



Note for veterinary practices – Common Swift (*Apus apus*)



This document has been issued by the Swifts Local Network (SLN) to assist veterinary practices who may receive Swifts and similar species of wild bird that have been found in difficulty and brought in by the public.

A Swift is most reliably identified from the similar but unrelated Hirundines (Swallows, House Martins, and Sand Martins) by its scream-like call and, in the hand, its long crescent-shaped wings.

Adult Swifts and Hirundines may find themselves on the ground for a number of reasons, such as collision, bad weather, or attack by a predator. Nestlings, once old enough to move around the nest, can also fall.

The grounded bird may be otherwise healthy but unable to fly due to immaturity, exhaustion, temporary incapacity, or injury.

Rehabilitation of a Swift is a specialised task and should not be attempted without training.

However, there is a network of carers available to provide advice and, in many cases, collect the bird for rehabilitation. Although this document is primarily focused on Swifts, the other birds may also be brought in in similar circumstances, and most Swift carers will at least provide advice on Hirundines.

**NEVER THROW
A SWIFT OR
HIRUNDINE!**



What to do if a grounded Swift or Hirundine is brought to a veterinary practice

- The first step is to carefully place the Swift in a quiet, warm, safe, calm & clean environment - a ventilated shoe box is ideal - and place it somewhere away from any disturbance.
- Due to its long primary wing feathers and inability to perch, a Swift in particular must be placed in a spacious box.
- Many grounded adults and chicks are severely dehydrated and in need of urgent medical care, becoming vitamin B deficient in severe cases.
- If you can provide this care in the first instance, then it will increase the Swift's chance of recovery.
- The Swifts and Hirundines should only be given an insect-based diet, so this should be left solely to the specialist carer.
- Juvenile Swifts can be identified by the white edging of feathers on their forehead and primaries. Unless they have reached a minimum weight of 37g and wing length of 16cms, it's too soon to release them and they need specialist care. This is important as Swiftlets can often look well developed but they would perish if released.

ESSENTIAL STEPS

- PROVIDE WARMTH - a heat source such as plastic bottle of warm water wrapped in a tea towel
- PROVIDE HYDRATION - by water on a cotton bud
- DO NOT give food, as this can kill a dehydrated Swift

It is acceptable to release the Swift or Hirundine from head height if it can fly away safely of its own accord. If you attempt to do this, choose an open area with no obstructions, so that there is no collision risk and if the bird falls to the ground it can be easily located. Hold the bird aloft in the open palm facing into the wind and wait for it to fly off when it is ready.



Who to contact

Swift Conservation provide guidance on how to provide “first aid” to ensure the Swift stays healthy before being taken into care:

<https://www.swift-conservation.org/SwiftFirstAid.htm>

They also provide a list of Swift carers, and you should contact the carer closest to your location – even if they are unable to collect the bird, they should still be able to provide advice.

Alternatively, you could contact your local wildlife rescue centre who will typically be able to provide advice:

<https://helpwildlife.co.uk/map/>

housemartinconservation.com/rehabilitation has information about caring for House Martins together with a list of carers.

Swift numbers have declined by over 50% in 20 years - please try to help them

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<https://actionforswifts.blogspot.com/p/sln.html>