

Ledbury Swift Group 2022 Report



Ledbury Naturalists Field Club Swift Project Report 2022 .

This is an anonymised version for public distribution.

Background to the Project

Swifts (*Apus apus*) arrive in Britain from Africa in early May to breed before heading back to their winter home in late July or early August. Swifts are colonial and so usually nest in groups. They pair for life and will use the same nest site each year. Nest sites are usually high up on buildings, just inside the roof space, at the edge of eaves or beneath roof tiles so the birds are able to drop into the air from the nest entrance. Older buildings are favoured as these frequently offer suitable gaps to access nest sites. As swifts use the same nest site each year, these sites can be lost if maintenance or alterations are undertaken to buildings.

As swifts are gregarious and nest in groups, alterations to one building could prevent access to nest sites of many pairs and this could have serious negative impacts to the local swift population. In May and early June swifts can be seen returning to nest sites with nest material, especially in the morning. At dusk they return to roost at the site. Eggs generally hatch in late June so from late June through July, breeding adults will be returning to the nest every hour or so with food for their young. Swifts do not usually breed until they are 4 years old but the younger birds return to the area where they were born each year and begin to pair up and look for potential nest sites.

Young birds will fly past prospective sites ‘screaming’ and may brush the entrances with their wings. Resident birds respond by coming to the entrance and screaming back, this helps the young birds find out where colonies are and which holes are vacant. The presence of a low flying screaming party near to buildings indicate nest sites are nearby and so these locations can be watched for adult breeding birds returning to their nest holes. This is best done later in the evening but, as the chicks grow and require more food, the parents tend to return to the site more frequently throughout the day.



Young swifts ‘Screaming’ by a nest hole at Kempley

The Ledbury Naturalists Field Club Swift Project began in 2018 with the aim to identify, safeguard and create new swift nest sites in Ledbury.

Surveys now include buildings near but not necessarily in Ledbury.

The 2022 Survey

Our planning meeting was held on 30th May and surveying began on 6th June, continuing with weekly surveys through to 1st August, with an end of season meeting to discuss field results and to plan for 2023.

This year saw the initiation of swift surveying in the city of Hereford, by dint of a sub-group of our own members. This group will publish their own report.

The first birds arrived in Ledbury on 9th May, with a flock of 13 birds seen over Bye St. and six over The Southend.

The last sightings in Ledbury were on the 6th August.

In addition to forming our new Hereford City group this year, we extended our surveying to some local villages/parishes ie Bosbury, Coddington, Much Marcle, Aylton and Kempley. Details to follow.

The surveying again followed the pattern of identifying buildings where birds were seen flying low, screaming and entering/leaving nest sites. Again, the six nest boxes installed on the tower of St. Michael's Church had swift calls played as lures, within the tower, in an effort to attract birds to occupy the boxes. Sadly, again with no success.

The Nest Sites

Our 2021 survey resulted in the identification of 48 nests in 20 buildings:

Our 2022 survey resulted in the identification of 89 nests in 21 properties: 45 of these in 16 Ledbury properties and 44 in 5 properties elsewhere locally, 3 of which were churches.

Details of Ledbury Locations:-

Barrett-Browning building – continues as one of the few 'hot-spots' in the town. See the annotated photographs of the west elevation (7 nests), south west corner timber of clock tower (1 nest), east elevation (3 nests under clock) and south elevation (1 nest under clock)

We will continue to communicate with Ledbury Places, as owners of this historic building, especially in relation to future building works that may threaten its nesting importance and potential.

St Katharine's Almshouses – another important site for swifts. Survey results from 2019 identified 3 nests, 2021 5 nests, 2022 again 5 nests; all on the north gable end under the eaves.

House in Newbury Park – the owner reports 5 nests, as last year.

Two properties in the Homend – we have not been able to survey here adequately but evidence indicates the continuing importance of this location, with some 6 nests under the eaves of the west-facing elevation.

Another property in the Homend, – confirmation of the 1 nest identified last year for first time

The rear of a third site in the Homend – not surveyed this year but 2 nests identified in 2021

A large house in New St. – not surveyed this year but the owners report multiple nests under the eaves on the south elevation, as in 2021. The three boxes erected in early 2021 under the west-facing eaves have been occupied by sparrows.

The owners also report that roofing work is planned for early next year. They are keen to minimise the im-

pact on 'their' swifts. We will continue to liaise and do a full survey in 2023.

Burgage Hall – as in 2021, just 1 nest ie north east corner of roof, behind the fascia board. Our three nest boxes on the north wall have again not been occupied.

Deer Park – Five active nest sites recorded in Furlong Court, all in properties with unusually suitable gable end tiles. These results are similar to last year's but our surveying was more limited.

Queensway – 2021's survey recorded 6 nests in Queensway on 5 properties. Usually under the soffit boards which are gradually being replaced by modern ones which are less suitable

Barnett Close and Bridge St. were not surveyed this year

Locations Outside Ledbury

Bosbury – Parish Church: 4 nests identified along the south-facing elevation (cf 2021- 11 nests!) and 6 nests identified along the north wall. All of these were behind the ends of roof cross timbers.

As in 2021, a quick survey of the central village identified no nesting swifts.

Much Marcle – Parish Church: no nests identified – the building shows a very high standard of maintenance. However, a flock of 12 or so birds seen flying over the village hall.

Aylton – 2 nests identified in one house (cf 1 in 2021) plus one box

Canon Frome – a resident reports 2 nests (cf 3 in 2021)

Donnington Church – 3 boxes erected 5/6 years ago but no surveying undertaken since.

Coddington Church – our first survey and with pleasing results, as the annotated photo. of the south elevation shows ie a minimum of 7 nests under the eaves of the south-facing roof (probably 9 nests), plus 1 nest on the north side.

St. Mary's Church, Kempley – see the annotated photo. of the north and west elevations. These very heartening results matched those of our 2021 survey ie a total of approx. 21 nests.

Thoughts for the group's activities in 2023

- To encourage 'swift watching' for all (swift awareness week)
- To give more focus to Ledbury
- To ascertain the success, or otherwise, of our nest boxes.
- To offer swift talks to local primary schools
- To continue our liaison with property owners
- Records to be put on 'Bird Track' and 'Swift Mapper'
- To re-establish links with local house builders Barratts and hopefully to establish a link with Bloor Homes



ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING BUILDING - WEST ELEVATION 2022

- 'Woodcrete@nest boxes - in place since 2018
- Occupied nest box - first identified in 2019 and still occupied
- Nests identified in 2019 and still in use
- Nests first identified in 2021 and used again this year

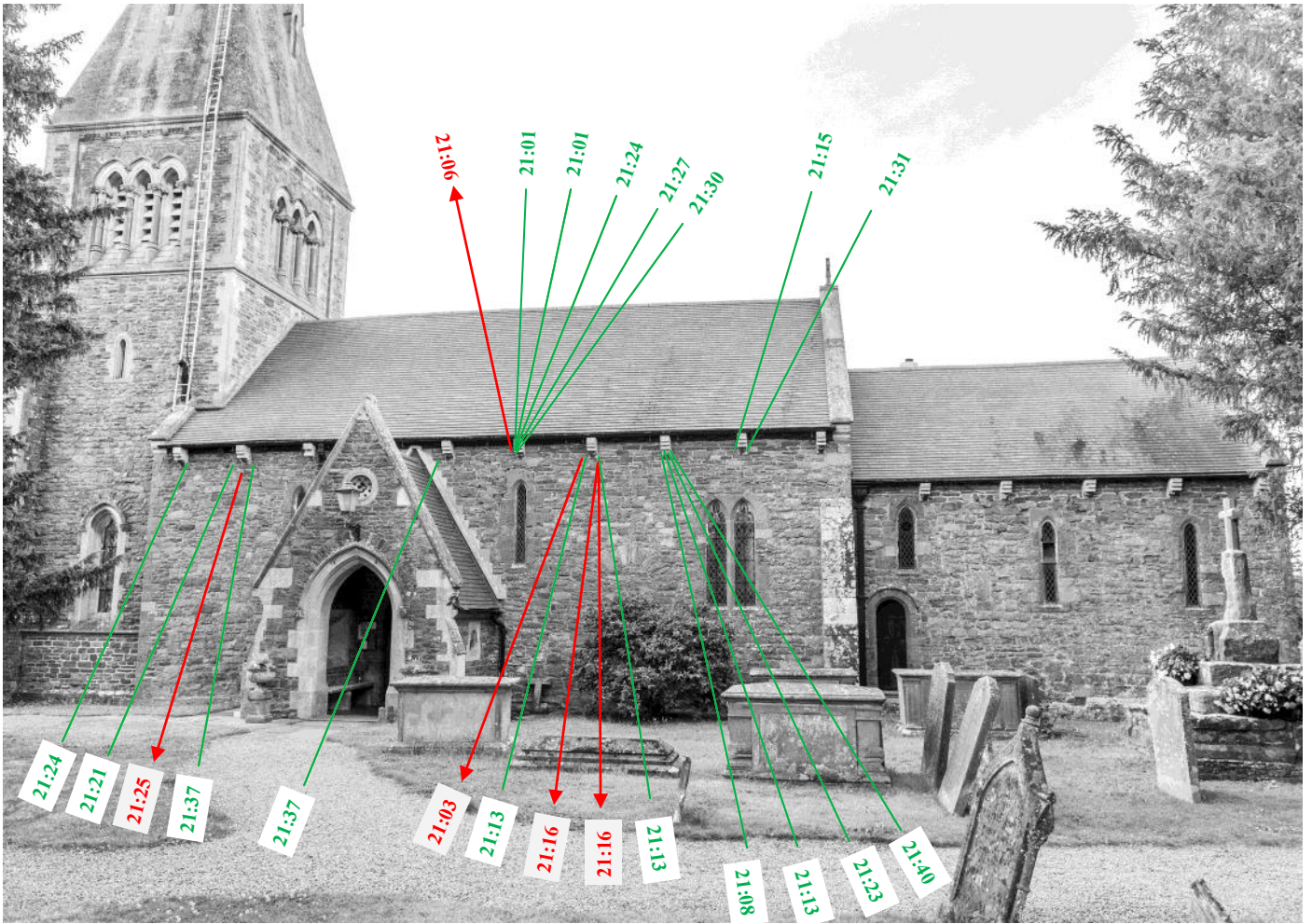


SOUTH ELEVATION

WEST ELEVATION

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING BUILDING - 2022

CODDINGTON CHURCH 11/07/22 South Elevation



ST MARY'S, KEMPLEY 2022 - North Elevation

