



CONCERN FOR SWIFTS

SWIFTS AND DOMESTIC PROPERTIES

LOCATING SWIFT COLONIES AS PART OF PRE-CONTRACT WORK ASSESSMENT

Swifts often choose domestic properties as colonial nesting sites. Maintenance or improvement work by landlords, tenants or owners can cause problems for swifts, particularly where the work involves large numbers of properties. In extreme cases, the work can destroy complete colonies. It isn't always easy to know whether a particular site is occupied by swifts. We recommend, therefore, that a check for swift colonies should be part of the pre-contract work assessment. Occupiers of properties usually know if they have nesting swifts. Observing the birds around buildings will reveal many nesting locations. A search of the soffit area from inside the roof space is best done outside the breeding season. It will usually reveal old nests, although these can be well-hidden in the darkest and least accessible part of the roof soffit area, and may be stepped down, out of sight. It may be a good idea to enlist the help of a local ornithologist (eg, a local bird group).

*** IMPORTANT ***

Swifts and their nests and young are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Since it would be illegal to intentionally damage or destroy their nests whilst they are in use, it is essential that any roofing or soffit work to buildings that house swifts is carried out prior to May or after mid-August. Prolonged working activity within the roof space should also be avoided, since this will prevent adult birds returning to eggs or young, which will lead to chilling or starvation. The birds may even desert eggs or young nestlings if disturbed.

GENERAL IMPROVEMENTS AND REPAIRS THAT MAY AFFECT SWIFTS

Replacing gutters and/or structural roof timbers

If the gutter type is being changed for different materials, fittings, etc, please ensure that the swifts can still gain access. The dimensions of an access point for swifts is minimal: 25-35mm deep x 65mm wide, placed at 1-2 metre intervals. Try to include access for swifts in new areas of refurbished roof.

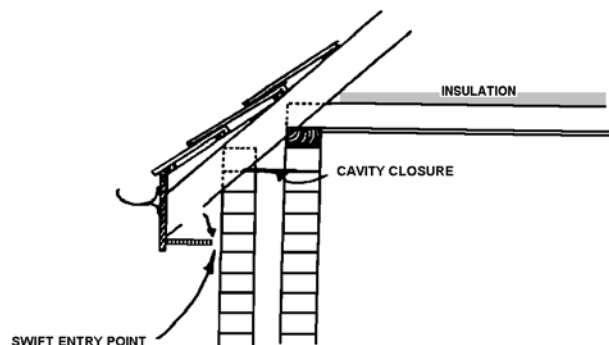
Replacing fascia and soffits

Determine where birds are gaining access to the roof void, and cater for this in the new work, ie by including access slots next to the wall on soffits, or access holes beneath, ensuring that the dimensions (25-35mm deep x 65mm wide) are such as to exclude sparrows and starlings.

Boxing in existing open soffits and gable ladders

As for above work in fascia and soffits, include access for swifts, preferably as slots along the wall side, effectively making the newly boxed-in soffit areas serve as one large nestbox.

TRADITIONAL BOXED EAVES DETAIL AND SWIFT ACCESS POINTS



Replacing roof covering

In older properties, particularly those having pantile roofs, swifts may enter the roof under ill-fitting tiles and will nest in the cavity sometimes created between tiles. New roofs will not have such gaps: they are intended to be weathertight, and, apart from any mandatory ventilation, will be tight-fitting and well-pointed. Where felt is added, fresh access points at the eaves are needed. Where this is not feasible, nestboxes are an alternative. Please contact us for advice about nestboxes, or visit the Cfs website www.concernforswifts.org.uk

Timber preservation treatment (insect control)

Avoid work when birds are present (May-August), as fumes can kill birds in the confined roof space. Bats are extremely sensitive to any chemicals. If there is any evidence that bats may be present, seek advice from your statutory conservation agency before any work starts.

General masonry repairs, window replacements and roof extensions

When planning to carry out general maintenance, consider if the work may disturb nesting swifts. For instance, removal and reinstallation of windows directly adjacent to a colony should be avoided.

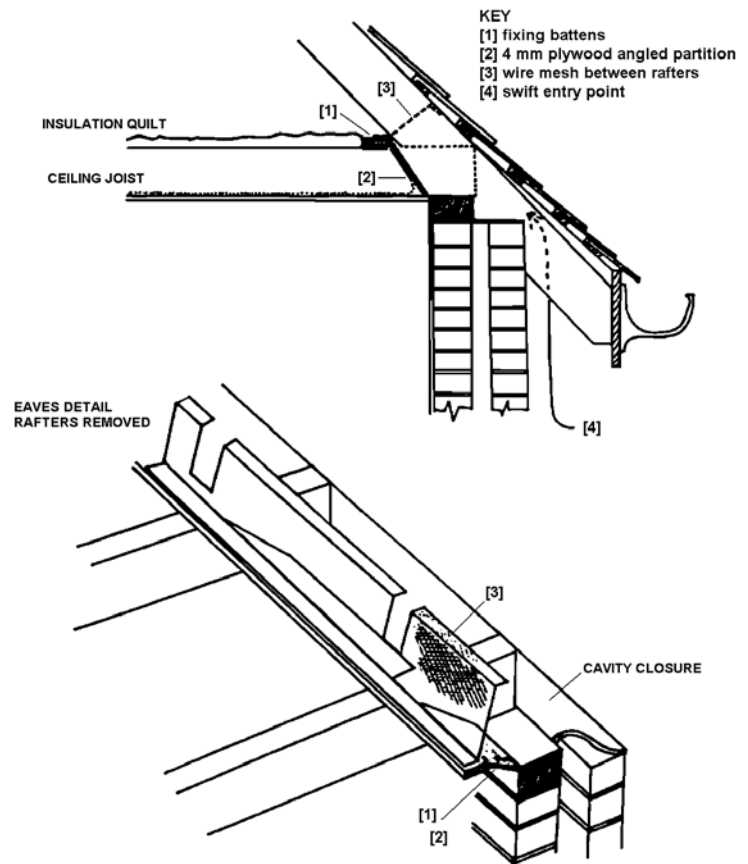
Roof space insulation

Current building regulations in respect of new housing recommend the use of Tyvek insulation. Loft insulation work, whether new or upgrading, if carried out in accordance with good working practices and procedures, should not prevent swifts gaining access at the eaves. The insulation material should not be pushed into the soffit and fascia area, which would obstruct the birds' point of entry and nesting areas, as well as impede ventilation.

In open soffit construction, swifts will usually choose to enter the roof at the eaves at the junction of the soffit and fascia. The nest is usually just inside the roof, confined to the closed cavity or solid brickwork ledge. The birds are known to dislike nesting on insulation quilt, particularly the glassfibre types, and show a preference for nesting on uninsulated areas.

Experiments have shown that the installation of an angled piece of plywood in between the joists resting on the ceiling plasterboard (see diagram) will prevent swifts from getting further into the roof void. The insulation quilt ends at the plywood partition, thus preventing obstruction of the eaves for ventilation while still allowing access for the swifts. The swifts cannot get any further into the roof space if wire mesh is fixed between the joists and the partition.

TYPICAL OPEN SOFFIT CONSTRUCTION WITH ANGLED PLY PARTITION AND WIRE MESH GUARD



This leaflet should be read in conjunction with the printed leaflet, CONCERN FOR SWIFTS, produced by the Concern for Swifts Group with the help and support of the RSPB and the BTO.

For further information, visit www.concernforswifts.org.uk and/or get in touch with:

Jake Allsop, Cfs Project Coordinator
Tel 01353 740540
e-mail concernforswifts@aol.com