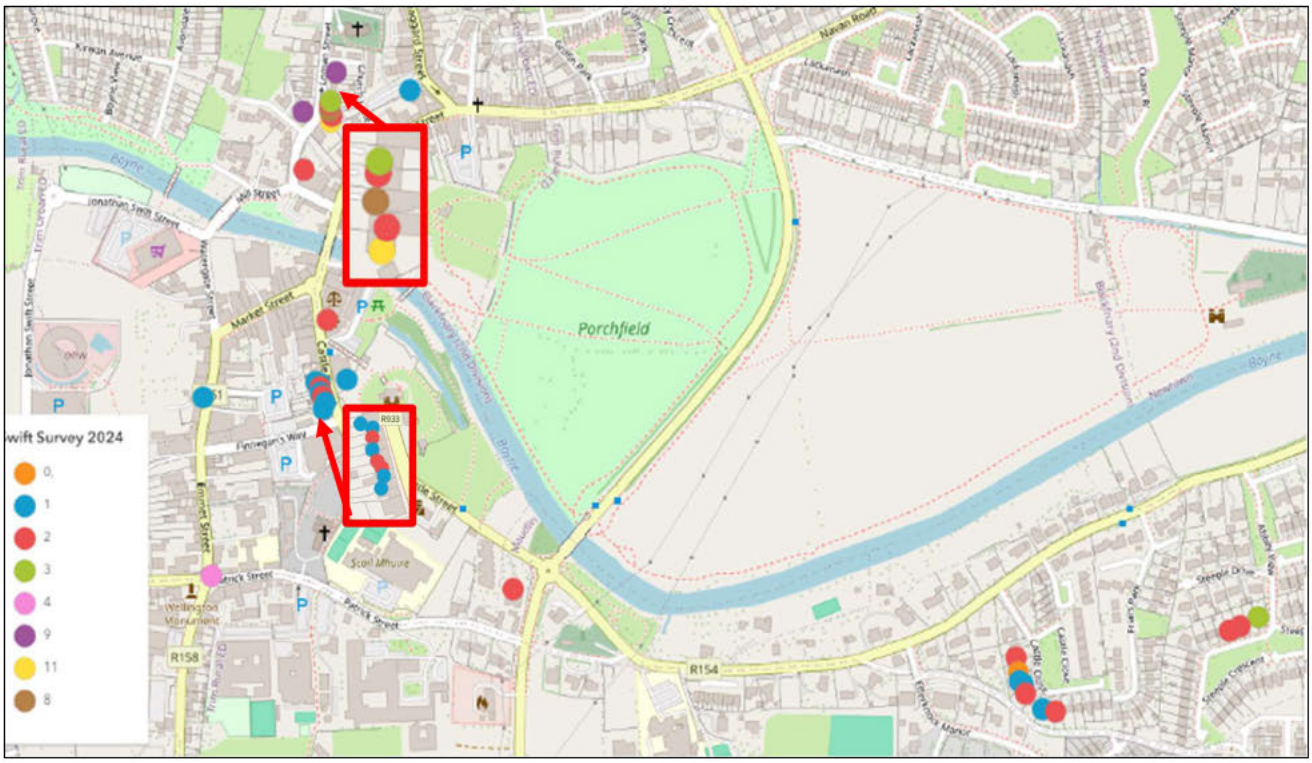


*Figure 14. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Trim. *Red boxes are zoomed in areas.*

In 2019, 59 Swift nests were confirmed in Trim. This has increased to 94 nests as of the 2024 breeding season. Eighty three percent of the Trim population was confirmed in the same buildings as in 2019, with the remaining population found in six new nesting locations. Eighty seven percent of nests are in residential buildings.

Table 7. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Navan in 2019 and 2024.

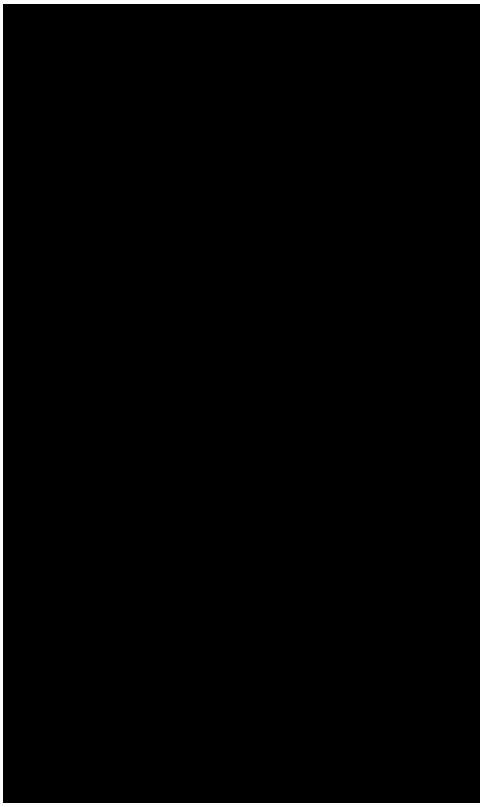
No. nests 2019	No. nests 2024	Change
59	94	+35

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

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	9
Residential	82
Public	3
Religious	0
Heritage	0
Other	0

Table 9. Trim *confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.*

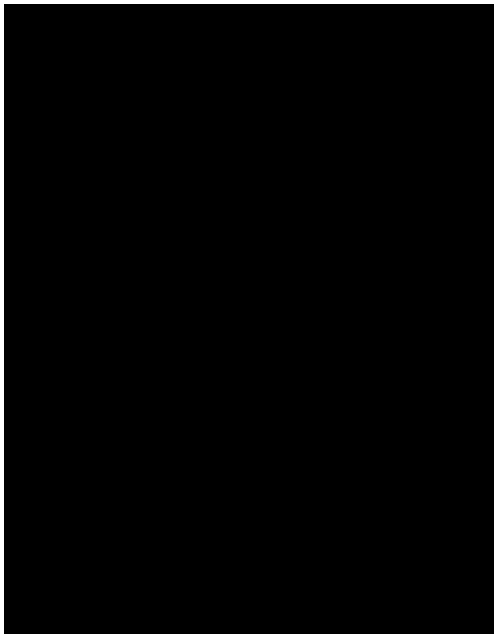
		2019		2024			
Photo no.	Address	No. Nests	Peak Swift Count	No. Nests	Peak Swift Count	Building Type	Change to Building
	Previously recorded locations						
1	[XX] St Lomans Street	3	10	11	10	Residential	
2	[XX] St Lomans Street	2	6	2	25	Residential	
3	[XX] St Lomans Street	3	8	8	12	Residential	
4	[XX] St Lomans Street	2	12	2	12	Residential	
5	[XX] St Lomans Street	2	14	3	11	Residential	
6	[XX] St Lomans street	2	14	no data			
7	[XX] St Lomans Street	1	28	9	26	Residential	
8	Furniture Shop/Council Building, St Lomans St.	2	4	2	5	Small Business	
9	[XX] Castle Street	2	38	1	7	Residential	
10	[XX] Castle Street	1	1	1	7	Residential	
11	[XX] Castle Street	2	14	2	7	Residential	
12	[XX] Castle Street	2	14	1	7	Residential	
13	[XX] Castle Street	1	14	2	7	Residential	
14	[XX] Castle Street	2	14	2	7	Residential	
15	[XX] Castle Street	2	20	1	7	Residential	
16	Courthouse Castle Street	1	2	2	3	Public	
17	[XX] Castle Street Trim	1	2	1	2	Small Business	
18	[XX] Castle Close	2	12	2	25	Residential	
18	[XX] Castle Close	2	20	0	25	Residential	
18	[XX] Castle Close	1	8	1	25	Residential	
18	[XX] Castle Close	2	12	1	25	Residential	
18	[XX] Castle Close	2	12	2	25	Residential	
18	[XX] Castle Close	1	12	1	25	Residential	
18	[XX] Castle Close	2	12	2	25	Residential	
19	[XX] Steeple Crescent	2	10	3	5	Residential	
19	[XX] Steeple Crescent	2	10	2	10	Residential	
19	[XX] Steeple Crescent	2	10	2	8	Residential	
20	[XX] Emmett Street	1	2	1	1	Residential	
21	[XX] Emmett Street Trim	3	6	4	8	Small Business	
22	[XX] Hamilton Place	2	10	2	6	Residential	
22	[XX] Hamilton Place	2	10	3	6	Residential	
22	[XX] Hamilton place	2	10	2	4	Residential	
	New locations						
22a	7[XX] Hamilton Place			1	4	Residential	
23	Town Hall tower, Castle Street			1	3	Public	
24	[XX] Kells Road			2	3	Residential	
25	Stone Building, Haggards St Carpark			1	5	Business	
26	[XX] St Lomans Street			9	15	Residential	
27	[XX] Castle st			1	7	Residential	
Total No. Nests		**59**		**93**			



2019



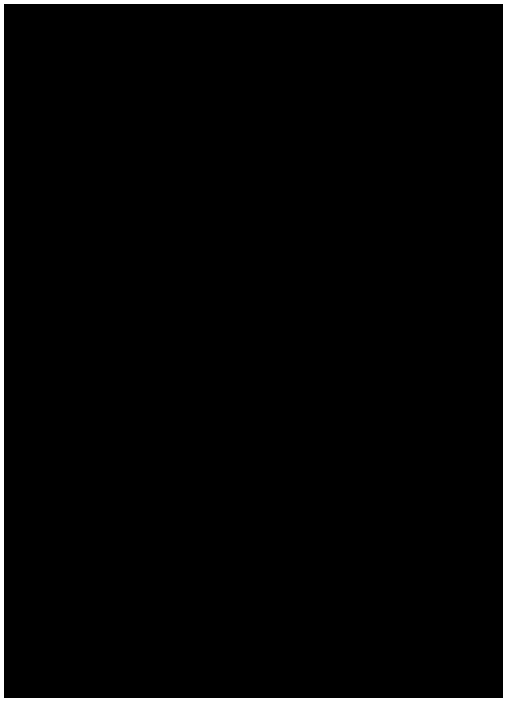
2024



2019



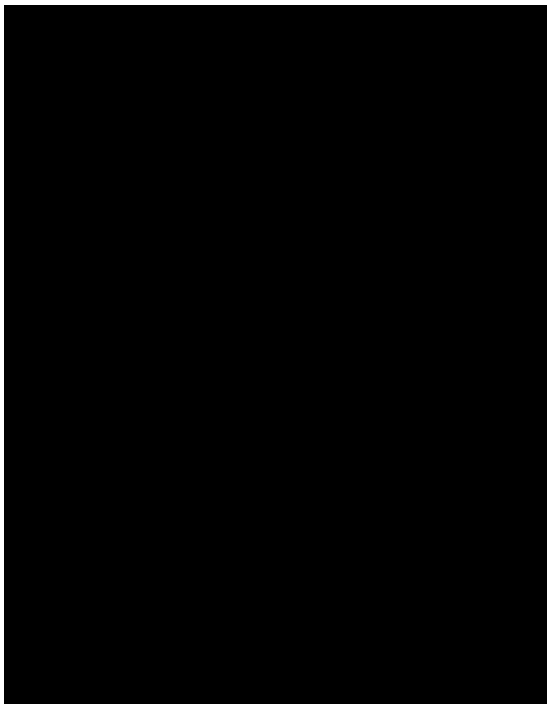
2024



2019



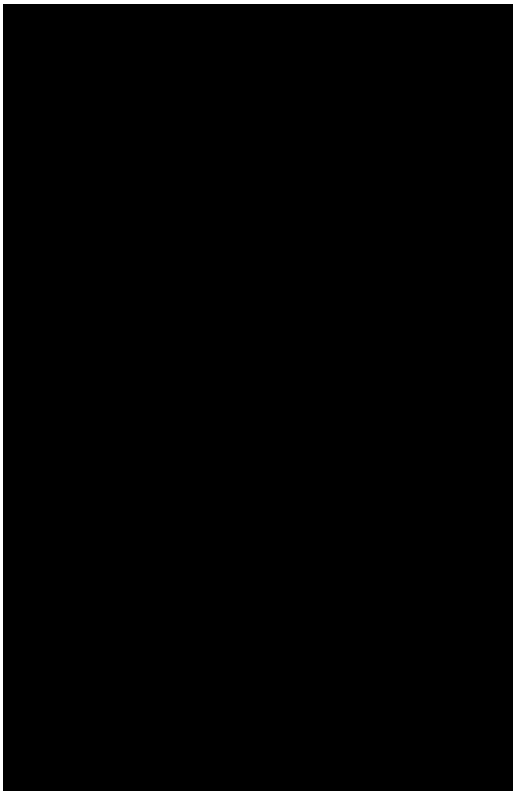
2024



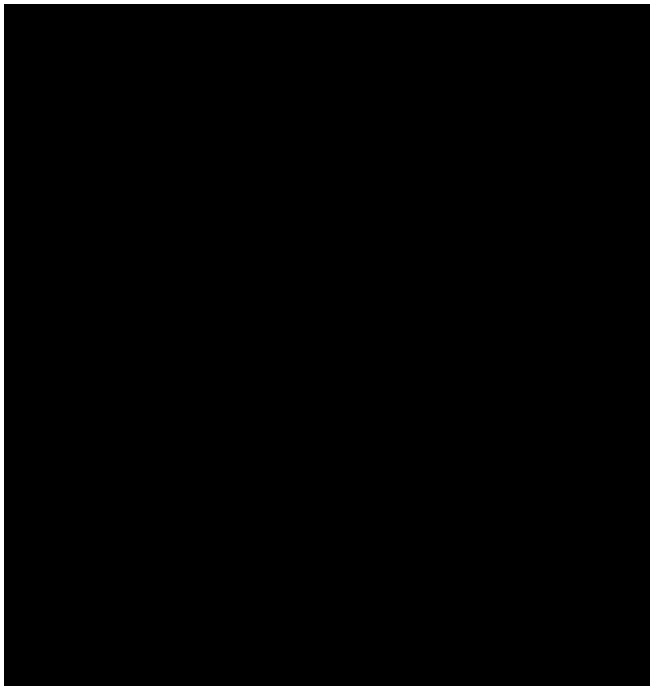
2019



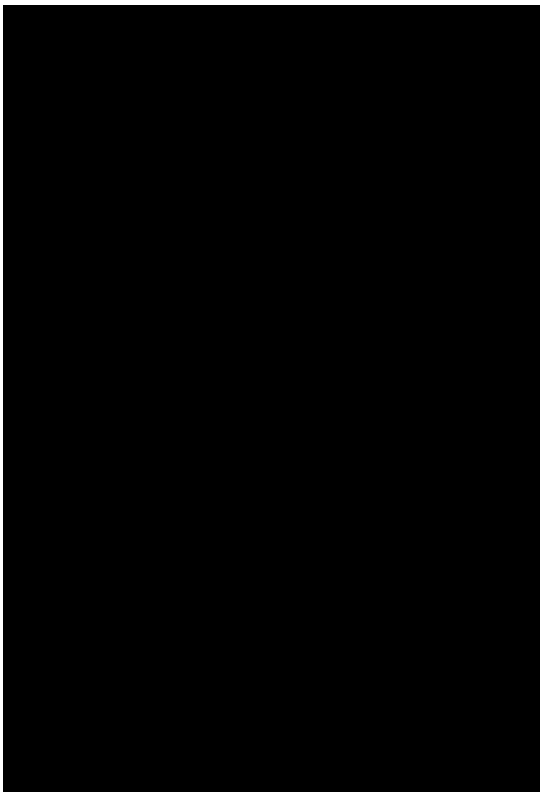
2024



2019



2024



2019



2019



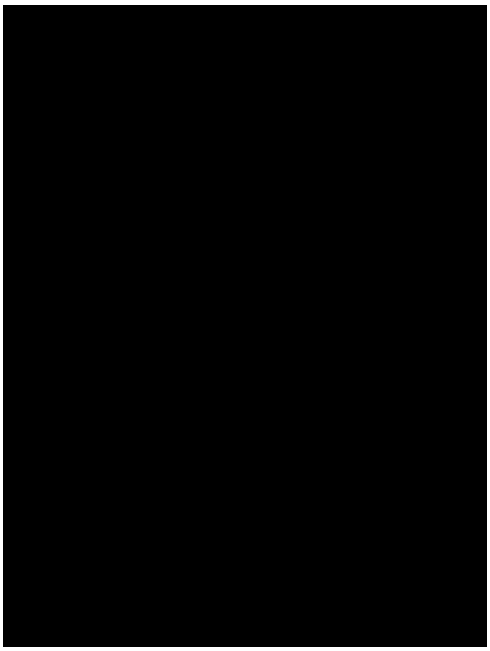
2024



2019



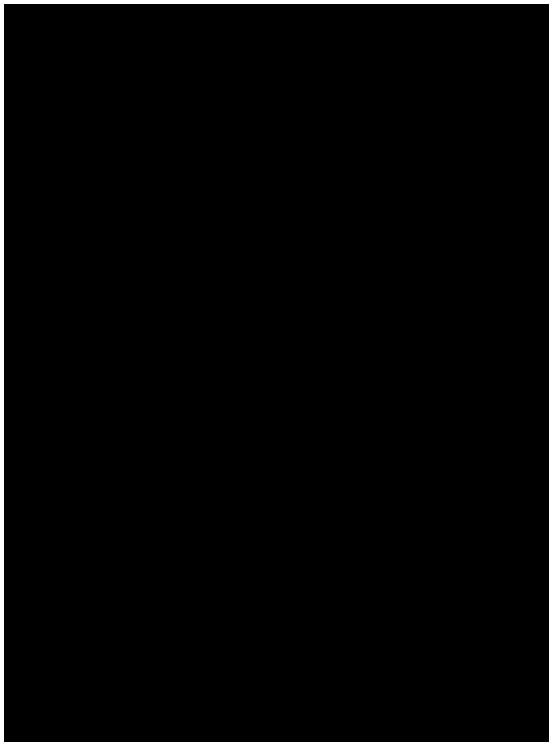
2024



2019



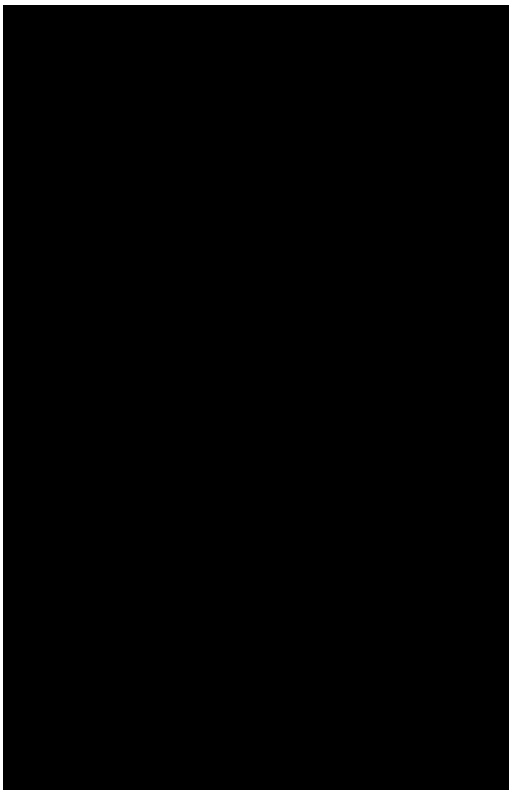
2024



2019



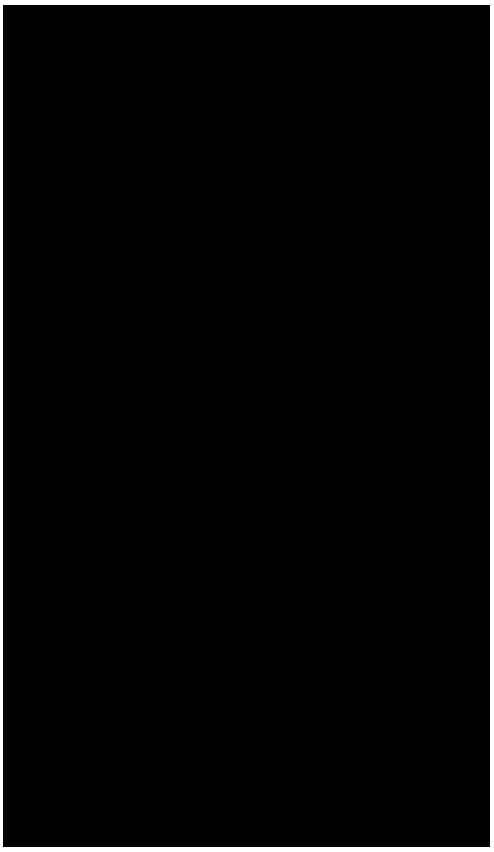
2024



2019



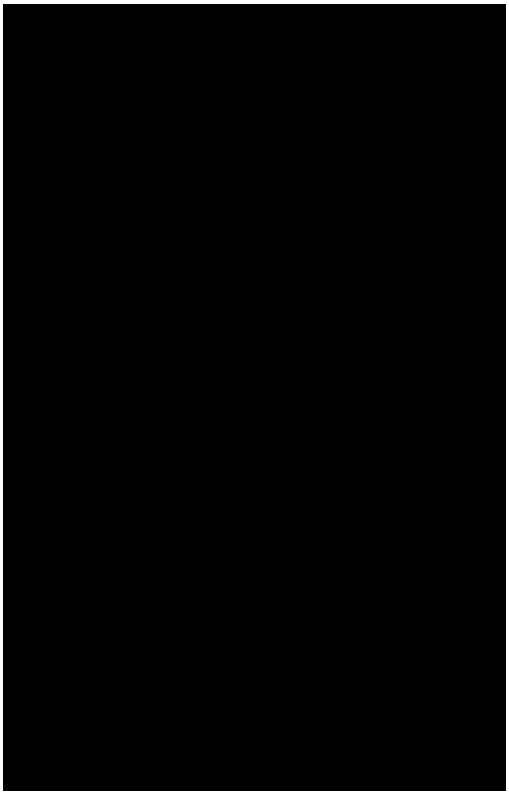
2024



2019



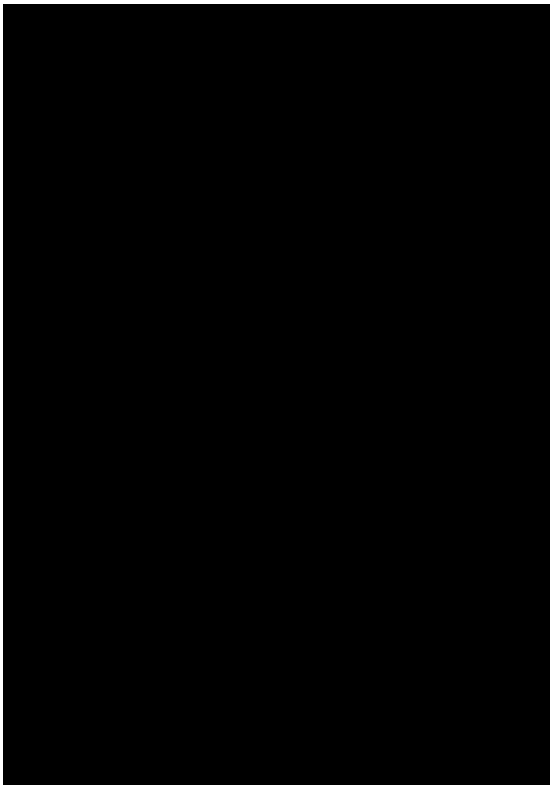
2024



2019



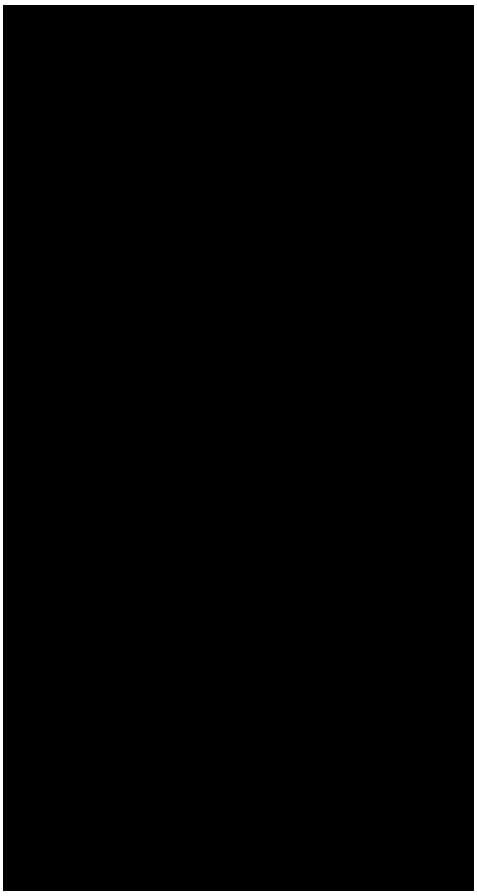
2024



2019



2024



2019



2024



2019



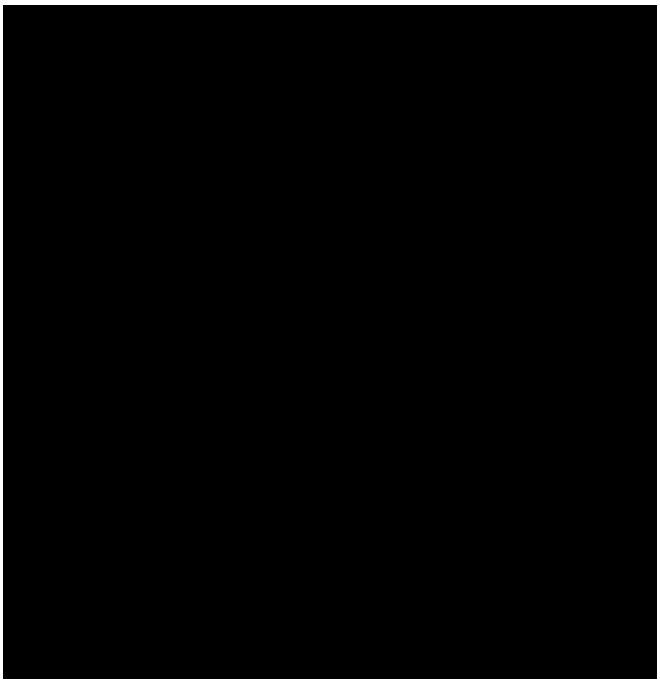
2024



2019



2024



2019



2019



2024



Figure 15. Typical Swift nest site locations confirmed in residential estates

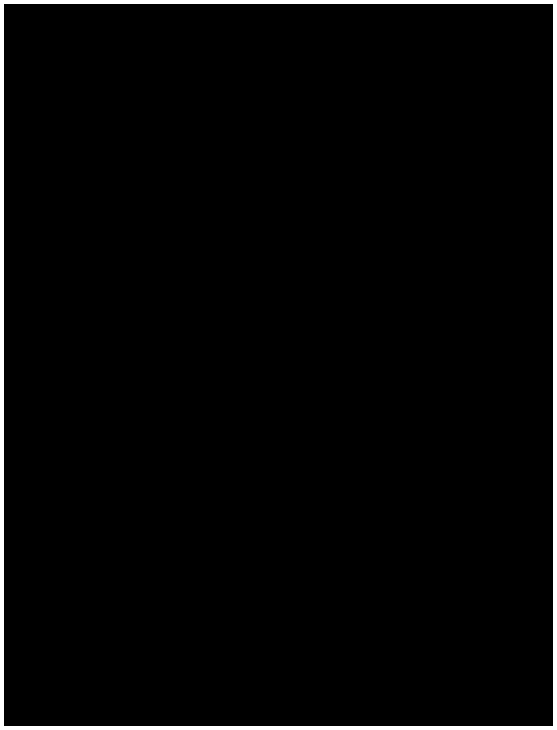
The roof design at Castle Close mirrors that of the "Jerkinhead" design seen to be favoured by breeding Swifts in the Ardlea estate in Dunshaughlin.



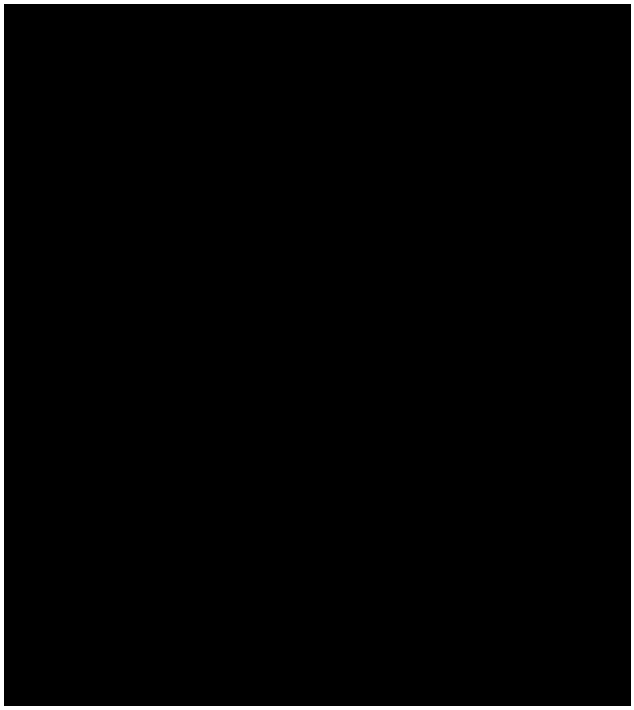
2019



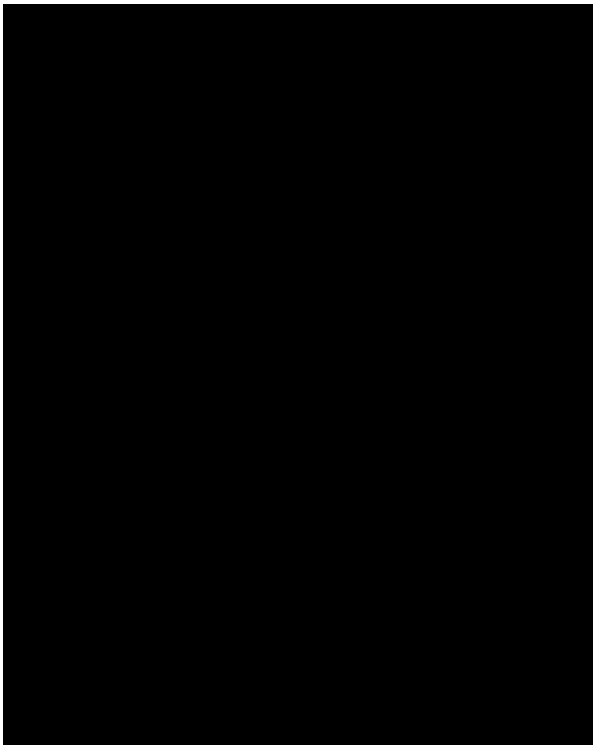
2024



2019



2024



2019



2024



2019



2024

[redacted]

2024



2024

[redacted]

2024

25



2024

[redacted]

2024

[redacted]

2024

An additional six nests were recorded at a private residence outside Trim as part of the nest box survey (four in nest box cavities and two in the building).



Figure 16. Map showing the location of confirmed nest box records (N.4) and nest in the building (n.2) at the private residence outside Trim.

4.4.3 Navan

Navan is the county town and is the biggest town in Meath. It was recorded to have a population of 33,886 in the 2022 census. Navan is at the confluence of two rivers the River Boyne and the River Blackwater and contains ample suitable feeding habitat for Swift.

A total of 58 nests were confirmed in Navan in 2019, increasing by 15 nests to 73 nests recorded by the 2024 resurvey. As in 2019, most nests (49%) were found in one large housing estate – Herbert Place on Flower Hill, close to the town centre and the second biggest colony was at Our Lady's Hospital. The concentration of confirmed nests at these two locations (76% of the entire Navan population) could leave the Navan population vulnerable in the event of restoration or development of these sites. The remaining small colonies are scattered throughout Navan town.

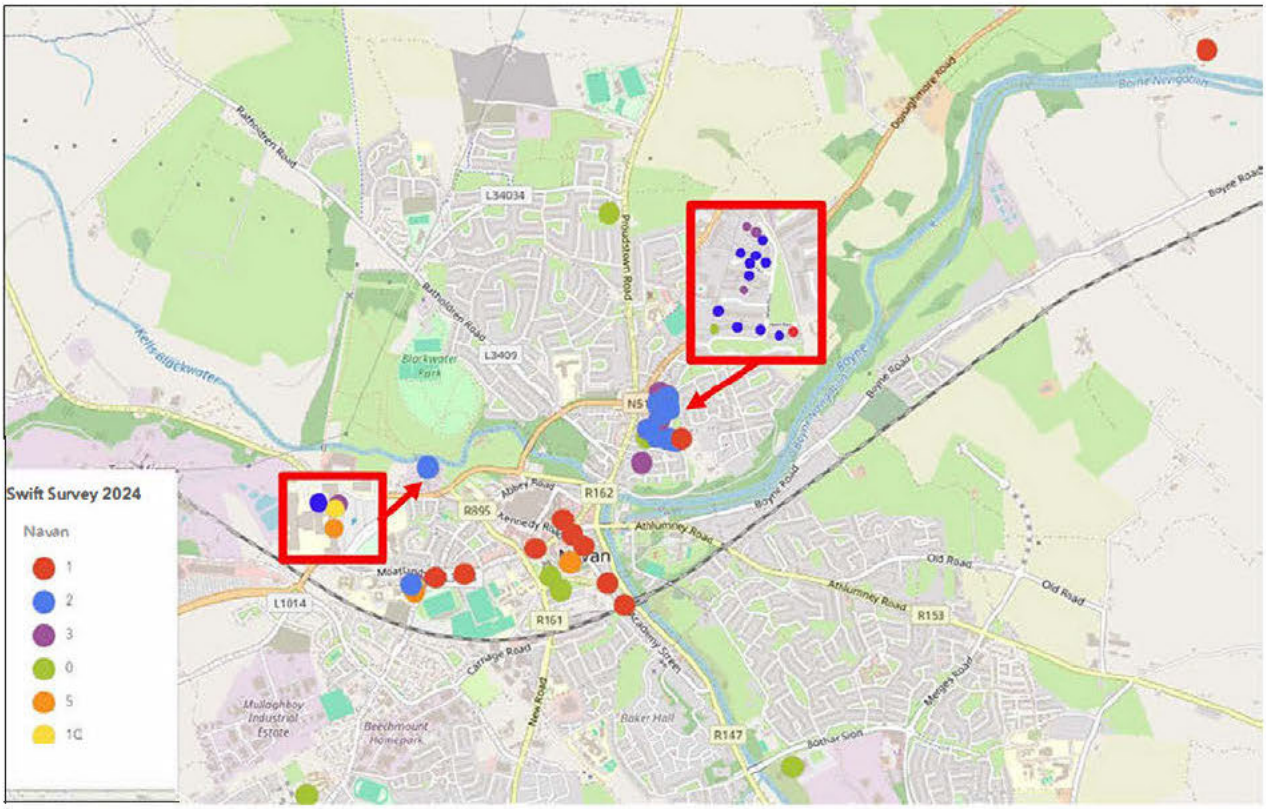


*Figure 17. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Navan. *Red boxes are zoomed in areas.*

In 2019, 58 Swift nests were confirmed in Navan. This has increased to 73 nests as of the 2024 breeding season. Eighty six percent of the Navan population was confirmed in the same buildings as in 2019, with the remaining population found in eight new nesting locations. Fifty five percent of nests are in residential buildings.

Table 10. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Navan in 2019 and 2024.

No. nests 2019	No. nests 2024	Change
58	73	+15

Table 11. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Navan by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	10
Residential	40
Public	22
Religious	0
Heritage	1
Other	0

Table 12. Navan confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

Photo no.	Address	2019 No. Nests	2019 Peak Swift Count	2024 No. Nests	2024 Peak Swift Count	2024 Building Type	2024 Change to Building	Change
Previously recorded locations								
1	[XX] Tara Glen Road	1	2	0	0	House	none visible	-1
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	1	28	0	19	House	none visible	-1
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	2	25	2	41	House		0
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	2	25	2	35	House		0
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	3	35	3	41	House		0
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	3	35	3	41	House		0
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	2	35	3	29	House		1
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	2	45	2	41	House		0
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	2	45	2	41	House		0
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	1	45	2	41	House		1
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	3	45	2	31	House	none visible	-1
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	2	45	2	41	House		0
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	2	10	2	20	House		0
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	2	55	2	41	House		0
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	2	20	3	23	House		1
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	3	12	3	41	House		0
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	2	50	2	41	House		0
2,2a	[XX] Herbert Place Flower Hill	2	25	1	41	House		-1
3	Metges Lane	1	10	1	5	House		0
4	[XX] Ludlow Street	2	6	1	5	Public		-1
5	St Marys Church Church Tower Fair Green	1	8	0	0	Religious	none visible	-1
6	[XX] Fair Green	4	12	5	11	Small Business		1
7a, b, c, d	Our Lady's Hospital	13	22	20	54	Public		7
New locations								
8	Trimgate Street [XX]			1	7	Small business		
9	Ambulance Building beside hospital			1	14	Public		
10	Arch Old Cornmarket			1	5	Small Business		
11	Dunmoe Castle			1	2	Heritage		
12	[XX], Bruce Hill			1	3	House		
13,13a	[XX] Academy Street Navan			2	5	House		
14	Railway Bridge Academy Street Navan			1	3	Public		
15	[XX] , Blackwater Business Park Navan			2	5	Small Business		
Total No. Nests		58		73				



2019



2019



2024



Figure 18. Houses in Navan showing the "Jerkinhead" roof design which is typical of the properties where Swift nest sites are found

The Jerkinhead style roofs at Herbert Place contained 36 nests in 16 properties. This build style proves to be vitally important for nesting Swifts in Navan and other Meath towns.

[redacted]

2019

[redacted]

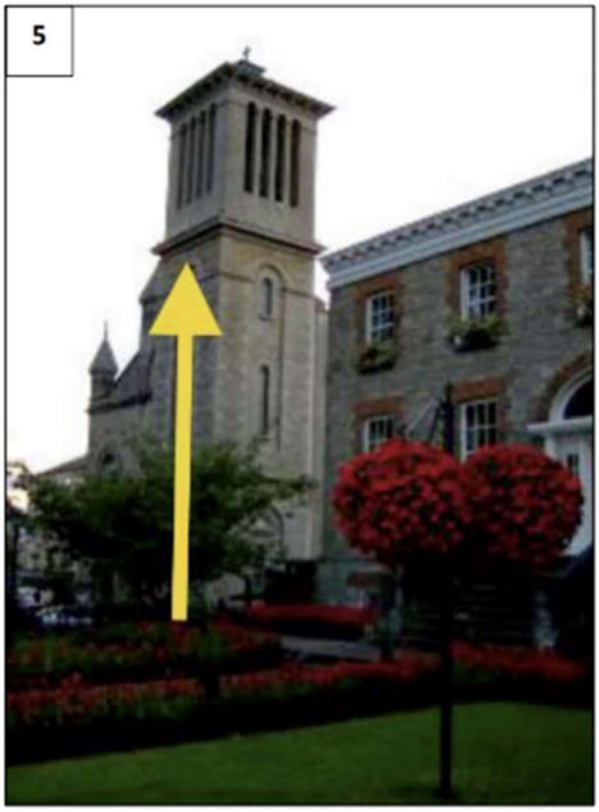
2024



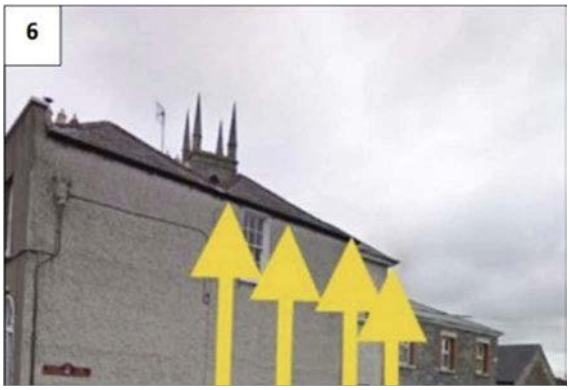
2019



2024



2019



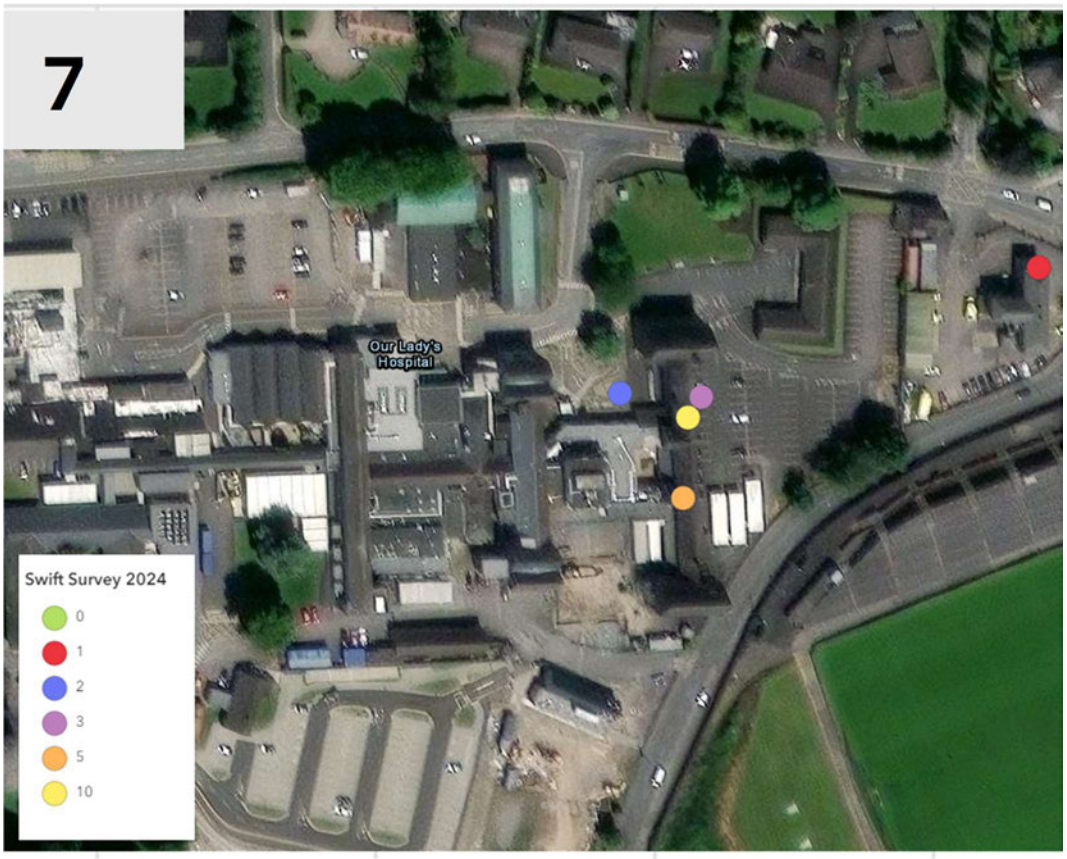


2019

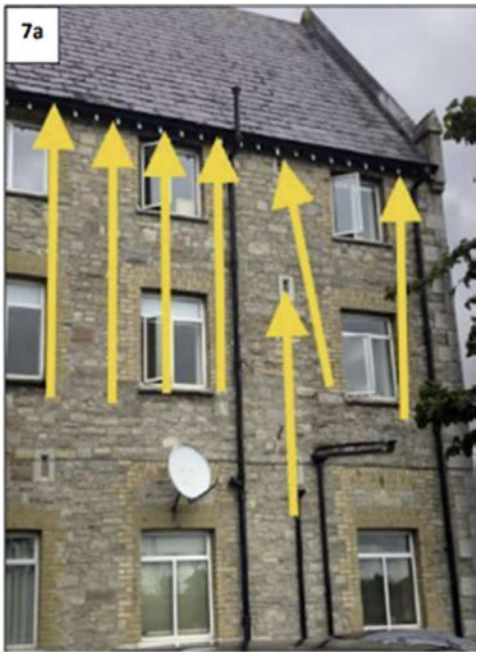
2024



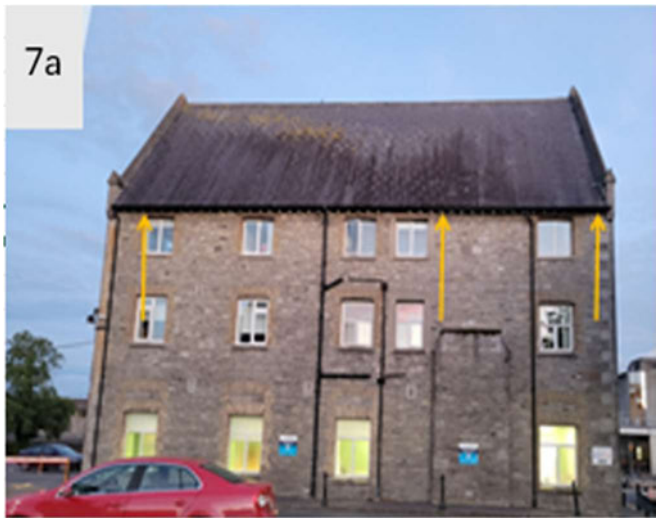
2019



2024



2019



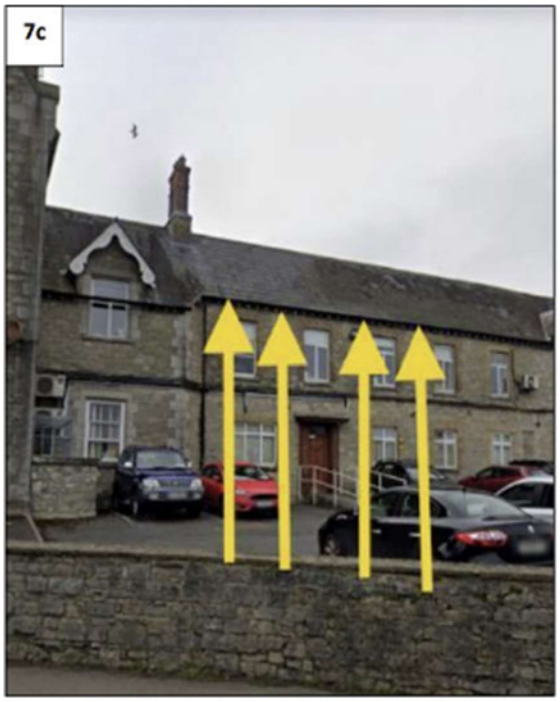
2024 new location on building complex



2019



2024 new location on building



2019



2024



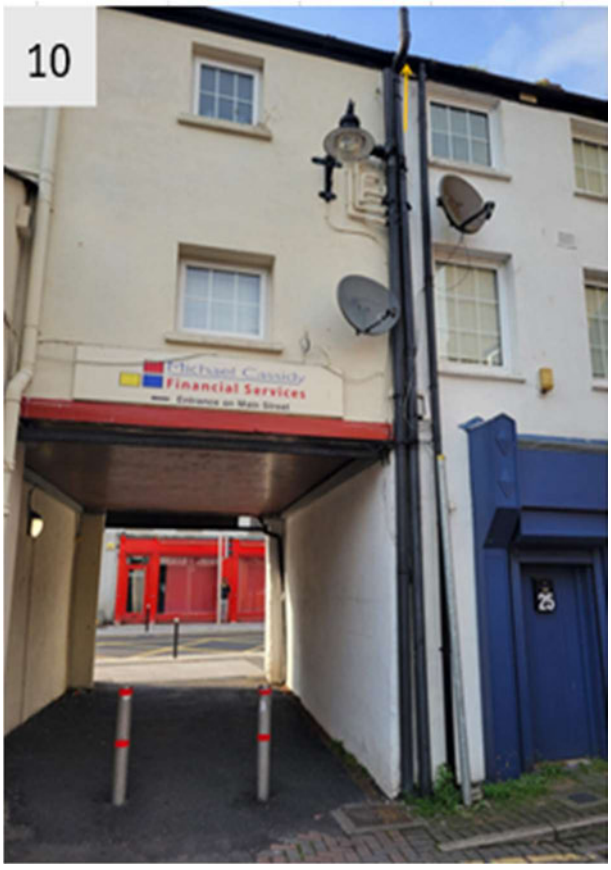
2024



2024



2024



2024



2024



2024



2024



2024



2024



2024

4.4.4 Athboy

Athboy is a medium sized town in the west of the county (population: 2,596 according to the 2022 census). It is located as its Irish name suggests on the Yellow Ford River near the Westmeath border. Seventeen Swift nests were confirmed by the 2019 survey. In 2024, 29 nest were confirmed and a peak count of 36 Swifts. As in 2019, all nests were in just three buildings and the majority of nests occurred in the old parish house. Between survey years the colony at the old parish house has increased by five nests and the colony at Greenville Lower Bridge Street has increased by eight nests. The colony at Athboy Furniture shop declined by one nesting pair, although no changes were identified in the building.

Despite the increase in the number of confirmed nests, the breeding population in Athboy is extremely vulnerable as it is contained within just three buildings. Ninety seven percent of all nests are in two residential buildings and thus are extremely vulnerable, should these buildings be renovated. Efforts to provide additional nest sites using Swift nest boxes and bricks would be of great benefit to the town.



*Figure 19. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Athboy. *Red boxes are zoomed in areas.*

In 2019, 17 Swift nests were confirmed in Athboy. This has increased to 29 nests as of the 2024 breeding season. All nets were located in the same three buildings as in 2019 and 97% of nests are in residential buildings.

Table 13. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Kildalkey in 2019 and 2024.

No. nests 2019	No. nests 2024	Change
17	29	+12

Table 14. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Kildalkey by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	1
Residential	28
Public	0
Religious	0
Heritage	0
Other	0

Table 15. Athboy confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

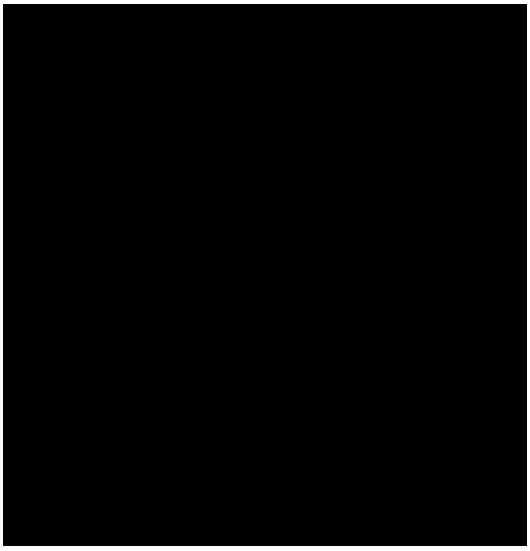
Photo no.	Address	2019 No. Nests	2019 Peak Swift Count	2024 No. Nests	2024 Peak Swift Count	2024 Building Type	2024 Change to Building
Previously recorded locations							
1, 1a, 1b	[XX] House	13	30	18	32	Residence	Vegetation
2	Athboy Furniture shop, Main Street	2	6	1	9	Small Business	None visible
3	Greenville Lower Bridge Street	2	6	10	36	Residence	
Total No. Nests		**17**		**29**			



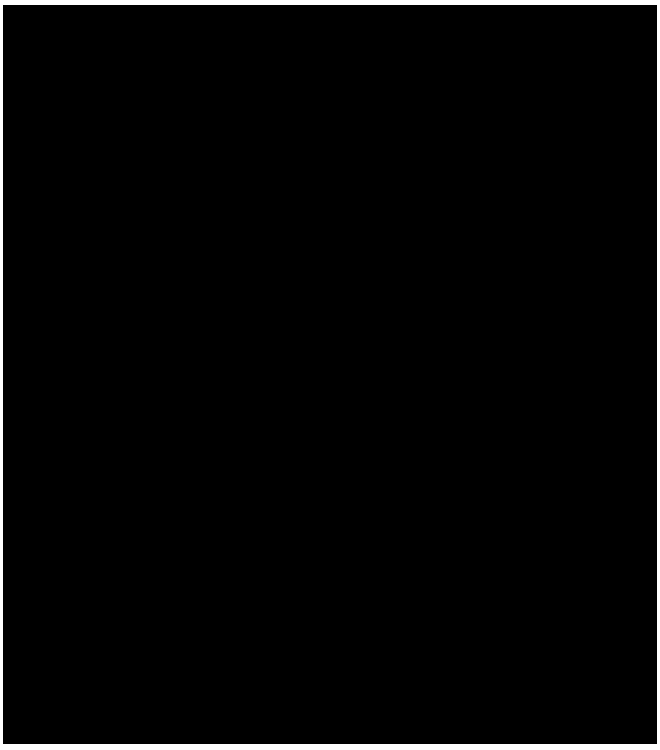
2019 2024



2019



2024



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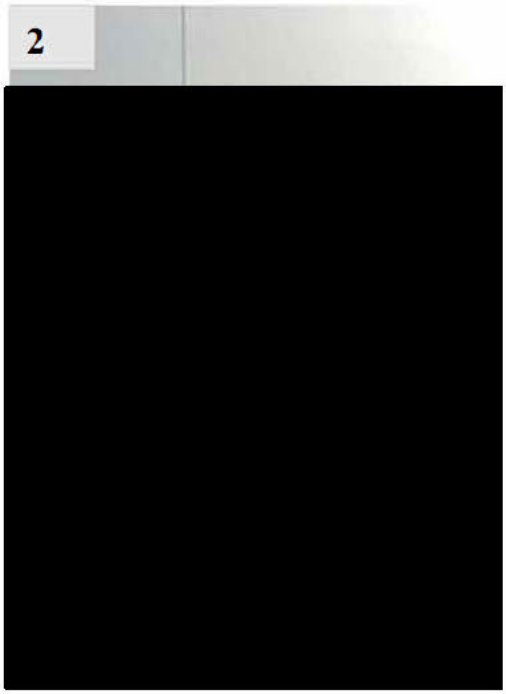
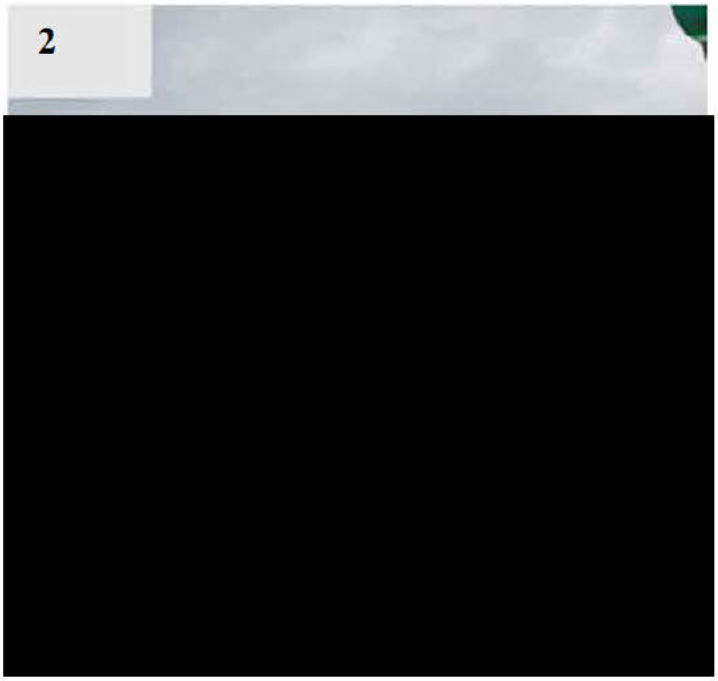


2019



2024



2024



2019 2024

4.4.5 Kells

Kells is a medium-sized town situated in the west of the county. Along with other towns in County Meath, it is within the commuter belt for Dublin and had a population of 6,608 as of the 2022 census.

During the 2019 survey 14 nests were found. In 2024, 24 nest were confirmed, with a peak count of 31 Swifts recorded. As in 2019, the largest colony was found in an old school building off Headfort Street on the eastern side of the town centre. Six other small colonies were recorded in the town. An additional two small colonies recorded by the 2019 survey were no longer active in 2024 – at Castle Street and Kells Round Tower. There were fewer nests in the Old Stone Building at Towns Parks in 2024 (n3), than in 2019 (n4), and nests were not located in the same area of the building. Kells round tower is an OPW heritage site. Prior to the 2024 breeding season restoration work began on this site, and the entire building was wrapped, restricting access to the tower for nesting Swifts. Nest boxes were erected at the adjacent church; however, Swifts were not recorded breeding in them this year. The importance of protecting nest sites when carrying out restoration works on buildings is vital if we are to safeguard the Swift breeding population.

Fifty eight percent of Kells nesting Swifts are found in one public building – the old school buildings off Headford street. Consequently the population is extremely vulnerable. Additional nest sites should be made available using Swift nest boxes and bricks.



Figure 20. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Kells.

In 2019, 14 Swift nests were confirmed in Kells. This has increased to 24 nests as of the 2024 breeding season. Seventy nine percent of the Kells population was confirmed in the same buildings as in 2019, with the remaining population found in four new nesting locations. Seventy five percent of nests are in public buildings.

Table 16. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Kells in 2019 and 2024.

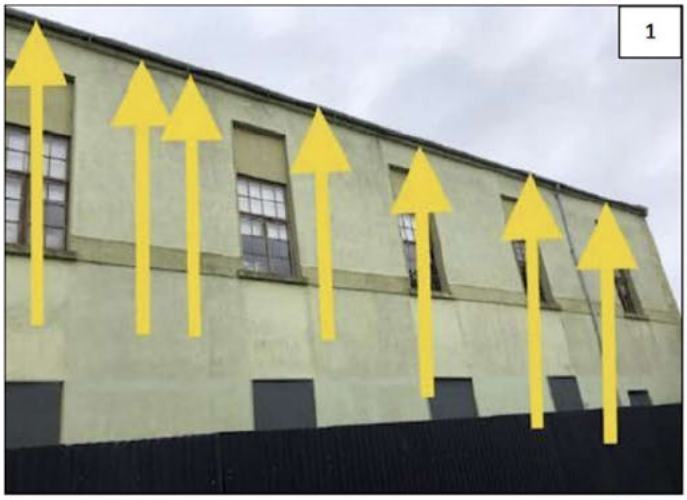
No. nests 2019	No. nests 2024	Change
14	24	+10

Table 17. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Kells by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	2
Residential	1
Public	18
Religious	0
Heritage	3
Other	0

Table 18. Kells confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

Photo no.	Address	2019 No. Nests	2019 Peak Swift Count	2024 No. Nests	2024 Peak Swift Count	2024 Building Type	2024 Change to Building
Previously recorded locations							
1, 1a, 1b	Old school buildings, Kenlis Place, Headford Street	7	22	14	31	Public	
2	Old Stone buildings Townparks	4	10	3	25	Heritage	none visible
3	Kells Round Tower Farrell Street	1	12	0	7	Heritage	restoration works
4, 4a	Kells Resource Centre, Lord Edward Street	1	10	2	9	House	
5	[XX] castle street	1	6	0		Small business	none visible
New locations							
6	Headfort House			2	5	School	
7	Rear of House, attached to J[XX] Canon Street			1	8	House	
8	[XX] , Farrell Street, Townparks			1	5	Small business	
9	Bank of Ireland Johns Street Townparks Kells			1	14	Business	
Total No. Nests		**14**		**24**			



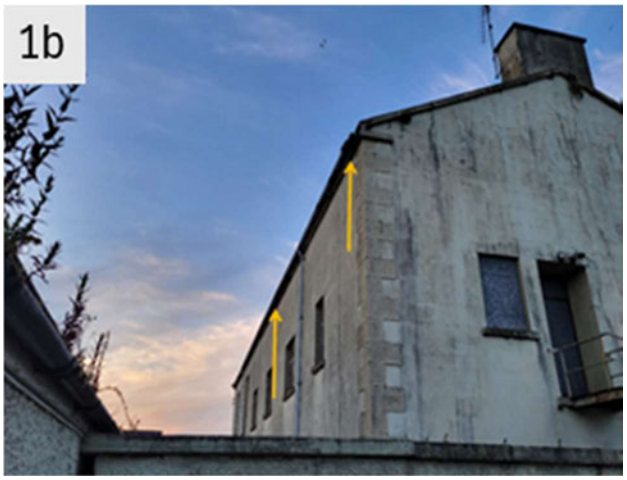
2019



2024



2024



2024



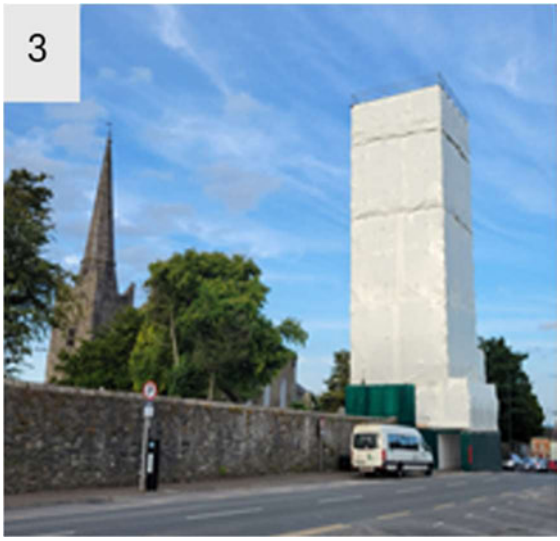
2019



2024



2019



2024

[redacted]

2019

[redacted]

2024



2019



2024



2024



2024



2024

4.4.6 Dunboyne

Dunboyne is a medium-sized town (Population: 7,155 according to the 2022 census). Situated in south-east of the county very close to the Dublin border.

During the 2019 survey 10 nests were confirmed in Dunboyne; this increased to 24 nests recorded during the 2024 resurvey, an increase of 14 nests. As in 2019, all nests were on one street, St. Mary's Terrace. Any renovations to these houses could result in the loss of the entire breeding population in Dunboyne, and thus this population is considered extremely vulnerable. It is vital that urgent action is taken in the town to protect this colony and increase Swift nest sites.



Figure 21. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Dunboyne.

In 2019, 10 Swift nests were confirmed in Dunboyne. This has increased to 24 nests as of the 2024 breeding season. Fifty eight percent of the Dunboyne population was confirmed in the same buildings as in 2019, with the remaining population found in five new houses within the same street as existing nests sites. Ninety six percent of nests are in residential buildings.

Table 19. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Dunboyne in 2019 and 2024.

No. nests 2019	No. nests 2024	Change
10	24	+14

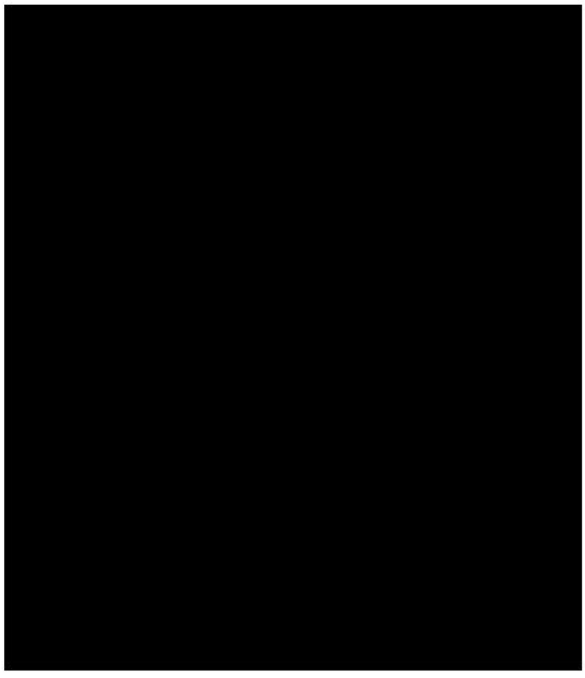
Table 20. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Dunboyne by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	1
Residential	23
Public	0
Religious	0
Heritage	0
Other	0

Table 21. Dunboyne confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

Photo no.	Address	2019 No. Nests	2019 Peak Swift Count	2024 No. Nests	2024 Peak Swift Count	2024 Building Type	2024 Change to Building
Previously recorded locations							
1	[XX] St Mary's Terrace	2	12	6	32	Residential	
2	[XX] St Marys Terrace	3	14	3	28	Residential	
3	[XX] St Marys Terrace	5	12	5	16	Residential	
New locations							
4	[XX] St Marys Terrace			3	45	Residential	
5	[XX] St Marys Terrace			3	45	Residential	
6	[XX] St Marys Terrace			1	45	Business	
7	XX] St Marys Terrace			2	18	Residential	
8	[XX] St Marys Terrace			1	9	Residential	
Total No. Nests		**10**		**24**			

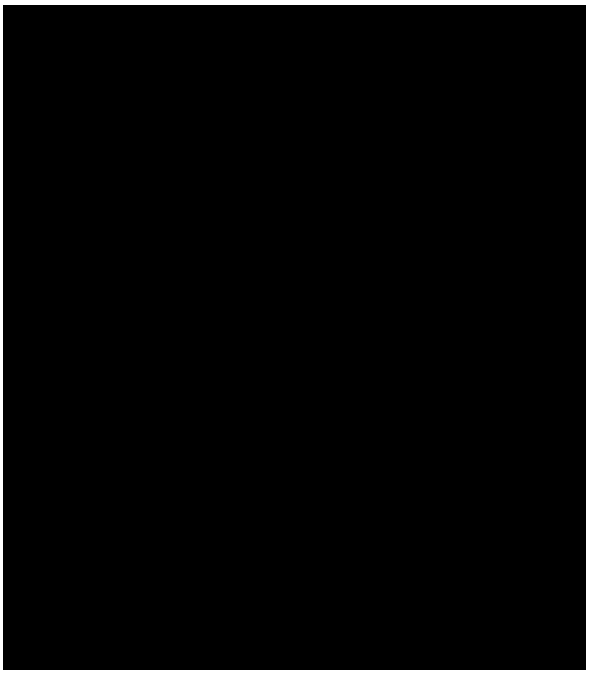
** Nest sites were incorrectly labelled St Mary Court by the 2019 survey*



2019



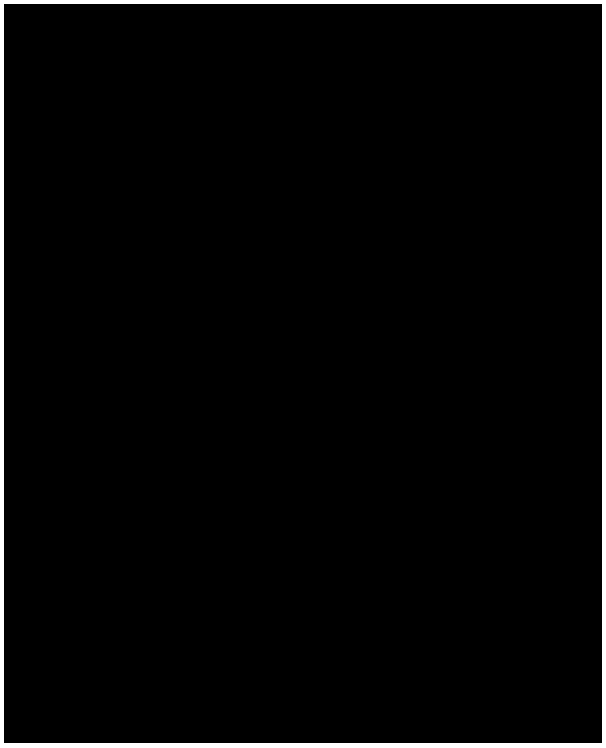
2024



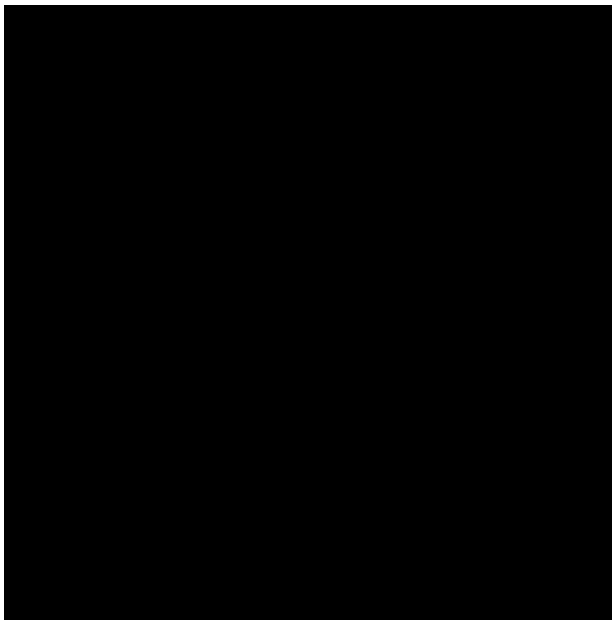
2019



2024



2019



2024



2024



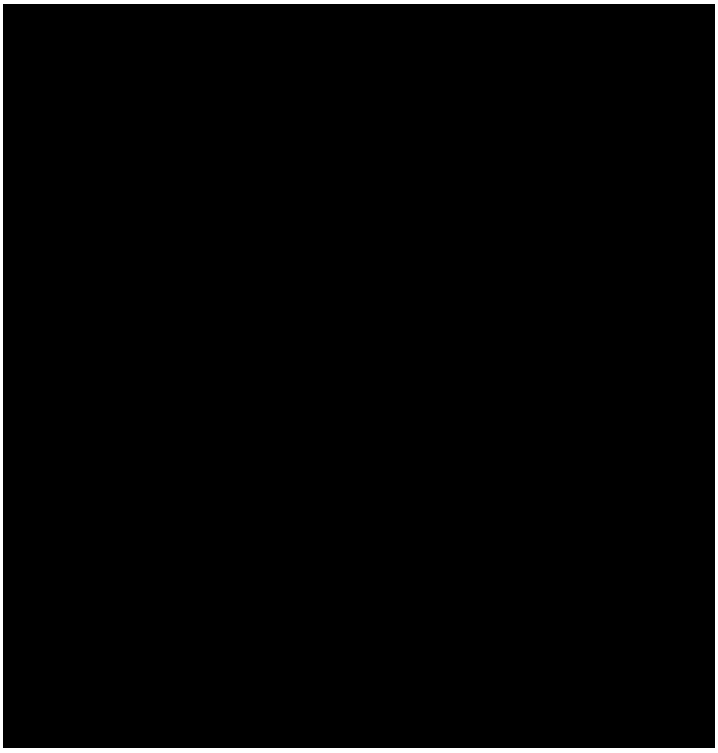
2024



2024



2024



2024

4.4.7 Oldcastle

Oldcastle is a small town (population: 1,409 according to the 2022 census) in west of the county, close to the Cavan border.

In 2019 a total of eight nests were confirmed. A total of 35 nests were confirmed by the 2024 resurvey, and a peak count of 26 Swifts. Eight new nesting locations were confirmed by the resurvey, and no nest sites from 2019 were lost between survey years.

As in 2019 Gilsen school contained the largest colony, with the number of nests increasing from five in 2019, to 20 in 2024. It currently holds 57% of Oldcastle's breeding Swift population and the colony is particularly vulnerable should this building be renovated. All other locations held small colonies of between one and three nests. Efforts to enhance and grow the number of nests within the town should be investigated.

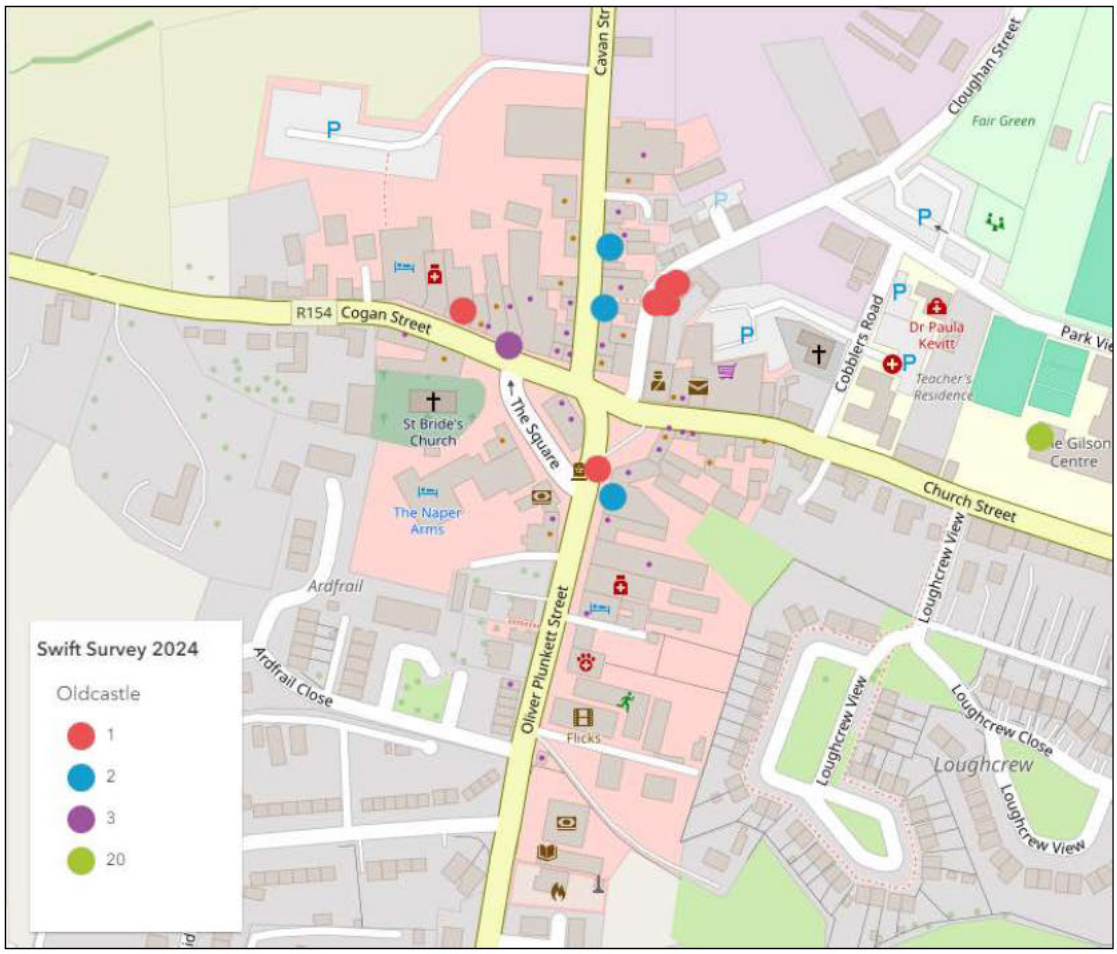


Figure 22. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Oldcastle.

In 2019, eight Swift nests were confirmed in Oldcastle. This has increased to 35 nests as of the 2024 breeding season. Seventy one percent of the Oldcastle population was confirmed in the same three buildings as in 2019, with the remaining population found in eight new locations. Fifty seven percent of nests are in public buildings, 29% in commercial buildings and the remainder in residential properties.

Table 22. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Oldcastle in 2019 and 2024.

No. nests 2019	No. nests 2024	Change
8	35	+27

Table 23. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Oldcastle by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	10
Residential	5
Public	20
Religious	0
Heritage	0
Other	0

Table 24. Oldcastle *confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.*

		2019		2024			
Photo no.	Address	No. Nests	Peak Swift Count	No. Nests	Peak Swift Count	Building Type	Change to Building
	Previously recorded locations						
1,1a	Gilson School Buildings, Main Street	5	12	20	26	Public	
2, 2a	Mc Dermott Menswear, Main Square	1	4	3	6	Small business	
3	[XX] Oliver Plunkett St,[XX] (Main square)	2	9	2	8	Small business	Gutter replacement
	New locations						
4	, The Square			1	5	Small Business	
5	Cavan st, [XX]			2	12	Small business	
6	[XX] Cavan St, [XX]			2	9	Small business	
7	[XX] Cloughan St, [XX]			1	15	Residential	
8	[XX] , Cloughan St, [XX]			1	15	Residential	
9	[XX] , Cloughan St,[XX]			1	15	Residential	
10	[XX] Cloughan St			1	15	Residential	
11	Cloughan St, [XX]			1	15	Residential	
Total No. Nests		8		35			



2019



2024



2024



2019



2024



2024



2019



2024 nests in different location of building



2024



2024



2024



2024



2024



2024



2024



2024

4.4.8 Slane

Slane is a village (population of 1,445 according to the 2022 census) in north-east of the county.

A total of eight Swift nests were confirmed in 2019. Nine Swift nests were confirmed during the 2024 resurvey, and a peak count of 23 Swifts.

As in 2019, all nests were in four buildings within the town, three of the four Manor Houses in the centre of the town and the Catholic Church buildings. Eight of the nine nests were in the Manor Houses, and it is vital this cluster of nest sites is protected in these residential buildings and that new sites are created in the village.

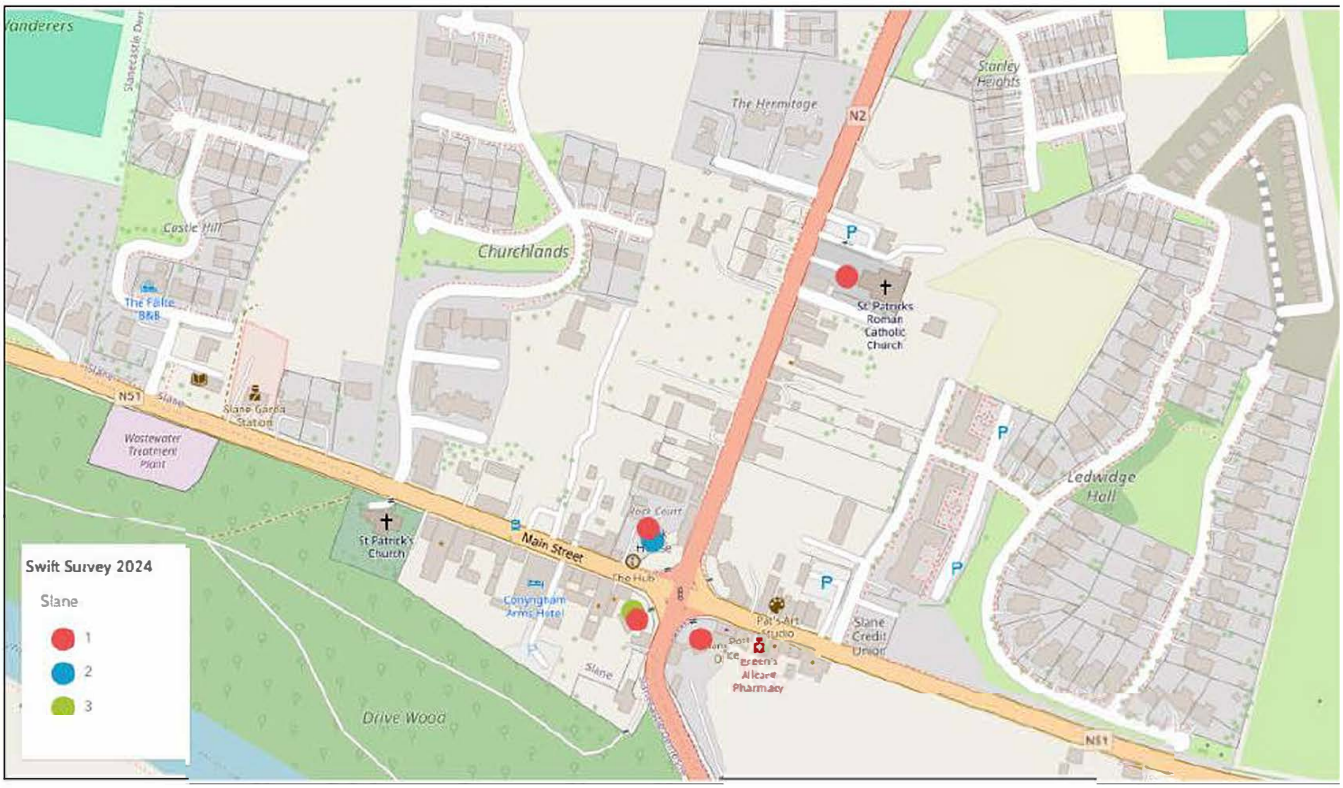


Figure 23. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Slane

In 2019, eight Swift nests were confirmed in Slane. This increased to nine nests as of the 2024 breeding season. All nests were confirmed in the same three buildings as in 2019, although one nest was lost at one site. Eighty nine percent of nests are in residential properties.

Table 25. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Slane in 2019 and 2024.

No. nests 2019	No. nests 2024	Change
8	9	+1

Table 26. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Slane by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	0
Residential	8
Public	0
Religious	1
Heritage	0
Other	0

Table 27. Slane confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

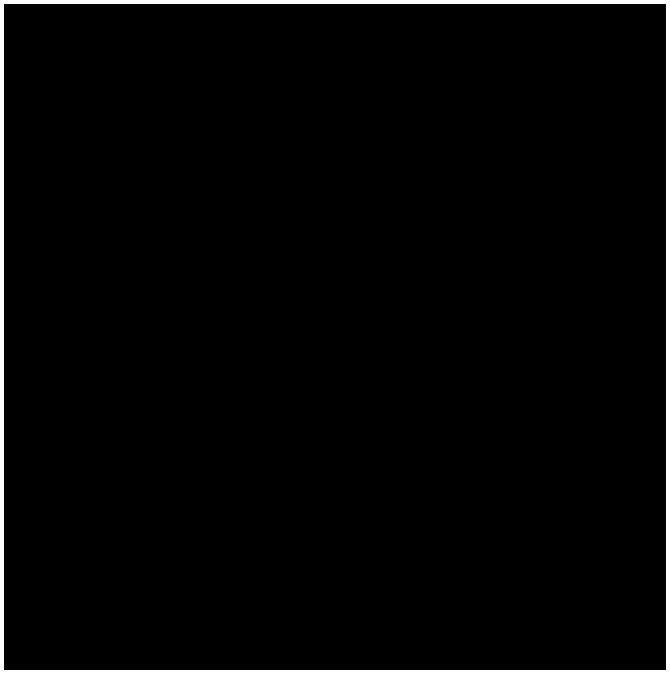
Photo no.	Address	2019 No. Nests	2019 Peak Swift Count	2024 No. Nests	2024 Peak Swift Count	2024 Building Type	2024 Change to Building
Previously recorded locations							
1,1a,1b,1c,1d	[XX] Main Street	6	11	8	23	Residence	
2	Catholic Church Buildings, Chapel Street	2	8	1	1	Religious	none visible
Total No. Nests		**8**		**9**			



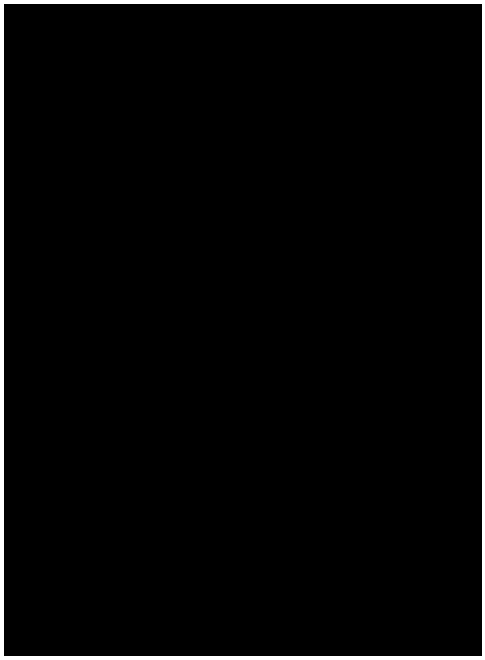
2019



2024



2019



2024



2019



2024

[redacted]

2024

[redacted]

2024



2019



2024

4.4.9 Duleek

Duleek meaning stone house or church is medium-sized town (population: 4,899 according to the 2022 census) in north-east of the county that takes its name from the early Christian monastic settlement and stone-built, St. Cianans Church, the ruins of which are still visible.
In 2019, a total of six Swift nest sites were confirmed, with a peak count of eight Swifts recorded over the old Priory Church. Nine nests were confirmed during the 2024 resurvey, and a peak count of 14 Swifts. Nesting sites were in the same three locations as in 2019, two religious/heritage sites and a derelict building in the town. One nest was lost in the Old Priory Church, most likely due to growth in vegetation. Four additional nests were confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church, Main Street.

Despite the increase in the number of confirmed nests, the breeding population in Duleek is extremely vulnerable as it is concentrated in just three buildings. The nest in the derelict building is particularly vulnerable if the building was to fall into further disrepair, be demolished or renovated. Efforts to provide additional nest sites using Swift nest boxes and bricks would be of great benefit to the town.



Figure 24. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Duleek.

In 2019, six Swift nests were confirmed in Duleek. This has increased to nine nests as of the 2024 breeding season. All nests are located in the same three buildings as in 2019.

Table 28. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Duleek in 2019 and 2024.

No. nests 2019	No. nests 2024	Change
6	9	+3

Table 29. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Kildalkey by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	0
Residential	1
Public	0
Religious	6
Heritage	2
Other	0

Table 30. Duleek confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

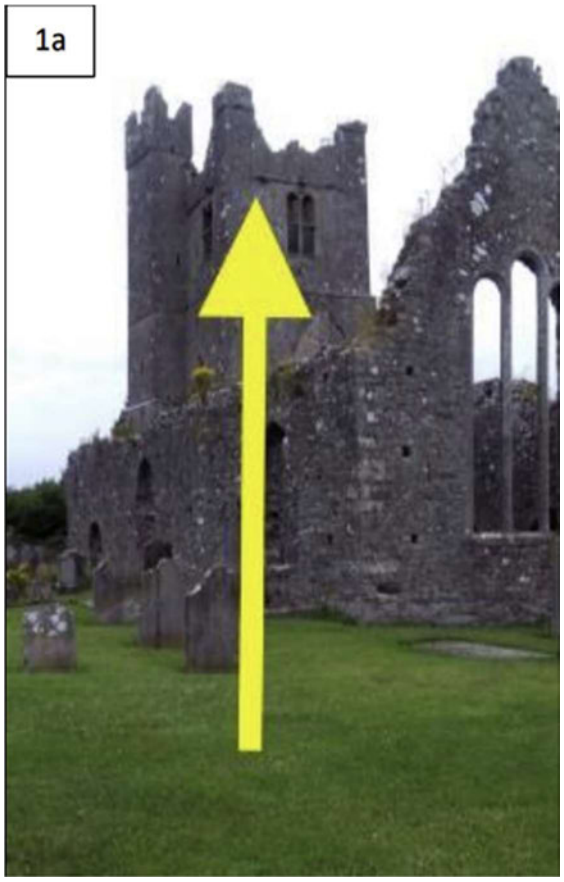
		2019		2024			
Photo no.	Address	No. Nests	Peak Swift Count	No. Nests	Peak Swift Count	Building Type	Change to Building
Previously recorded locations							
1, 1a	Old Priory Church	3	8	2	9	Religious	vegitation
2, 2a	Roman Catholic Church, Main Street	2	6	6	14	Religious	
3	Abandoned Building Abbey Road	1	2	1	2	House	
Total No. Nests		6		9			



2019



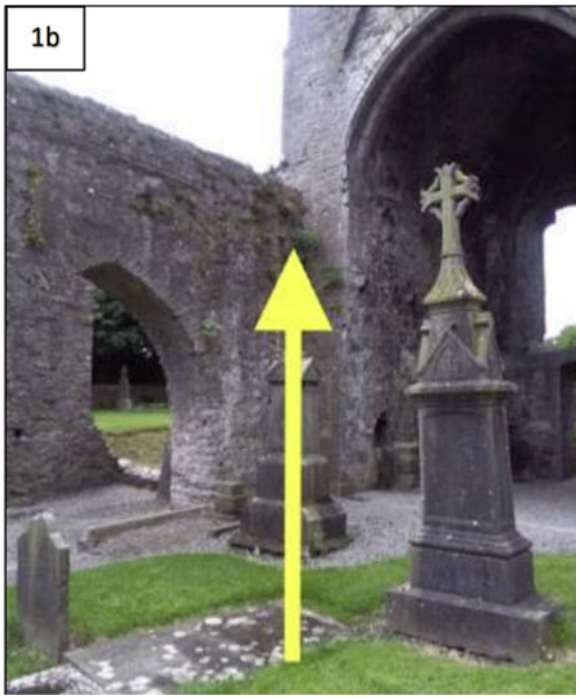
2024



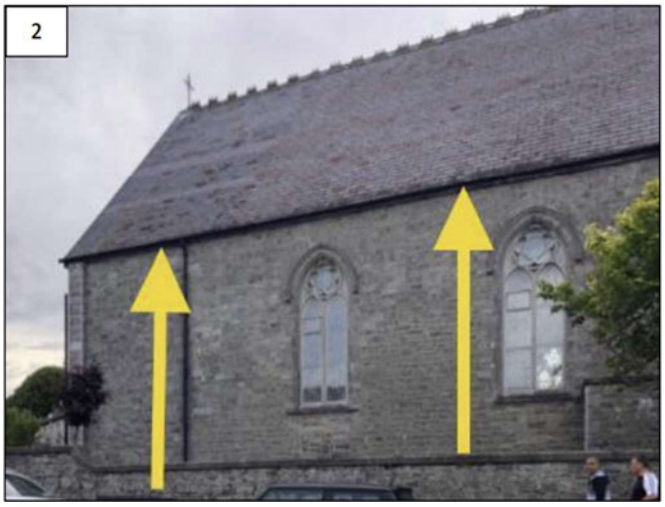
2019



2024



2019



2019



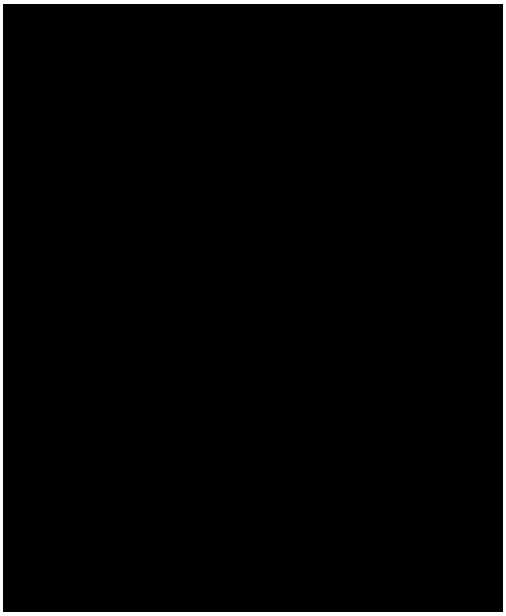
2024



2024



2019



2024

4.4.10 Enfield

Enfield is a town (population: 3,663 people according to the 2022 census) in south County Meath, situated between Kilcock and Kinnegad and very close to the border with Kildare.

In 2019 no breeding was confirmed in the town itself but breeding was confirmed at Johnstown Catholic Church with three nests. No Swifts were recorded in Enfield in 2024; however, two nests were again confirmed at Johnstown Catholic Church. Efforts to establish Swifts in the town itself using Swift nest boxes and bricks would be of great benefit.

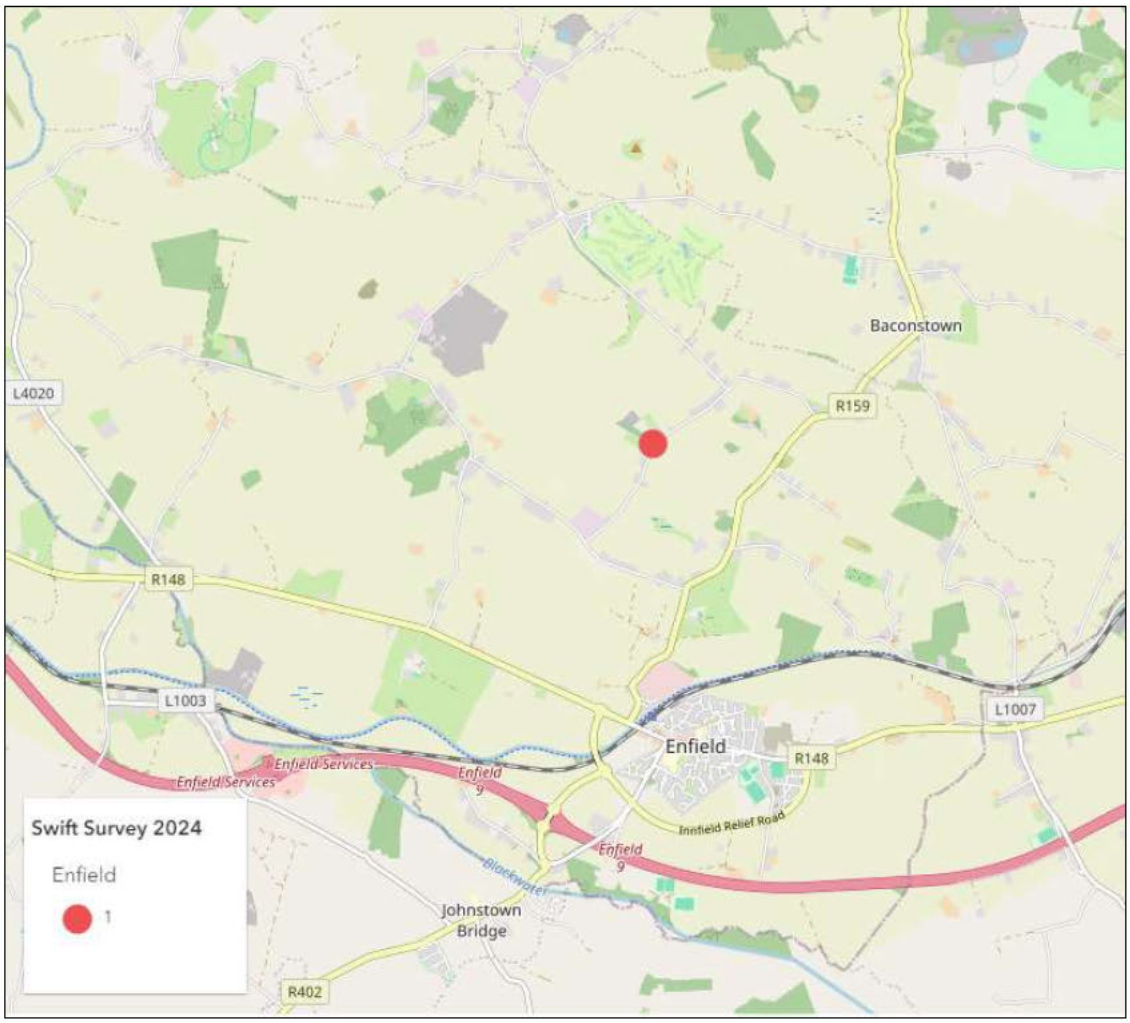


Figure 25. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Enfield.

In 2019, three Swift nests were confirmed at Johnstown Catholic Church. Only two nests were confirmed in 2024.

Table 31. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Enfield in 2019 and 2024.

No. nests 2019	No. nests 2024	Change
3	2	-1

Table 32. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Enfield by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	0
Residential	0
Public	0
Religious	2
Heritage	0
Other	0

Table 33. Enfield confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

Photo no.	Address	2019 No. Nests	2019 Peak Swift Count	2024 No. Nests	2024 Peak Swift Count	2024 Building Type	2024 Change to Building
Previously recorded locations							
1	Jordanstown Catholic Church	3	7	2	4	Religious	none visible
Total No. Nests		**3**		**2**			



2019



2024

4.4.11 Kildalkey

Kildalkey, is a rural village with a population of 739 people according to the 2022 census. It lies approximately 11km east of Trim and 5km north of Athboy. The River Turry runs close to the village. The village has seen an increase in its population over the last few decades, with the Celtic Tiger boom delivering a host of new housing developments within the village environs.

Although a peak of seven Swifts were recorded in the 2019 County Meath Survey, no nests were confirmed. This year one nest was confirmed in St Dympna's Catholic church. An effort to increase the Swifts breeding population using Swift nest boxes and bricks would be of great benefit to the village.

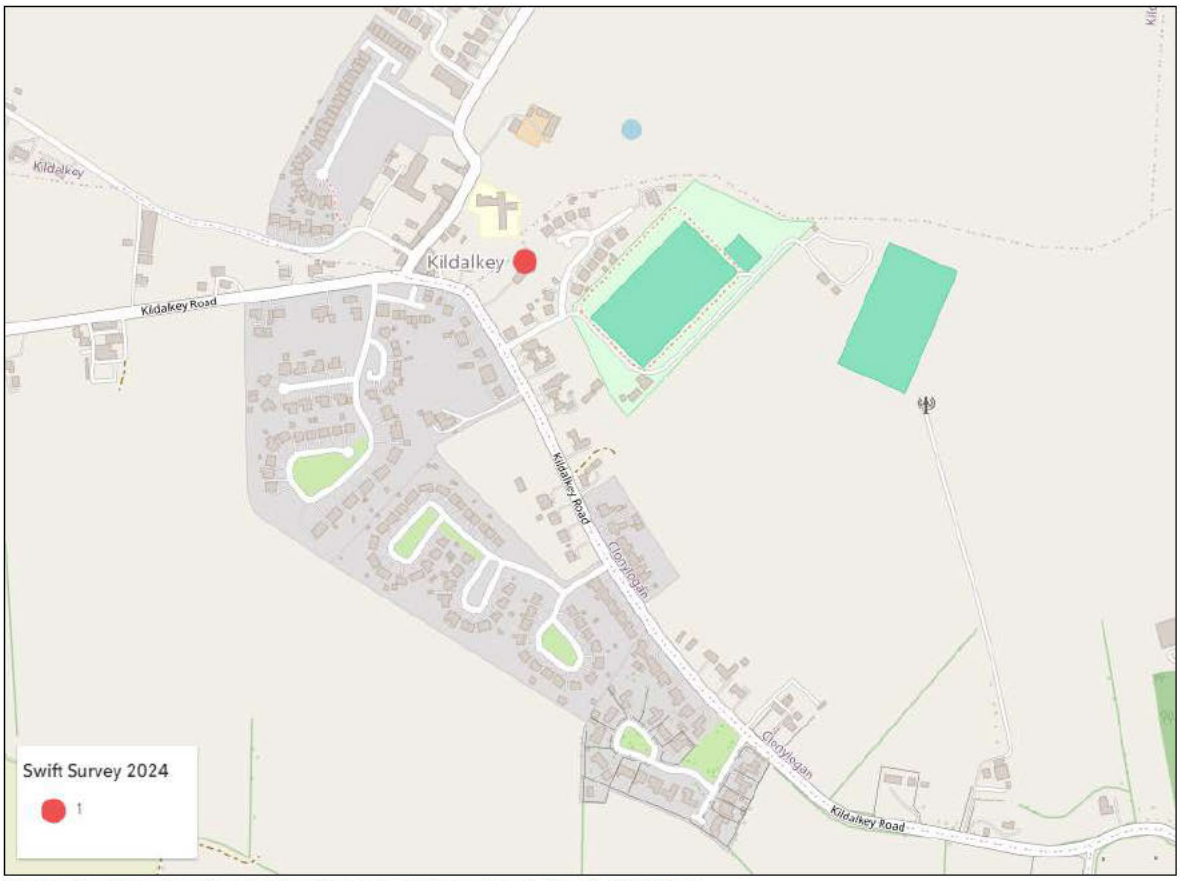


Figure 26. Map showing the location of confirmed nest sites in Kildalkey.

In 2019, no Swift nests were confirmed in Kildalkey. This has increased to one nest as of the 2024 breeding season.

Table 34. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Kildalkey in 2019 and 2024.

No. nests 2019	No. nests 2023	Change
0	1	+1

Table 35. The number of Swift nests confirmed in Kildalkey by building type.

Building type	Number of Swift nests
Commercial	0
Residential	0
Public	0
Religious	1
Heritage	0
Other	0

Table 36. Kildalkey confirmed nest site locations and colony numbers.

Photo no.	Address	2019		2024			
		No. Nests	Peak Swift Count	No. Nests	Peak Swift Count	Building Type	Change to Building
Previously recorded locations							
1	St Dympna's Catholic church	0	7	1	4	Religious	
Total No. Nests		**0**		**1**			



2024

4.4.12 Oldbridge

Oldbridge is a townland beside Drogheda consisting of mostly single bungalow residencies and some industrial sites. One of the few possible buildings for breeding Swifts is the Battle of the Boyne Visitor's Centre, a three-storey building surrounded by large open fields. However, this building was found to be unsuitable during the 2024 survey as it lacked any crevices. A peak count of 6 Swifts was recorded during the 2019 survey, although no nests were confirmed. No Swift activity was recorded during the 2024 survey. Swifts have been reported at the Newgrange Visitor's Centre just outside Oldbridge. It is possible that any swifts identified in the Oldbridge area are nesting at this OPW site. An effort to establish Swifts in Oldbridge could be made by erecting Swift boxes on the Boyne Visitor Centre.



Figure 27. Map showing the location of Oldbridge

4.5 Nest Box Uptake

Twenty-three nest box project/ locations were surveyed as part of the 2024 Meath County Resurvey. Out of a total of 165 available nest cavities, five or 3% were occupied by Swifts. Caller systems were observed at seven properties and were confirmed as 'in use' at five properties.

Table 37. Results of the nest box survey 2024.

Town	Location	Cavities	Occupied	Building Type	Peak swifts	Tape Lure
Dunshaughlin	Church of Ireland	1	No	Public	0	No
Trim	[XX] Castle Close	3	No	Residential	25	No
	St Josephs Nursing Home	3	No	Buisness	5	No
	St Mary's School, Patrick St	6	No	Public	5	Yes, not on
	Castle Street	9	Yes (1)	Public	3	No
	[XX] Saint Lomans street	11	Yes	Residential	10	No
	[XX] Saint Loman's Street, Trim, Meath,	2	Yes	Residential	25	No
	[XX] Saint Loman's Street, Trim, Meath,	9	Yes	Residential	12	No
	[XX] Saint Loman's Street, Trim, Meath	9	Yes	Residential	15	No
	Swift Cultural centre	9	No	Public	7	No
	House outside Trim [XX]	4	Yes (all)	Residential	2	No
Dunboyne	[XX] Ciurthill Drive and second private house [XX]	3	No	Residential	0	No
	Church of Ireland	2	No	Public	0	No
Navan	Navan Library	9	No	Public	9	Yes
	St Annes School, Fairgreen	12	No	Public	12	Yes
	Educate Together , Commons Rd	12	No	Public	0	Yes
	Private house [XX]	4	No	Residential	0	No
	Buvinda House	6	No	Public	0	No
Athboy	Private House (Delvin Rd.[XX]	not recorded	No	Residential	32	not recorded
Kells	Private House ([XX])	5	No	Resedentual	4	Yes
	Church of Ireland beside the Round Tow	38	No	Religious	52	Yes
Slane	Community Centre	9	No	Public	0	Yes, not on
Enfield	St Mary's Primary School, Johnstown Rd	Not recorded	No	Public	0	No



Figure 28. Map showing location of nest boxes in County Meath.

5. Community Engagement and Publicity

Community engagement took place throughout the 2024 project with community members being encouraged to take part in the survey by submitting sightings. In addition, fieldworkers coordinated less formal Swift Survey engagements and "meet-ups" with interested people/groups who wished to learn more about Swift conservation. See Table 38 below

Individuals and groups were contacted through an initial e-mails and contact was made through the BirdWatch Ireland Meath Branch, the Meath Biodiversity Officer and the project fieldworkers.

Table 38. Summary of community engagement.

Community Group / individual	Date of Meeting
BirdWatch Ireland Meath Branch	Several throughout
Dunshaughlin	23-Jun-24
Dunshaughlin	07-Jul-24
Navan Hospital Biodiversity and Climate Committee	08-Jul-24
Trim residents	13-Jul-24
Connecting Trim to Nature	13-Jul-24
Oldcastle Tidy Towns	22-Jul-24
Dunboyne Tidy Towns	20-Jul-24
Oldcastle McDermot Menswear	22-Jul-24
Duleek Heritage Group	23-Jul-24
Wild about Navan	23-Jul-24
Slane Tidy Towns	25-Jul-24
Kells Local Heros	29-Jul-24
Wild About Navan meeting	31-Jul-24
Athboy Tidy Towns	19-Aug-24
Trim Tidy Towns	October 2024
	October 2024

Other groups were contacted throughout the survey period but were unable to meet with project staff.



Figure 29. Slane Tidy Town Group



Figure 30. Duleek Heritage Group



Figure 31. Community Engagement in Navan.

5.1 Project Promotion/Awareness Raising

A number of events were organised to help raise awareness about Swifts and targeted at members of the public and local community groups. These included a 'Swift Walk' organised with Meath County Council on the 26th of May in Dunshaughlin as part of Biodiversity Week, prior to the start of the project proper. A Swift Walk was organised on 12th July in Trim. Two more informal events were organised in Duleek and Navan on the 23rd and 25th July (to meet community groups, and open to members of the public), and organised in collaboration with BirdWatch Ireland Meath branch and Meath County Council. On the 19th of August, during Heritage Week a presentation was given in Navan on the preliminary results of the 2024 resurvey. All formal events were very well attended by approximately 20 -30 people.

The project has also been widely promoted through social media, on the BirdWatch Ireland website and social media platforms, and promotion through Meath County Council and BirdWatch Ireland Meath branch and North East Ireland Swift Facebook.



Figure 32. Swift event posters.



Figure 33. Trim Swift Walk.



Figure 34. Dunshaughlin Swift Walk.







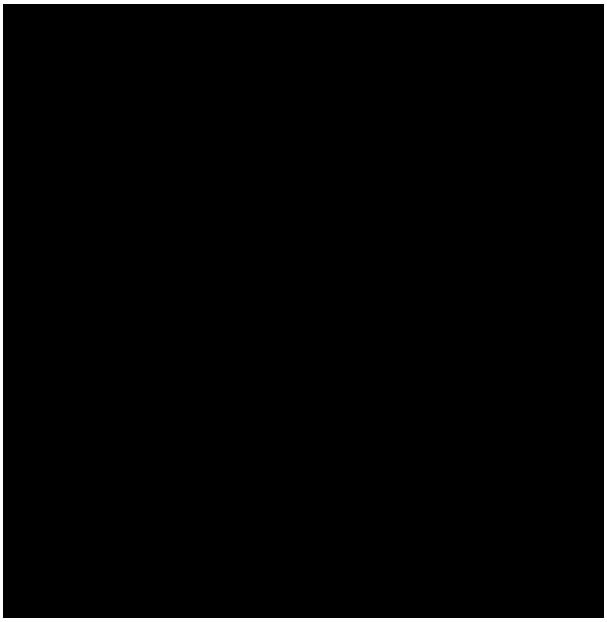


Figure 35. Examples of project promotion through social media.

6. Discussion

The County Meath Swift Resurvey 2024 is part of a wider project by Birdwatch Ireland to survey Swift populations nationally, through county surveys which first began in 2017. The 2024 Meath County Resurvey is one of only a few resurveys which have been carried out to date, and thus provides vital information on Swift breeding trends nationally. The County Meath Biodiversity Officer is to be commended for funding and supporting this resurvey project, indicating their commitment to the conservation of this species.

The work undertaken this season is particularly timely given the regeneration and renewal projects which are being implemented throughout the country, including energy efficient retrofits. While these schemes are important for local economies and homeowners, regeneration work can inadvertently remove Swift nesting locations. By mapping the known Swift nest sites (identified by this survey) and incorporating the information into the Meath Council Geographical Information System the nests can be better protected. In addition, existing populations can be supported and increased by establishing nest brick and box projects at suitable locations across the county.

The number of Swift nests increased by 49% between survey years, with all towns and villages surveyed showing increases, except Enfield.

The 2024 resurvey aimed to identify if Swift were still nesting in the same locations as confirmed during the 2019 survey. By targeting survey effort at previously identified Swift colonies it is likely that more nests were found at these locations, and this could account for some of the gains between survey years. However, a number of existing colonies increased to such an extent that it is likely that there have been some real increases, e.g. Kells old school buildings, Athboy at Greenville, Oldcastle at Gilson School Buildings and Our Lady's Hospital Navan.

Of the new nests identified by the survey, just under half (49%) were at new locations. It is probable that many of these are due to real population increases, especially given that colonies at existing sites also recorded an increase.

The 2023 County Offaly resurvey did not record similar gains, with the population remaining stable between survey years. It is possible that Swift populations are experiencing the north-east shift identified for many species by the 2007-11 Breeding Bird Atlas (Balmer *et. al.* 2011) and it will be interesting to see whether this factor is identified by the 2027 Atlas.

Of the 386 nests recorded during the 2024 resurvey, 71% were in residential properties (276 nests). These are more likely to undergo renovation works in the coming years than public or religious buildings, and thus Swift nests in these buildings are more vulnerable. In particular, the population at several towns/villages is considered extremely vulnerable due to their reliance on either a very small number of buildings, or because a high proportion of nests are in residential buildings, such as Athboy, Duleek and Dunboyne.

A very high proportion (38%) of all Swift nests in County Meath were in houses with the "Jerkinhead roof" style. The ridged tiles at the end of the roof allow Swift access to the roof plate, as there is no guttering on these sections. There are also two associated spines which are capped with a row of ridge tiles, and where the ridge tile meets the end of the spine there is a small gap. At some properties this roof has been retrofitted between survey years, blocking access to Swifts and resulting in a loss of nest sites. Given the very large proportion of County Meath's Swifts nesting in houses with this style of roof, it is important that these nests are adequately protected. New estates could specify this style of roof at planning stage, which would greatly increase nest site availability in Meath, as Swifts seem to favour these buildings.

Between survey years, Swift nesting populations have increased in public and commercial buildings, although the changes have been small. Providing additional nesting opportunities in public buildings is the best way to protect the population in the long term. All new public buildings should have Swift bricks installed as a biodiversity enhancement measure.

There are currently 165 Swift nest box cavities in County Meath. Only five (3%) have been occupied by Swifts. Uptake has been quite low, with the absence of a caller system at many of the sites the most likely reason for this. Swift callers are vital to the successful establishment of a Swift colony (Huxley 2017, Whelan et al. 2019), therefore installing caller systems to the existing nest boxes is highly recommended.

Community engagement was good in County Meath and has been well fostered between survey years by the BirdWatch Ireland Meath branch. Engagement with the project in some of the smaller towns/villages was poor, however. Further work should be undertaken to encourage local groups to become more involved in Swift conservation. Groups such as Tidy Towns in particular, have much to gain from participating as it could form part of the biodiversity element of their Tidy Towns

application. In other towns, such as Trim, similar activity has been highly commended by the judging panel, and there could be significant benefits to other Tidy Towns groups also.

7 Conclusion and Recommendations

The breeding population of Swifts in County Meath has shown an increase between the 2019 and 2024 survey. However, some colonies are considered extremely vulnerable. Taking on board recommendations made within this report will help maintain or further bolster Co. Meath's breeding Swift population.

7.1 General Recommendations

Ensure the results of this report are used for the protection of Swifts in County Meath.

7.1.1 Data access and planning

- Make available the data contained in this report to relevant departments within the council (such as planning) and stakeholders.

- Incorporate the Swift nest site geolocational date into the County Meath GIS for use by all decision and policy makers in the County Council.

- 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. Areas of the county 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 be help offset the environmental impact of large-scale developments.

- Propose the inclusion of Swift conservation measures in the next County Development Plan (suggested text in Appendices 1.). 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.

- Work with new and retrofitted commercial developments/housing to include a provision for Swift nest boxes where relevant.

7.1.2 Community engagement

- A follow up nest box project should be initiated in 2025 with BirdWatch Ireland to support local community groups in developing Swift box projects within the city.

- Continue to engage with community groups and the wider public. Tidy Towns and Men's Sheds are playing an increasingly important role in saving Swifts across the country.

- Encourage local community groups and volunteers to carry out breeding Swift surveys of their areas each summer.

- Resource and support groups and individuals carrying out Swift conservation projects locally such as Men's Sheds, Tidy Towns etc.

- 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/

7.1.3 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.

7.2 Site Specific Recommendations

7.2.1 Dunshaughlin

All 86 pairs of Swift are in the Ardlea housing estate in residential buildings. Although large this population is extremely vulnerable, as private residence are more likely to be refurbished / redeveloped. According to locals, Swifts once nested on the main street, but they have not been recorded there for several decades.

It is recommended that efforts are made to establish a second colony in the town centre, by erecting Swift boxes and caller systems. The Fire Brigade Station would be an ideal location, as the tower is well situated, visible and accessible to Swifts from near and afar. The tower could accommodate 4-6 triple cavity boxes or equivalent. A swift caller would be required at this location.

A suggestion by locals is that homeowners in the Ardlea estate who are keen to enhance the local population, could be encouraged to install nestboxes on their houses. This would facilitate population expansion, providing new nest sites for juvenile birds. This suggestion is also recommended as proving additional nests sites for juvenile birds is important for the long-term viability of the population.

Providing additional nesting opportunities in public buildings is one of the best ways to protect the population in the long term, as public buildings do not face the same renovation/redevelopment pressures as residential or commercial buildings. All new public buildings should include Swift bricks as part of the design and nest boxes should be erected on other suitable public buildings within the town.



Figure 36. Suggested nest box location at the Fire Brigade Station in Dunshaughlin

7.2.2 Trim

Trim holds the highest number of breeding Swifts in County Meath. Eighty seven percent of confirmed nest sites in Trim are in residential buildings, which are more vulnerable to renovations, and it is important that these nests sites are adequately protected.

Swift conservation has been extremely active in Trim in the interim years between the 2019 County Survey and the 2024 Resurvey. In total 65 new nest cavities have been provided in the town; however, these would benefit from the installation of caller systems. Swift callers are vital to the successful establishment of a Swift colony (Huxley 2017, Whelan et al. 2019).

Work should continue to identify new nest box locations within the town.

7.2.3 Navan

The Navan breeding Swift population is largely concentrated at two main sites, Herbert Place housing estate on Flower Hill and Navan Hospital, which when combined hold 76% of the town's population. Although large, such a high proportion of nests at just two sites makes this population vulnerable to changes or developments at these locations. In addition, 55% of all nests in Navan are on private residences, which are more vulnerable than other building types to refurbishment / redevelopment works.

Nest boxes have already been installed at several schools and libraries in the town. It is recommended that new boxes should be erected to provide additional nesting sites for juveniles, as these become occupied, and the colony grows. Additional locations should also be considered for nestboxes, prioritising public buildings. Residents and business owners in the town should also be encouraged to install nest boxes.

Navan Hospital

Between survey years the Swift breeding population at Navan Hospital has increased from 13 to 20 nesting pairs. However, many of the original nests located by the 2019 survey have been lost because of refurbishment work to the original Workhouse building. It is vital that any further refurbishment work takes account existing Swift nests and that these are protected. New Swift bricks (number 50) should be incorporated into the design of refurbishments works planned for the campus. In the short term, a minimum of 10 triple cavity boxes should be installed on campus buildings that do not currently hold nesting Swifts.

7.2.4 Athboy

The Athboy Swift population is concentrated in two just residential buildings and thus is extremely vulnerable, should these buildings be renovated. Protecting these nest sites is crucial if the Athboy population is to be safeguarded.

Nest boxes should be erected at alternative sites as a matter of priority. A suitable location is the grounds of the Old Convent buildings beside the old parish house. There is ample space for boxes and a minimum of 12 triple cavity boxes and a caller system should be provided. See below image for suggested location of Swift nest boxes at this site.



Figure 37. Suggest location of Swift boxes on the Old Convent buildings, beside Franville House.

All new public buildings should have Swift bricks installed as a biodiversity enhancement measure and nest boxes should be installed on existing buildings. Many of the buildings on Athboy main street are suitable for Swift boxes; residents and local businesses should be encouraged to erect boxes where suitable.

7.2.5 Kells

The Old school buildings off Headford street contain 58% of Kells nesting Swifts, consequently the population is extremely vulnerable.

The OPW restoration works at Kells Round Tower has eliminated breeding Swift from this site. As a mitigation measure six triple cavity boxes and a call system have been installed at Saint Columba's Church of Ireland, adjacent to the round tower. BirdWatch Ireland have been liaising with the OPW about the importance of maintaining suitable cavities for Swift in the round tower itself. However, as the boxes at Saint Columba's Church become occupied, additional boxes should be considered.

Many of the building on the main street of Kells are suitable for Swift boxes and residents and local business should be encouraged to erect boxes where suitable. Consideration should also be given to erecting additional boxes (and caller systems) at the schools in the town, to encourage new colonies to establish.

7.2.6 Dunboyne

All Dunboyne's Swift nests are located on one street, St. Marys Terrace. 96% of all nests are in residential properties and any renovations to these houses would result in the loss of the entire breeding population in Dunboyne. Thus, this population is considered extremely vulnerable and in need of immediate action.

Residents who grew up in No.[XX],[XX] and [XX] Navan Rd which is opposite St Marys Terrace, recalled the Swift population in Dunboyne being much higher and lamented the decline they have witnessed. Where suitable residents on this street should be encouraged to erect swift nest boxes and caller systems.

Swifts were observed "banging" at The Yeates Centre, The Garda Station, and The Bank of Ireland. These buildings are all close to St Marys Terrace and would be ideal locations to erect new Swift nest boxes. The red brick building could be suitable to retrofit with swift bricks.

7.2.7 Oldcastle

Gilsen school currently holds 57% of Oldcastle's breeding Swift population. All nests are in the old school building and the colony is particularly vulnerable should this building be renovated. All other locations contained small colonies of between one and three nests. Eight new nesting locations were confirmed during the resurvey and efforts should continue to help establish new colonies throughout the town by erecting Swift nest boxes and caller systems.

According to local swift champion, many nests were lost at the Smith Academy of Dance because of gutter repair works. Swift nest boxes should be erected on or adjacent to this building to help maintain this population.

7.2.8 Slane

Slane's Swift population is small considering the excellent habitat for feeding close to the town along the Boyne and Slane Castle woodlands. Almost 90% of nests are in three residential buildings, and as a result are extremely vulnerable, should renovation work be carried out on these buildings.

Nine new Swift bricks have been installed at the new community centre. To augment this, six triple cavity nest boxes and caller system should be installed on the tower at Slane primary school,

adjacent to the Community Centre as a priority. A further six triple cavity boxes and caller system should be erected at the Church on Main Street, which is close to existing nests, as funds allow. Many of the building on the main street are suitable for Swift boxes and residents and local business should be encouraged to erect boxes where suitable.
It is important that the caller system installed at the community centre is turned on between April and August.



Figure 38. Potential nest box locations at Slane primary school and community centre.

7.2.9 Duleek

The breeding population in Duleek is considered extremely vulnerable, as it is concentrated in just three buildings. The nest in the derelict building is particularly vulnerable if the building was to fall into further disrepair or be renovated. Most nests are in heritage or religious buildings.

It is recommended that additional nest boxes and caller systems be erected in Duleek. The public library and the turret above Angelo's Restaurant (this location may not require a Swift caller) would be suitable locations. Buildings on the catholic church grounds would also be a suitable location for boxes. Many of the building on the main street are also suitable and residents and local business should be encouraged to erect boxes where suitable.

7.2.10 Enfield

Only two pairs of Swifts breed in Enfield, as in 2019 both are located outside the town at the Church of Assumption, Johnstown. As a matter of urgency three triple cavity nest boxes and a caller system should be erected at this location.

Efforts to establish Swifts in the town of Enfield itself using Swift nest boxes and bricks should be considered.

7.2.11 Kildalkey

Only one pair of Swifts remain in Kildalkey. The nest is located at Saint Dymphna's Catholic Church. As a matter of urgency three triple cavity nest boxes and a caller system should be erected at this location.

7.2.12 Oldbridge

An effort to establish Swifts in Oldbridge could be made by erecting Swift boxes on the Boyne Visitor Centre.

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Appendix 1 Suggested Wording for County Development/Heritage Plan

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. Wholescale 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.

Appendix 2 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 39 A row of Swift nest boxes installed at Mullingar Courthouse. Photo: Richella Duggan.



Figure 40. Installing Swift boxes as part of the fabric of the wall. Photo: Lynda Huxley (Swift Conservation Ireland).

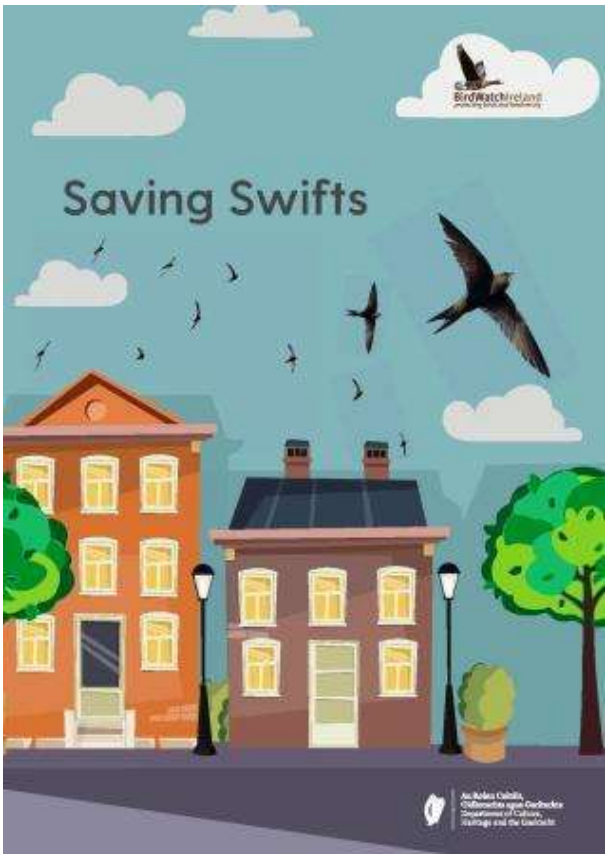


Figure 41. Swift Bricks installed during build phase in Nothing Hill, London



Figure 42. A Swift Brick installed in a newly erected redbrick wall. Photo: www.birdbrickhouses.co.uk.

Appendix 3 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. The In Your Nature podcast on Swift Conservation could also be provided.

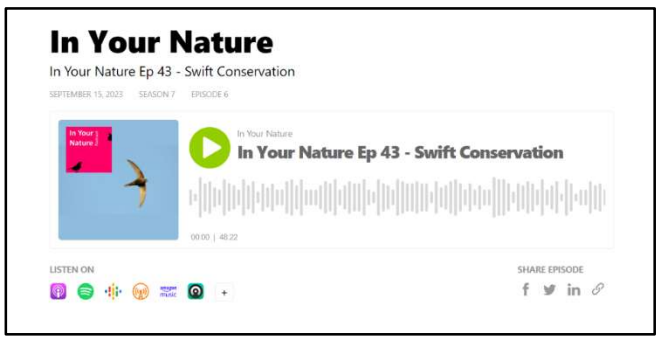


Figure 43. The BirdWatch Ireland podcast 'In Your Nature'. Released 15th September 2023.