

Species in Buildings



Above: Barn Owl (Photograph copyright of The Barn Owl Trust)
Below: Buildings can attract many birds, plants and wildlife. (Photograph by Steve Wilson)



Introduction

Whereas most of the BAP deals with semi-natural habitats, there are some man-made structures that have a wildlife conservation role. For instance, some species live in close association with Mankind utilising buildings that replicate natural structures such as cliffs, caves and hollow trees.

Enhancing the value of buildings will allow everyone the opportunity to contribute towards biodiversity conservation. This Habitat Action Plan covers Barn Owl, Swift, Swallow; and House Martin.

Many other species use buildings, including a number of bats (see Bats

Our objective for Species in Buildings is:

To increase the opportunities for species that are associated with buildings.

SAP) and the House Sparrow (see the Tree Sparrow and House Sparrow SAP). Some walls are also good for ferns and lichens.

Current Protection

- All bats have full European protection.
- Breeding birds are fully protected by the W&CA 1981.
- Nesting Barn Owls are protected from disturbance at or near the nest by the W&CA 1981.

Barn Owl

A bird of open country requiring rough grassland in which to hunt and dry cavities in which to nest. An increasing lack of prey-rich habitat and ideal places to roost and breed have led to a population decrease in the UK. Barn Owls readily take to man-made structures for nesting, such as church towers and modern or traditional farm buildings, and to purpose built provision in these as well as in modern or traditional rural dwellings. Advice on the design and installation of nestboxes and loft

provision is widely available. The species is vulnerable to collisions with traffic, especially on trunk roads which are bordered by verges and hedgerows.

Swift

This common and widely distributed bird has decreased in numbers, possibly due to the reduction in aerial insects and loss of nesting opportunities. They nest in high buildings where they can gain access to roof spaces or similar. However, Swifts rarely nest in post-1944 buildings, nor in re-furbished older buildings, as they cannot gain access. The species would benefit from the provision of cavities in new buildings. This can be achieved through the installation of ready-made concrete Swift Bricks. Advice on siting and installation is widely available.

Swallow

This common and widely distributed summer visitor is a typical bird of the British countryside. However, it has decreased in recent years, possibly due to a general reduction in insect prey, loss of nest sites and migrational hazards, particularly hunting in southern Europe. The mud nest is constructed on open beams, and birds will nest in any building where they have continuous access. Sites are selected which are close to good feeding areas.

House Martin

This common summer visitor still nests on cliff faces, but the majority of pairs nest on buildings, making mud nests under the eaves. They nest in colonies. These birds are sometimes unpopular because of their droppings, however these can be caught by placing a wooden platform below nests. It is also illegal to destroy occupied nests. Artificial nests are commercially available to encourage nesting.

Threats

The species highlighted in this action plan are under threat from the following:

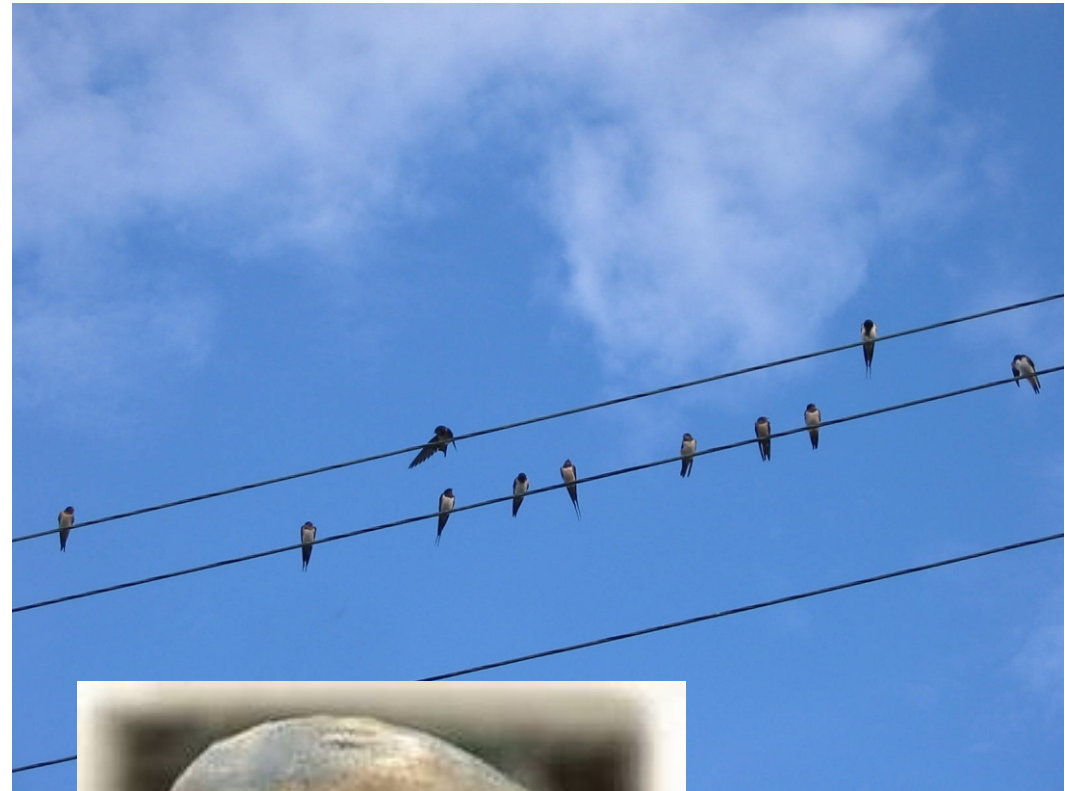
- Insensitive bridge or building works;
- Loss of access to roost/nest sites through building renovation and demolition;
- Use of timber treatment chemicals at bat roosts;
- Destruction of House Martin nests;
- Collisions between Barn Owls and traffic; and
- Loss of feeding habitat.

The Potential for Enhancement

There are a number of opportunities for enhancement and improvement to the habitat required by these birds and animals and the building industry can have a significant impact at the point of construction of new buildings or during renovation/improvement work by:

- Installing Swift bricks;
- Erecting House Martin nest boxes;
- Creating or retaining cavities in buildings;
- Ensuring bat and Barn Owl inspections are carried out prior to building works;
- Installing bat bricks/bat lofts/bat tiles or suitable soffits;
- Maintaining suitable foraging habitat;
- Retaining or constructing small open buildings for Swallows; and.
- Including Barn Owl lofts and boxes in suitable buildings.

Specialist advice can be obtained from the local authority, Wildlife Trust, the local Bat Group, English Nature, the Barn Owl Trust and the RSPB on the siting and detailed design of these or by checking websites.



Above: Swallows
(Photograph by Graham Megson)

Left: Barn Owl
(Photograph copyright of The Barn Owl Trust)

What you can do to help:

Erect nest boxes, fit bat boxes, fit Swift bricks or grow climbers up walls.