

Laois Swift Survey 2018



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A.Krastev

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1 Introduction

The Common Swift *Apus apus*, is perhaps the most iconic and intriguing of our urban bird species. It is a summer migrant that breeds throughout Europe and much of Asia, and winters in southern Africa. In recent decades, Swift numbers have been in decline throughout many parts of their range, giving much cause for concern. In Ireland, the recent Bird Atlas 2007-11 shows there has been a 26% loss in range since 1970 and a severe decline in abundance since 1990 (Balmer et al. 2013), while the latest Countryside Bird Survey data show an alarming 39% decline between 2008 and 2013 (Crowe et al. 2014). As a result, Swifts are now of conservation concern in Ireland, and is Amber-listed (Colhoun et al. 2013).



Figure 1: Common Swift (*Apus apus*) in flight - A.Krastev

Throughout most of its breeding range, the Swift nests in cavities in walls or under eaves of houses and old buildings. Because of this they are a well-known bird species in urban centres, particularly cities and towns. Based on data from existing surveys (BirdWatch Ireland Laois Branch Swift Survey 2017), it is known that Swifts nest in several Co. Laois towns, including Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Portarligton, and Abbeyleix. However, anecdotally it is thought that numbers locally are in decline, mirroring the national and international trends. Reasons for the decline of Swifts are not fully understood, but it is thought the loss of available nest sites due to renovations of old buildings and modern building techniques restrict the availability of nesting cavities is a significant factor (Concern for Swifts 2013)

It has been documented that Swifts will nest in artificial nest boxes, thus allowing for populations to be maintained, notably where renovations to buildings have reduced nest site availability. Swifts are long-lived and faithful to their nest sites from year to year, and it is known that individual pair will not readily move to a newly provided colony. Newly available sites are most likely to be occupied by new pairs if they are attracted to the area by other birds. Therefore, it is essential that any provision and placement of alternative nest sites must be guided by information on where Swifts are currently nesting.

The Laois Swift Survey acts to quantify the level of Swift nesting activity across the county. The survey work will highlight areas where nesting Swift populations are found and in need of direct and immediate help. The survey will identify to site level the largest and most important Swift nesting sites that act as source populations within the county and further afield. These sites once identified need to be treated with the upmost sensitivity during any renovation or redevelopment to ensure existing Swift nest sites are retained. The survey team will make special effort to include local community groups and residents in the project, so they become knowledgeable about Swifts in their respective localities and in turn take increased responsibility in the future conservation and protection of Swifts in their county.

2 Project Objectives

Aim: To undertake a detailed survey of Swifts in towns and villages across Co. Laois to establish a picture of the distribution of nesting Swifts in the county. The data collected will allow, communities, Local Authorities and property owners to effectively manage for Swifts at site level, helping to conserve this important part of Laois's urban heritage.

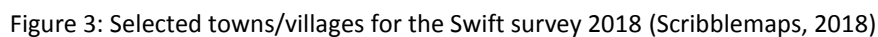
Objectives:

- Carry out a survey of Swifts in Co. Laois towns and villages to locate nesting colonies.
- Engage volunteers, community groups and local people to take part in Swift survey work.
- Encourage the development of Swift projects in towns and villages and provide training and advice to local groups and communities for the implementation of conservation projects.



Figure 2: Abbeyleix Tidy Town Group – A.Krastev

A total of 44 localities in Co. Laois were identified for Swift survey work, two additional areas were added during the survey schedule bring the total areas surveyed to 46. Of this number, 18 towns were ranked as 'High Priority' for survey work, with the remaining 26 towns ranked as 'Lower Priority', the two additional sites were not ranked in the initial survey planning phase. The 'High Priority' towns were selected on several criteria, particularly, the known presence of nesting Swifts, the town size and the suitability of buildings for nesting Swifts in the town. 'Lower Priority' towns were those where no previous records of Swifts and where the town buildings are less likely to be suitable for nesting.



The survey work took place from early May to early August 2018. Survey visits were carried out during fine weather to increase chances of encountering Swifts. Survey visits were carried out before 11am and after 6pm where possible to maximise encountering peak Swift activity. A standardised survey form was designed to capture survey location, date, time, weather conditions and Swift activity (See Appendix 1). Furthermore, details of Swift nest locations were also recorded, information on location, building type, point of nest entrance, number of nests present and photos of each site were all recorded.

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4 Data Collection

Survey data from all locations was entered to Microsoft Excel and mapped in ArcGIS Online. The ArcGIS Online platform was specifically designed to enable record submissions from both project staff and volunteers. At the end of the survey season all records were reviewed, verified and included in this report as appropriate.

All confirmed nest sites were photographed and included in the Site Based Results section of this report.



Figure 4: Screenshot of ArcGIS Online Swift sighting mapping tool with historical (previous to 2018 survey) records ranging from 2015-2017 shown.

5 Citizen Science

A network of volunteers was established to help with survey work and links developed with Tidy Towns Groups across the county.

Input from local volunteers was collected through the ArcGIS Online Mapping Application and bulk records were accepted in Excel format and integrated online.

Regular contact and liaison with local groups was made throughout the project to support on the ground citizen science efforts and promote the survey and follow up actions locally.

Active effort was made to meet with local groups to recruit new citizen science contributions, this was supported by awareness raising through social media platforms and local media coverage (print and broadcast) See Appendix 2.

6 Results

All confirmed nests found during the Laois Swift Survey 2018 are submitted to the online platform and available to be viewed. Overall the Laois Swift Survey 2018 identified 249 Swifts (peak counts from all areas combined) and confirmed 149 nest sites. These results provide a baseline figure from which we can measure future changes of Swift numbers in the county. The 149 nests are concentrated within 84 buildings/structures which are documented with photographs and plotted in ArcGIS Online. In total, BirdWatch Ireland conducted 30 field survey days and 15 days of office work to complete and coordinate the survey work and to collate the results. During this time, 10 Tidy Town Groups took part in this project. Overall results of the Laois Swift Survey 2018 are presented in Table 1.

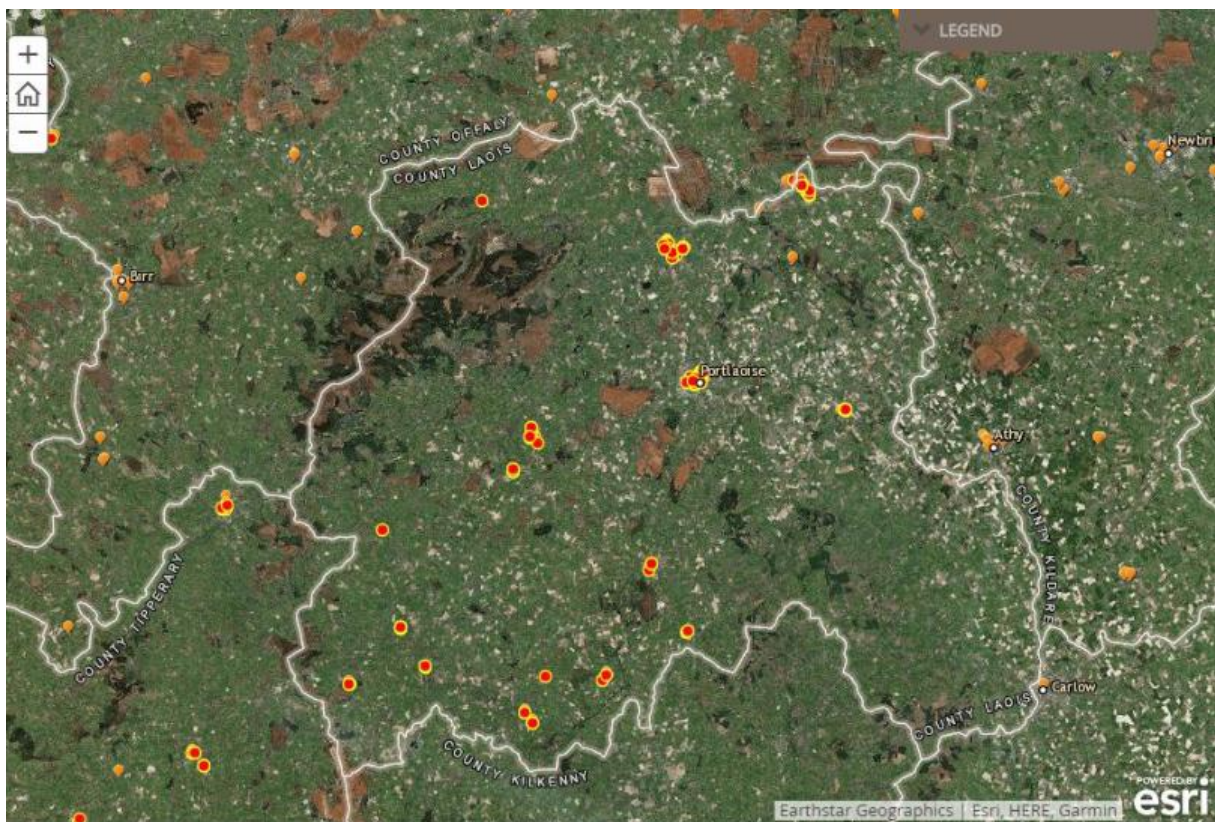


Figure 5: Screenshot of the ArcGis online platform showing all records found in 2018 Laois Swift Survey.

6.1 Survey Visits/Location Summaries

An initial visit to each of the 46 Laois towns and villages was completed to survey for the presence of Swifts. In towns or villages where Swifts were recorded on first visits, subsequent surveys were completed to confirm breeding and identify exact nest site locations. Between 1 and 5 visits were undertaken to each locality to pinpoint Swift nest sites.

The highest number of Swift nests were recorded in Mountmellick, where 35 nests were found. This was followed by 23 nests in Portlaoise, 17 in Portarlington, 11 in Stradbally, and a remaining 12 towns/villages reporting between 1 and 14 nests. The largest peak count (maximum number of birds observed during a single visit) of Swifts were recorded in Portlaoise – 34 Swifts and Stradbally – 29 Swifts.

Table 1: Presence of Swifts and their nests across county Laois

	Town/Village	Number of Visits	Swifts Present	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests
1	Abbeyleix	4	Yes	12	2
2	Ballinakill	2	Yes	15	5
3	Borris-in-Ossory	3	Yes	5	1
4	Castletown	3	Yes	11	8
5	Clonaslee	2	Yes	9	1
6	Cullohill	3	Yes	10	5
7	Donaghmore	2	Yes	20	14
8	Durrow	3	Yes	5	3
9	Errill	3	Yes	19	9
10	Mountmellick	6	Yes	22	35
11	Mountrath	2	Yes	8	11
12	Newtown House Mill	2	Yes	2	1
13	Portarlington	5	Yes	24	17
14	Portlaoise	5	Yes	34	23
15	*Raheen	2	Yes	1	-
16	Rathdowney	4	Yes	18	3
17	*Rosenallis	3	Yes	4	-
18	Stradbally	3	Yes	29	11
19	*The Swan	2	Yes	1	-
20	Clonburren Castle	1	Not Found	-	-
21	Aghaboe	1	Not Found	-	-

	Town/Village	Number of Visits	Swifts Present	Peak no of Swifts	Number of confirmed nests
22	Arless	2	Not Found	-	-
23	Ballacolla	2	Not Found	-	-
24	Ballaghmore	2	Not Found	-	-
25	Ballickmoyler	1	Not Found	-	-
26	Ballybrittas	2	Not Found	-	-
27	Ballybrophy	1	Not Found	-	-
28	Ballyfin	2	Not Found	-	-
29	Ballyhide	1	Not Found	-	-
30	Ballylinan	1	Not Found	-	-
31	Ballyroan	1	Not Found	-	-
32	Barrowhouse	1	Not Found	-	-
33	Clonaghadoo	1	Not Found	-	-
34	Clough	2	Not Found	-	-
35	Coolrain	1	Not Found	-	-
36	Crettyard	1	Not Found	-	-
37	Emo	2	Not Found	-	-
38	Jamestown	2	Not Found	-	-
39	Kilbricken	1	Not Found	-	-
40	Killeshin	2	Not Found	-	-
41	New Inn	2	Not Found	-	-
42	Newtown	2	Not Found	-	-
43	Shanahoe	2	Not Found	-	-
44	Spink	2	Not Found	-	-
45	Timahoe	2	Not Found	-	-
46	Vicarstown	1	Not Found	-	-
			Total	249	149

*areas where Swifts were seen, but nests were not found

6.2 Swift Nests

The survey has identified a total of 149 Swift nest sites across the county. These have been found in religious buildings, schools, heritage sites, public buildings and private residences.



Figure 6: Representative photographs of buildings containing Swift nest sites – church, school, castles and residential properties - A.Krastev

Figure 7 shows the density of Swift nest sites, low density (blue), average (red) and high density (yellow). This may clearly shows that Mountmellick, Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Stradbally and Donaghmore to have the highest densities of Swift nests.

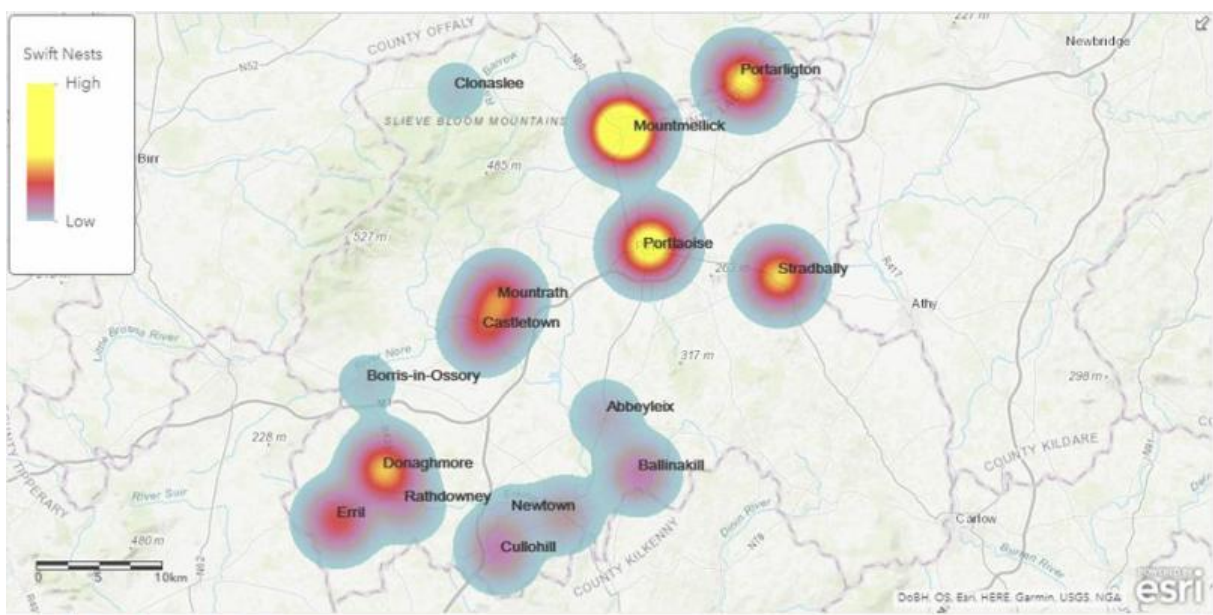


Figure 7: Heat map showing the densities of Swift nests across county Laois (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 2 lists the overall percentage of Swift nest sites by town/village. Mountmellick holds 23% of the total Swift nest sites found in Co. Laois. Portlaoise held 15%, Portarlifton with 11% and Donaghmore with 9% of the total population. Mountrath and Stradbally were seen to have 7% of the Swift nest sites in the county, Erril and Castletown contained more than 5%, while the remaining towns/villages had between 3% and 1% of the counties Swift nest sites.

Table 2: Percentage of the total confirmed Swift nests by town/village

Town/Village	Percentage
Mountmellick	23.%
Portlaoise	15.%
Portarlifton	11.%
Donaghmore	9.%
Mountrath	7.%
Stradbally	7.%
Erril	6.%
Castletown	5.%
Ballinakill	3.%
Cullohill	3.%
Durrow	2.%
Rathdowney	2.%
Abbeyleix	1.%
Borris-in-Ossory	1%
Clonaslee	1%
Newtown	1%

Swift nests have been recorded in a total of 84 individual buildings and structures across Co. Laois. These buildings have been categorised under a classification system - House/Residential, School, Public, Church/Religious, Heritage Site/Castle, Small Business, Industrial and Other. Figure 8 below shows that 67% of all Swift nest sites found during the survey are in the category House/Residential, followed by 17% Heritage Site;Castle, 7%; Church/Religious 5%; Small Business 3%; School 3% and 1% Public.

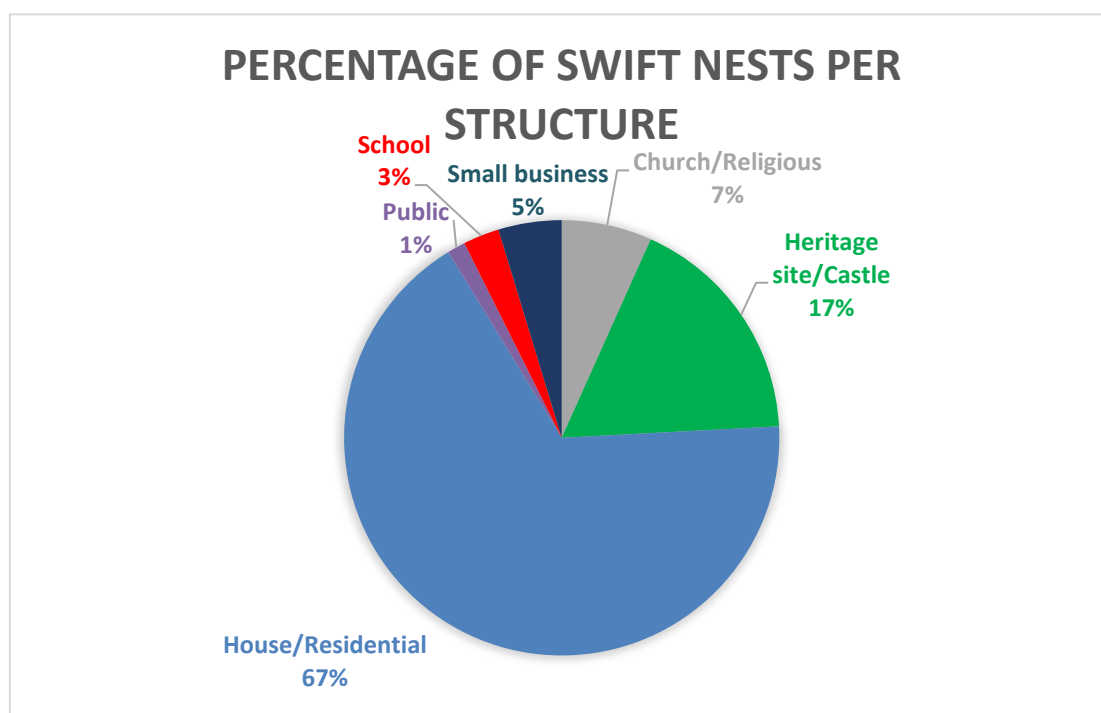


Figure 8: Percentage of Swift nest sites across different categories of buildings and structures

Figure 9 shows the number of Swift nests found in different structure types across the towns and villages in Co. Laois. A total of 33 nests found in Mountmellick are associated with House/Residential properties and further 2 nests in a School. It can be seen that residential properties are providing large proportion of the Swift nest sites around Co. Laois. These nests are mostly clustered around estates where buildings identified typically host one Swift nest i.e St Bridgits, Portlaoise, although there are few exceptions which can be seen on Emmett Street Mountmellick where up to 6 nests were found in a single residential building. Heritage Sites such as Donaghmore Famine House Museum, Erril/Ballagh and Cullohill Castle are of high priority as they contain the majority if not all Swift nest sites in their respective localities. Church/Religious buildings are important for Swift populations in Castletown, Cullohill, Mountrath and Portarlinton with buildings of this category containing multiple nests in these localities. Small Business are of significance to nesting Swifts in Mountrath and Portlaoise and schools in Ballinakill, Mountmellick and Portarlinton contain at least one Swift nest site.

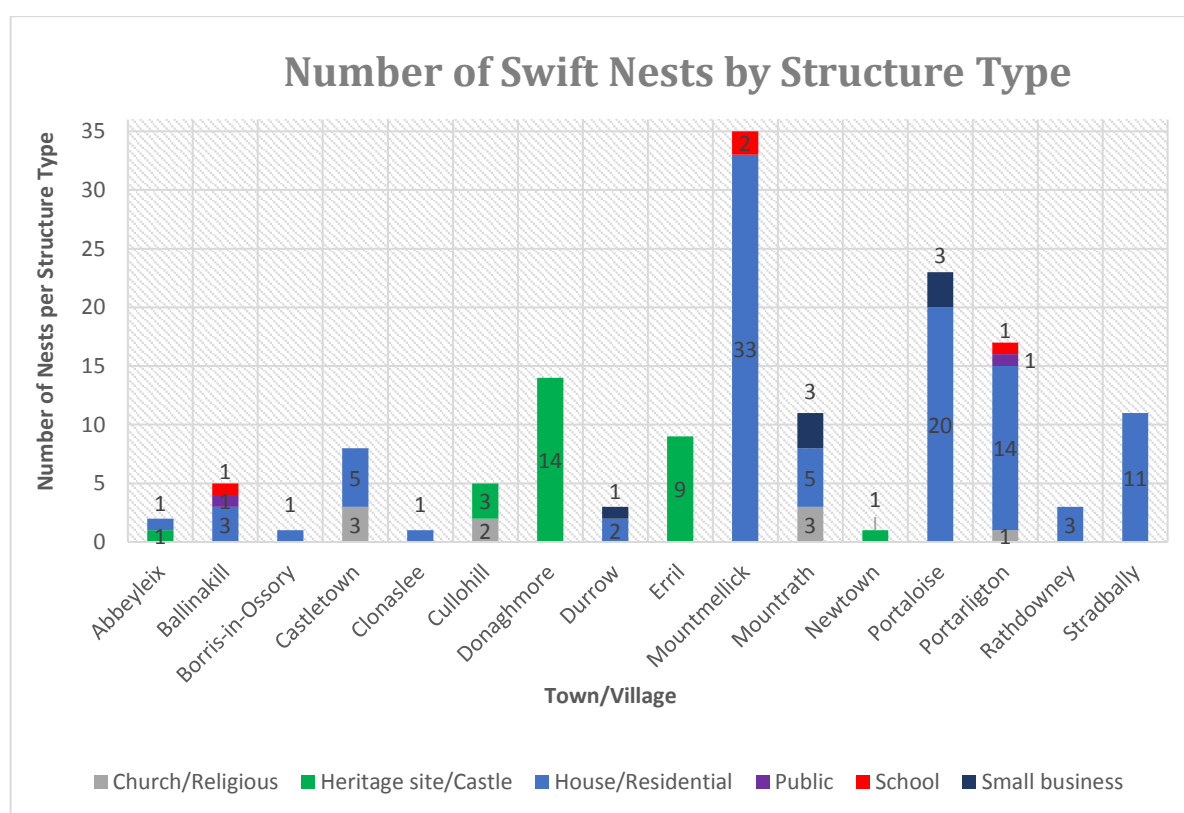


Figure 9: Number of nests per structure type divided by towns/villages in Co. Laois.

7 Site Based Results

During the Laois Swift Survey 2018 a total of 46 towns/villages in Co. Laois were surveyed for this project. Swifts were recorded in 19 of these locations. The towns/villages where Swifts were not found are listed in Table 1.

Results of the Swift survey are presented below for individual towns and villages. Each location where Swifts were found is documented with photographs of the nest sites included with the approximate location of the nest entrance marked on each photo (yellow arrows). Peak numbers of Swifts observed flying at each location is also given. Peak number of Swifts observed relates to the highest number of Swifts counted in a town or village at any one time during survey work.

Results are presented for individual localities in alphabetical order for ease of use of this document.

All Swift nest locations can also be view online at the following link:

<https://bwi.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=81ddc38cfcde40ffab699be638ee5b20>

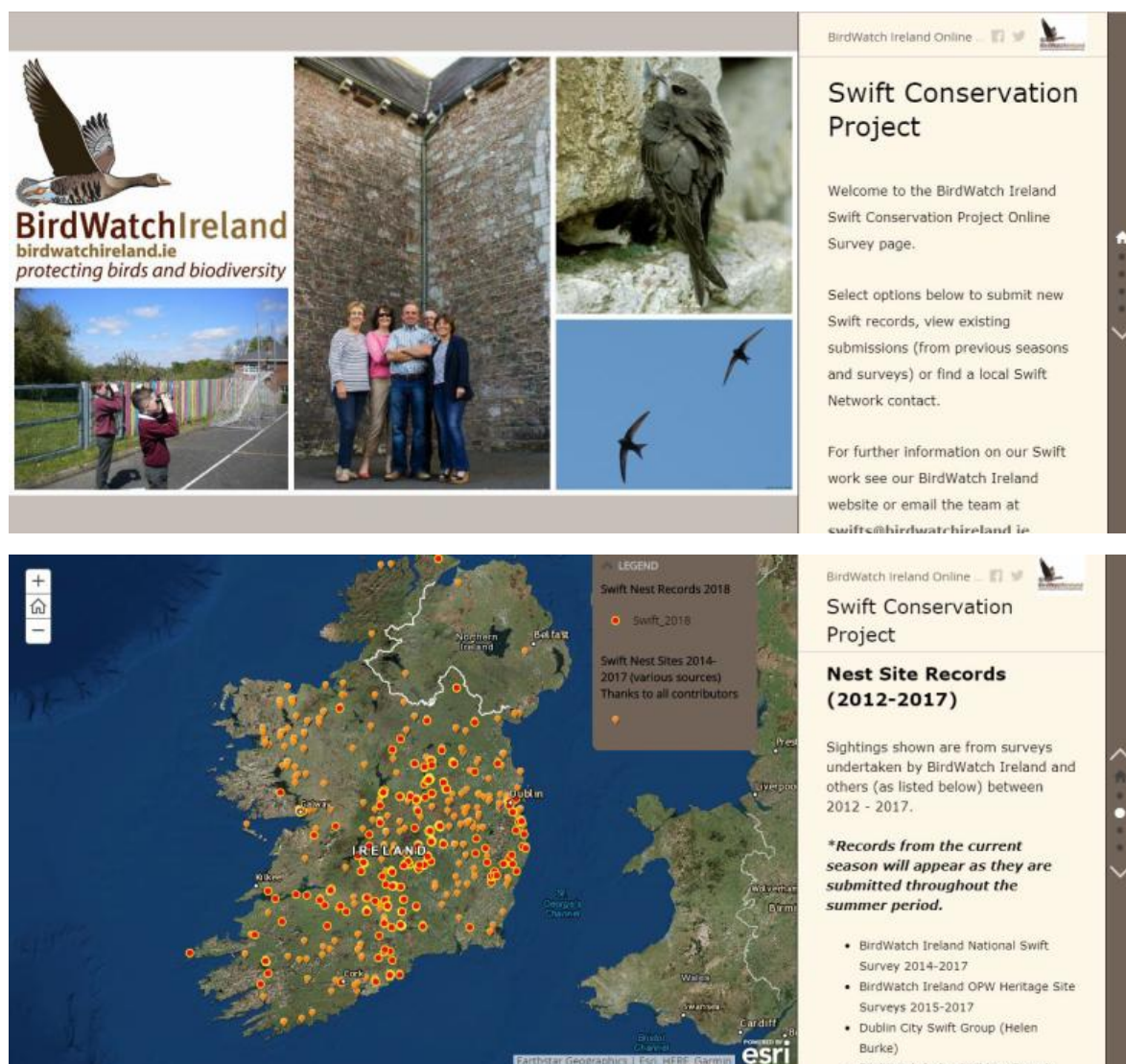


Figure 10: Screenshots of the Online ArcGIS Swift Conservation Project data entry and viewing system.

7.1 Abbeyleix



Abbeyleix is medium sized town in the south of the county. Abbeyleix has a significant amount of historical buildings and fits the criteria to potentially hold a large Swift nesting population. Observations made during survey visits found Swift nest sites are mainly restricted to the rear of buildings, making it difficult to find suitable vantage points from which to make observations. Two nests were confirmed in Abbeyleix but it is likely that more active nests remain to be found.

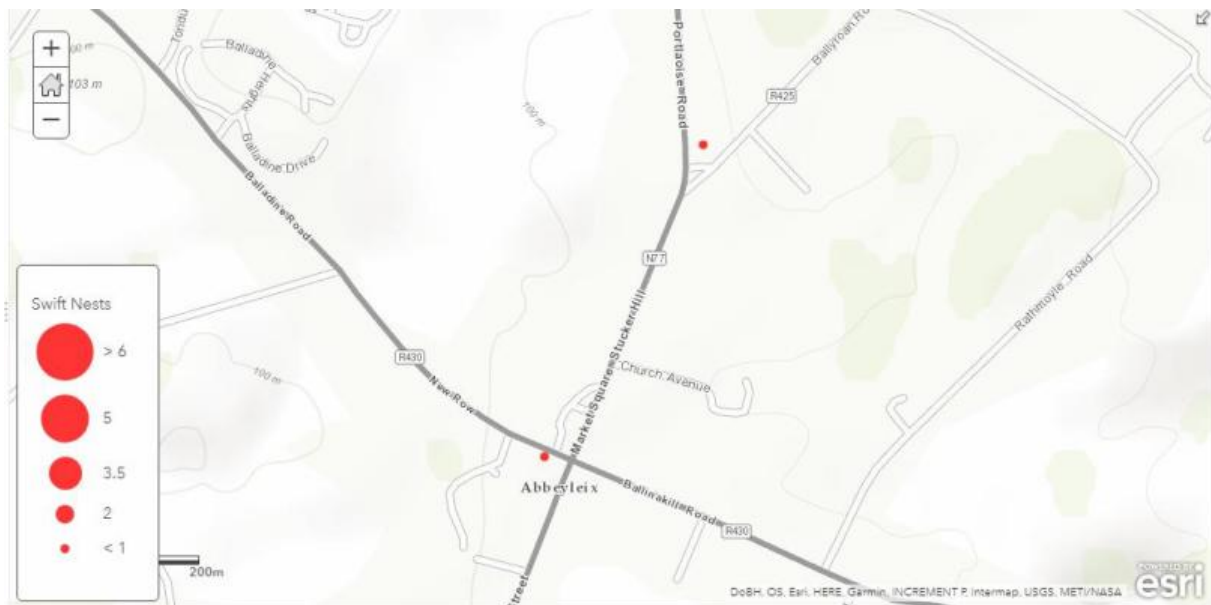


Figure 11: Confirmed nests in Abbeyleix represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 3: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Abbeyleix

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1	Abbeyleix Heritage House	12	1	Heritage Site/Castle
2	Rear of Cards Confectionery Cholocolates - Mountrath Road		1	House/Residential
			Total 2	



Figure 12: Des Finnamore (BWI Laois Branch) ,John Mc Donald, Robert Maher, Dominique Rusnak, Mary Mc Donald, Mary Fennelly, Betty Whelan, Bernie Loughman, Anita Bonham, John Joe Fennelly and Mary White (Abbyleigh Tidy Town Group) pictured following a group Swift survey in Abbyleix – A.Krastev



Figure 13: Abbyleix CE Scheme participants have built Swift nest boxes and are planning to install them in 2018/2019.

7.2 Ballinakill



Ballinakill is a small village in the south of the county. Five Swift nest sites were confirmed which is a good population given the size of the village. A peak count of 15 Swifts were observed during the survey visits.

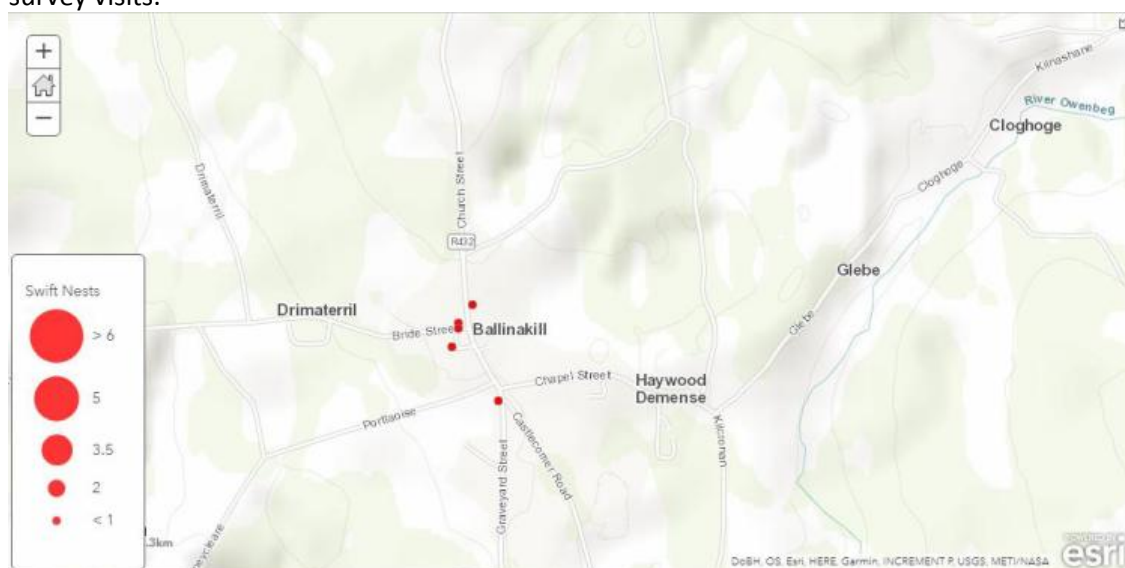


Figure 14: Confirmed nests in Ballinakill represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 4: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Ballinakill

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1	Rear side of the Courtyard, Market Square	15	1	House/Residential
2	Bride Street		1	House/Residential
3	Chapel Street		1	House/Residential
4	Ballinakill Health Centre, Bride Street		1	Public
5	Ballinakill National School		1	School
			Total 5	



7.3 Borris-in-Ossory



Borris-in-Ossory is small village in the south western part of the county. Large parts of the village have suitable buildings for nesting Swifts including a derelict convent on the southern side of the village, however the survey visits have confirmed only one nest and a peak count of 5 Swifts.



Figure 15: Confirmed nests in Borris-in-Ossory represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 5: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Borris-in-Ossory

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1	The White House, Main Street	5	1	House/Residential
			Total 1	

1



7.4 Castletown



Castletown is situated on the River Nore and close to the Slieve Bloom mountains both providing excellent feeding opportunities for locally nesting Swifts. Our survey work identified two main colonies with total of eight confirmed nests and a peak count of 11 Swifts.



Figure 16: Confirmed nests in Castletown represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 6: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Castletown

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1	Elderfield	11	5	House/Residential
2a,2b	The Pastoral Centre, Del La Sal Complex, Castletown		3	Church/Religious
			Total 8	



Figure 17: Castletown Tidy Towns participating in the Laois Swift Survey 2018 – A.Krastev

7.5 Clonaslee



Clonaslee is a small village in the Slieve Bloom Mountains, it is the most north-western survey area and contains the most isolated Swift colony in relation to the rest of the counties colonies. There was one Swift nest site confirmed and a peak count of nine Swifts were observed during the survey visits.



Figure 18: Confirmed nests in Clonaslee represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 7: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Clonaslee

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1	New Millenium Estate R422 (Historically this building used to be Slieve Bloom Garden Centre)	9	1	House/Residential
			Total 1	

1



7.6 Clonburren Castle



Clonburren Castle has been visited with the chairperson of Erril Tidy Town Group. The castle is located close to Ballagh Castle and appears suitable to contain nesting Swifts. Swifts were not observed during the survey visit but it is still possible that the castle contains nesting pairs and should be resurveyed in 2019.

Table 8: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Clonburren Castle

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
	Clonburren Castle	-	-	Heritage site/Castle
			Total	

7.7 Cullohill



Cullohill is a small village situated in the south-western side of Co. Laois. The nest sites in Cullohill are found radial to the main village settlement in a church to the west and a castle ruin to the south-east of the village. A total of five nests were confirmed between both sites and a peak count of 10 Swifts observed.



Figure 19: Confirmed nests in Cullohill represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 9: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Cullohill

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1a,1b	St Tighearnach's Church	10	2	Church/Religious
2a,2b	Cullohill Castle		3	Heritage site/Castle
			Total 13	



7.8 Donaghmore



Donaghmore is located on the south-west corner of the county. There were no Swifts found in Donaghmore village, however a large colony of Swifts was confirmed in Donaghmore Famine Workhouse Museum. There were 14 Swift nests confirmed in the Donaghmore Workhouse complex, a peak count of 20 Swifts were observed during the survey visits.

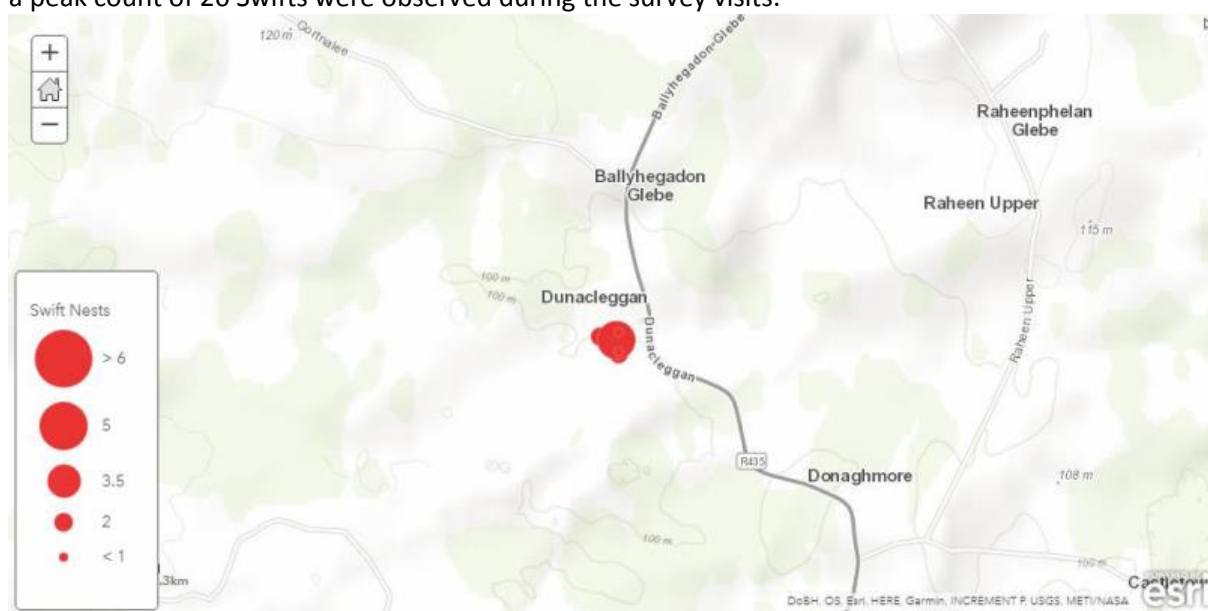


Figure 20: Confirmed nests in Donaghmore represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 10: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Donaghmore

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1a,1b,1c,1d,1e,1f	Donaghmore Famine Workhouse Museum (East, North, West)	20	14	Heritage Site/Castle
			Total 14	



7.9 Durrow



Durrow is located to the south east of the county. The River Erkina flows through this small heritage town, joining River Nore further downstream. The towns buildings are in a very good state of repair overall, so its possible that there were once more Swift nests in the town centre. There were three Swift nest sites confirmed in Durrow, a peak count of five Swifts were observed during the survey visits.



Figure 21: Confirmed nests in Durrow represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 11: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Durrow

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1	Patrick Street	5	2	House/Residential
2	The Ashbrook Arms Hotel		1	Small business
			Total 3	



7.10 Errill



Errill is a small village, near Rathdowney in the south-west of the county. There were no Swifts found in the village, however within its vicinity lies Ballagh Castle where nine confirmed Swifts nests were confirmed and a peak count of 19 Swifts were observed.

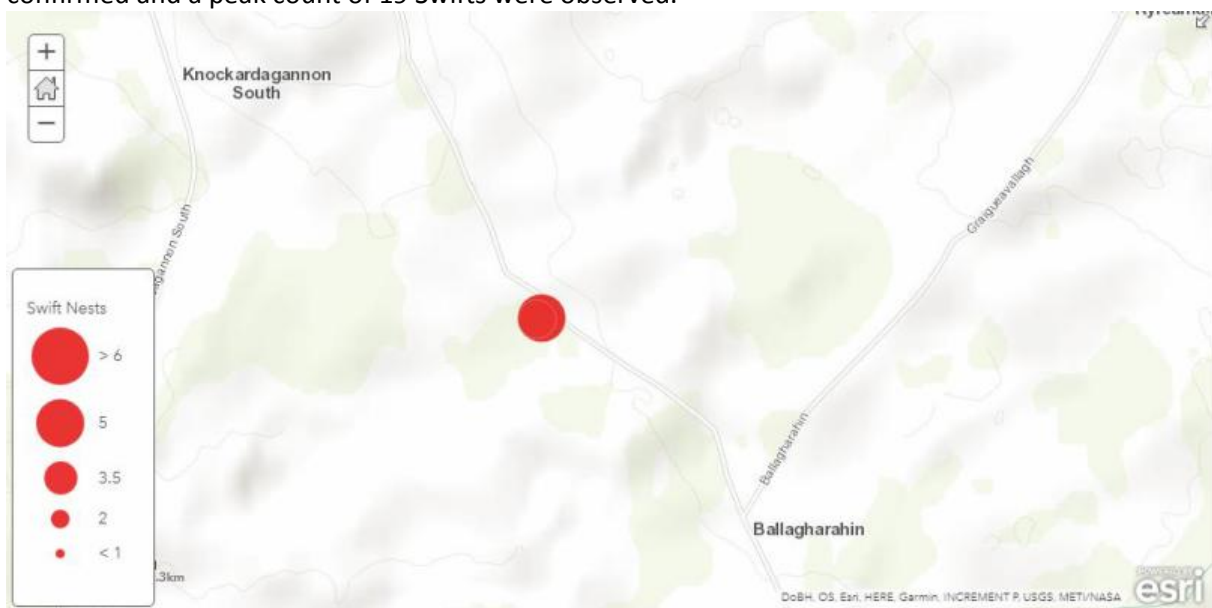


Figure 22: Confirmed nests in Errill represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 12: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Errill

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1a,1b	Ballagh Castle	19	9	Heritage Site/Castle
			Total 9	



Figure 23: Patrick Cleary (Errill Tidy Towns)

7.11 Mountmellick

Mountmellick is a large town in north of the county. The town lies to the east of the Slieve Bloom Mountains and the River Barrow runs along the northern boundary of the town. The survey confirmed colonies distributed in the north side of the town with smaller colonies spread out in the eastern side of the town. There were 34 Swift nest sites confirmed in Mountmellick which is the largest density of nest sites in the county, a peak count of 22 Swifts were observed during the survey visits.

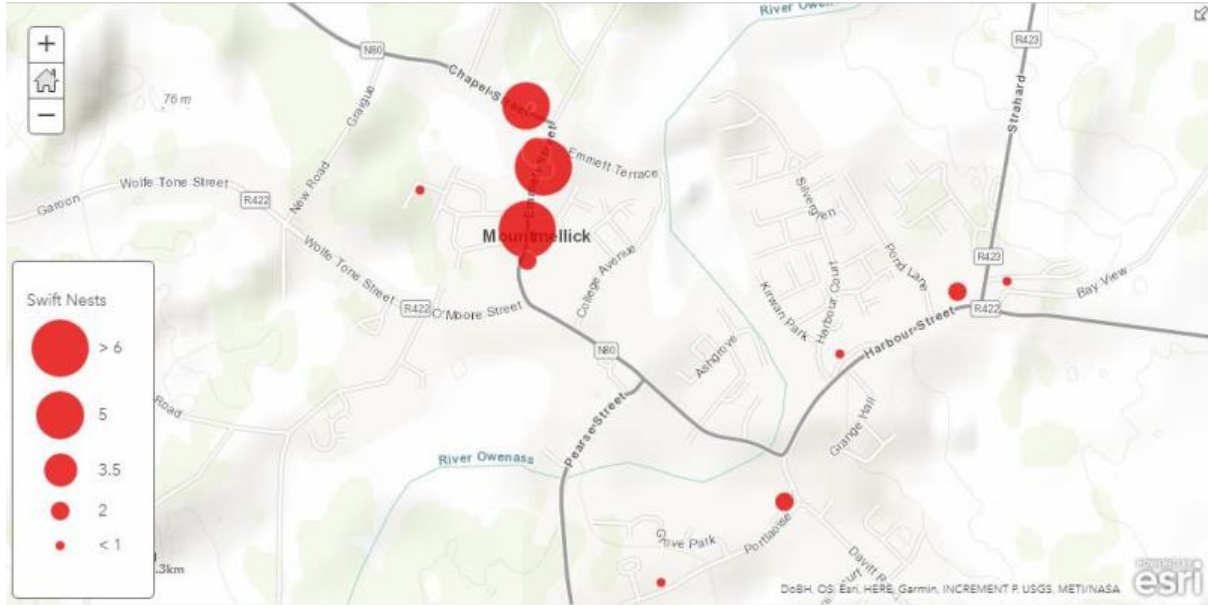


Figure 24: Confirmed nests in Mountmellick represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 13: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Mountmellick

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1	24 - 23 Emmett Street	22	6	House/Residential
2	31 Chapel Street		5	House/Residential
3	29 Chapel Street		1	House/Residential
4	23 Emmett Street		2	House/Residential
5	11 Emmett Street		2	House/Residential
6	26 Emmett St		3	House/Residential
7	14 Emmett Street		1	House/Residential
8	18 Emmett Street		6	House/Residential
9*	Buildings directly opposite to Mountmellick Library		-	House/Residential
10	100 St Joseph's Terrace		1	House/Residential
11	54 Harbour Street		1	House/Residential
12	Mountmellick Community Arts Centre		-	Public
13	8 Pattison's Estate		1	House/Residential
14a,14b*	Mountmellick Further Education Centre		2	School
15	14 Connolly Street		2	House/Residential
16	49 Harbour Street		1	House/Residential
			Total 34	

*depict sites where nest sites are probable but unconfirmed during 2018 survey visits.







Figure 25: Barbara Lawlor, Lynda Kiernan, Kitty Creighton (Mountmellick Tidy Towns) – A.Krastev



Figure 26: Mountmellick Tidy Town Group – R. Whelan

7.12 Mountrath



Mountrath is a medium sized town in the mid-west of the county, located in the foothills of Slieve Bloom Mountains and close to the River Nore both habitats providing ample feeding opportunities for foraging Swifts. There were 11 Swift nest sites confirmed in Mountrath spread throughout the town. The Brigidine Convent had two confirmed nest sites whereas all others contained single nest sites. A peak count of 8 Swifts were observed during the survey visits.



Figure 27: Confirmed nests in Mountrath represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 14: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Mountrath

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1	Shannon Street	8	1	House/Residential
2	11 Patrick Street		1	House/Residential
3	Brigidine Sisters Convent		2	Church/Religious
4	Main Street, Market Square		1	House/Residential
5	O'Rourke's Pharmacy, Main Street		1	Small Business
6	4 Moonbaun Close		1	House/Residential
7	Patrick Street - Thanh Phat Chinese Takeaway		1	Small Business
8	The Old Barrack		1	House/Residential
9	Main Street		1	Small Business
10	Brigidine Sisters Convent		1	Church/Religious
			Total 11	

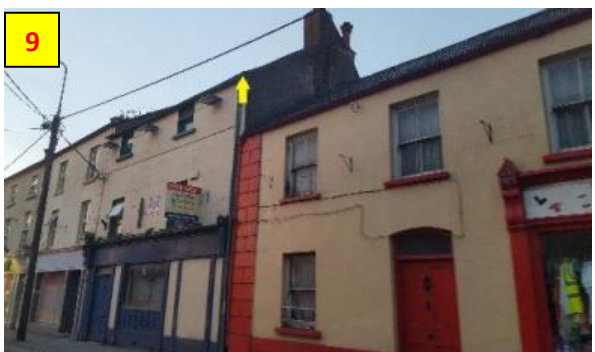
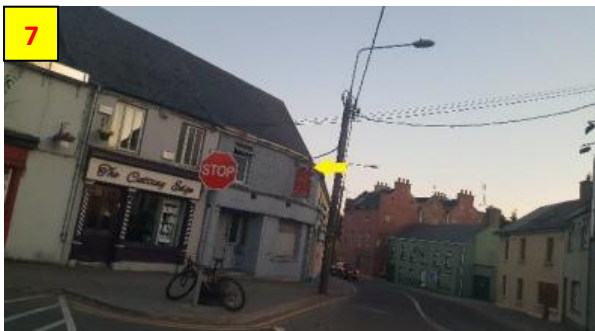
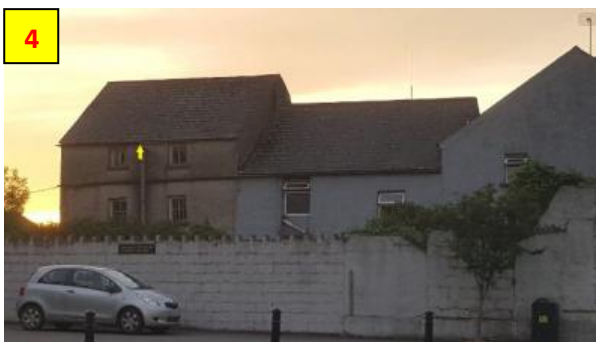




Figure 28: Mountrath Tidy Town Group – A.Krastev



Figure 29: Swift Awareness Week in Mountrath – R.Whelan

7.13 Newtown House and Mills



Newtown House and Mill is found to the west of Durrow, it was surveyed due to previous knowledge of Swifts observed at the site by members of the BirdWatch Ireland Laois Branch. There was one Swift nest site confirmed at the site, a peak count of 2 Swifts were observed during the survey visits.



Figure 30: Confirmed nests in Newtown House and Mills represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 15: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Newtown House and Mills

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
None taken	Newtown House And Mills	2	1	Heritage Site/Castle
			Total 1	

7.14 Portarlington



Portarlington is a town divided between two counties Laois and Offaly. The majority of the nests found are in residential buildings with the remainder in the Garda Station and a school. In total there were 17 Swift nest sites confirmed on the Laois side of the town. A peak count of 24 Swifts were observed during the survey visits.



Figure 31: Confirmed nests in Portarlington represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 16: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Portarlinton

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1	13 Station Road	24	4	House/Residential
2	Main Street (beside former Social Welfare Office)		1	House/Residential
3	3 Station Road		1	House/Residential
4	Market Square		1	Church/Religious
5	St Brigids Square			House/Residential
6	Rear of Dunnes & Associates		1	House/Residential
7	Building behind Portarlinton Social Services Centre		1	House/Residential
8	Portarlinton Garda Station		1	Public
9	16 Station Rd		1	House/Residential
10	Building beside Portarlinton Library		1	House/Residential
11	59 St Brigid's Square		3	House/Residential
12	Portarlinton Further Education Centre		1	School
	49-36 Station Ct		1	House/Residential
			Total 17	

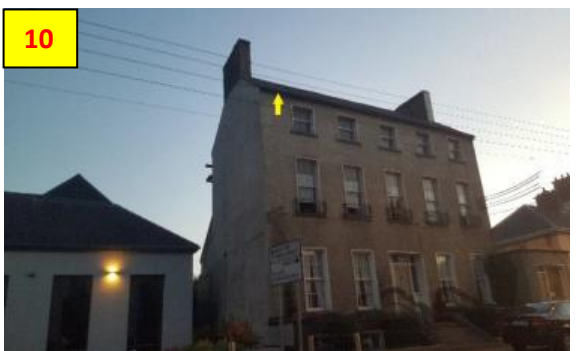
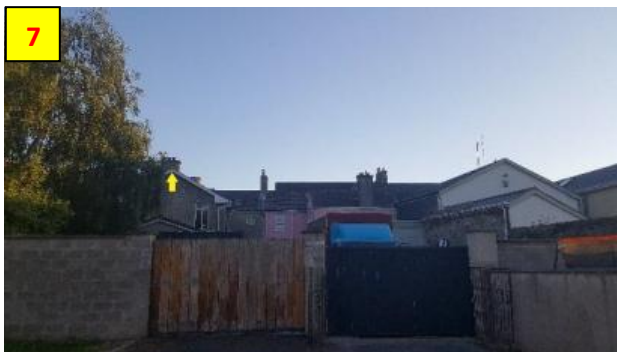




Figure 32: Portarlington Tidy Town Group – A.Krastev

7.15 Portlaoise



Portlaoise is the largest town in Co.Laois. The survey confirmed 23 Swift nest sites. The main Swift colony is spread across 16 individual residences in two neighbouring housing estates, Dr Murphy's Place and St Bridgit's Place located to the north-east of the town. The nests are spread between houses all built to the same design which have not been modernised with PVC facias or soffit like many neighbouring properties in the area. There is some concern that this colony will be slowly lost over time as the remaining houses are renovated and modernised. The remaining nest sites are found closer to the town centre with each building containing single nest sites. A peak count of 34 Swifts were observed during the survey visits.

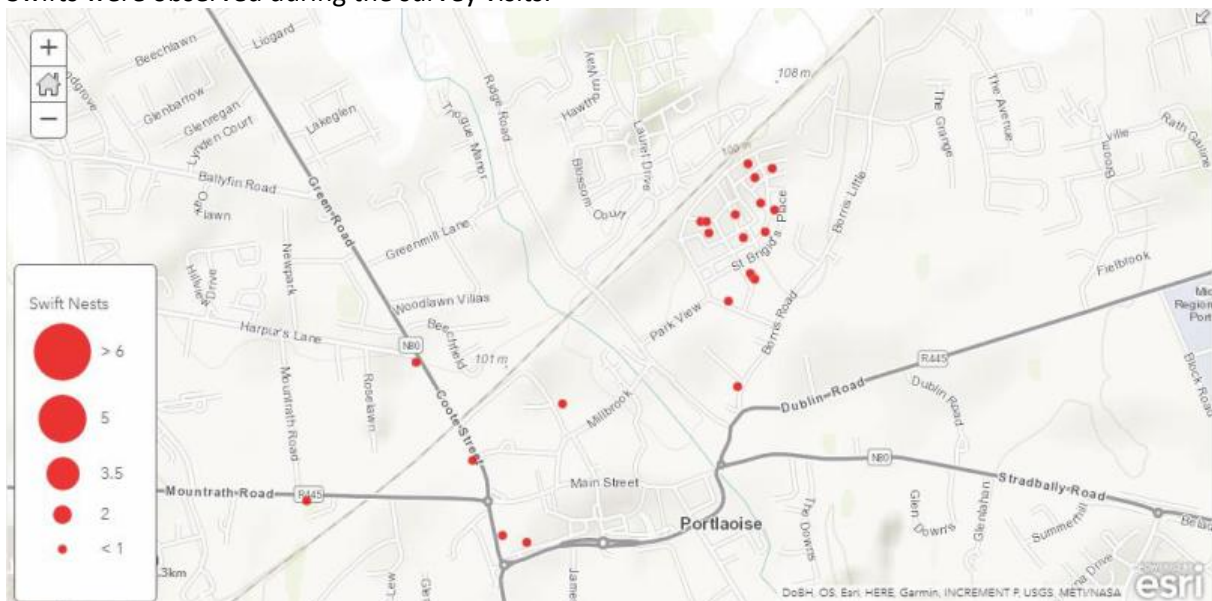


Figure 33: Confirmed nests in Portlaoise represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 17: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Portlaoise

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1	151 St Brigids Place	34	1	
2	Ivyleigh House B&B		1	Small Business
3	67 St Brigid's Pl		1	House/Residential
4	69 St Brigid's Pl		1	House/Residential
5	Maxol Service Station		1	Small Business
6	45 Dr Murphy Pl		1	House/Residential
7	194 St Brigid's Pl		1	House/Residential
8	St John Square		1	House/Residential
9	Teagasc,1 Park Villa		1	Small Business
10	64 St Brigid's Pl		1	House/Residential
11	176 St Brigid's Pl		1	House/Residential
12	185 St Brigid's Pl		1	House/Residential
13	157 St Brigid's Pl		1	House/Residential
14	34 St Brigid's Pl		1	House/Residential
15	43 Dr Murphy Pl		1	House/Residential
16	23 Dr Murphy Pl		1	House/Residential
17	7 Kellyville Park		1	House/Residential
18	45 Dr Murphy Pl		1	House/Residential
19	Clonminam R445 , Building directly across from historic Petrol Service Station		1	House/Residential
20	96 St.Brigids Place		1	House/Residential
21	Rear side 135 St Brigid's Pl		1	House/Residential
22	43 Dr Murphy Pl		1	House/Residential
23	Coote Terrace		1	House/Residential
			Total 23	







7.16 Raheen

Raheen is a small village located in the southern region of Co. Laois. During the survey one Swift has been observed, however no nests were found in Raheen.

Table 18: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Raheen

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
		1	-	NA
			Total	

7.17 Rathdowney



Rathdowney is a large town located in south-west of the county. The survey has confirmed three nests in O'Daly's housing estate on the south-western side of the town. A peak count of 18 Swifts over the town may suggest there are more nests active in the locality.



Figure 34: Confirmed nests in Rathdowney represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 19: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Rathdowney

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1	1-2 O'Daly Terrace	18	2	House/Residential
2	20 O'Daly Terrace		1	House/Residential
			Total 3	



7.18 Rosenallis



Rosenallis is a small village located in the foothills of Slieve Bloom Mountains to the north-west of the county. There were no nests confirmed, however there were four Swifts observed flying above the village. We undertook a total of three survey visits without confirming a nest site.

Table 20: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Rosenallis

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
		4	-	NA
			Total	

7.19 Stradbally



Stradbally is a small town in Co. Laois, which is surrounded by vast area of arable and grazing agricultural land. Reports to BirdWatch Ireland suggested that Swifts have been occupying buildings off the N80 (Portlaoise Rd). However, all a total of 14 confirmed Swift nests have been found in Church Avenue a housing estate to the north of the N80. A peak count of 29 Swifts was observed during survey visits.

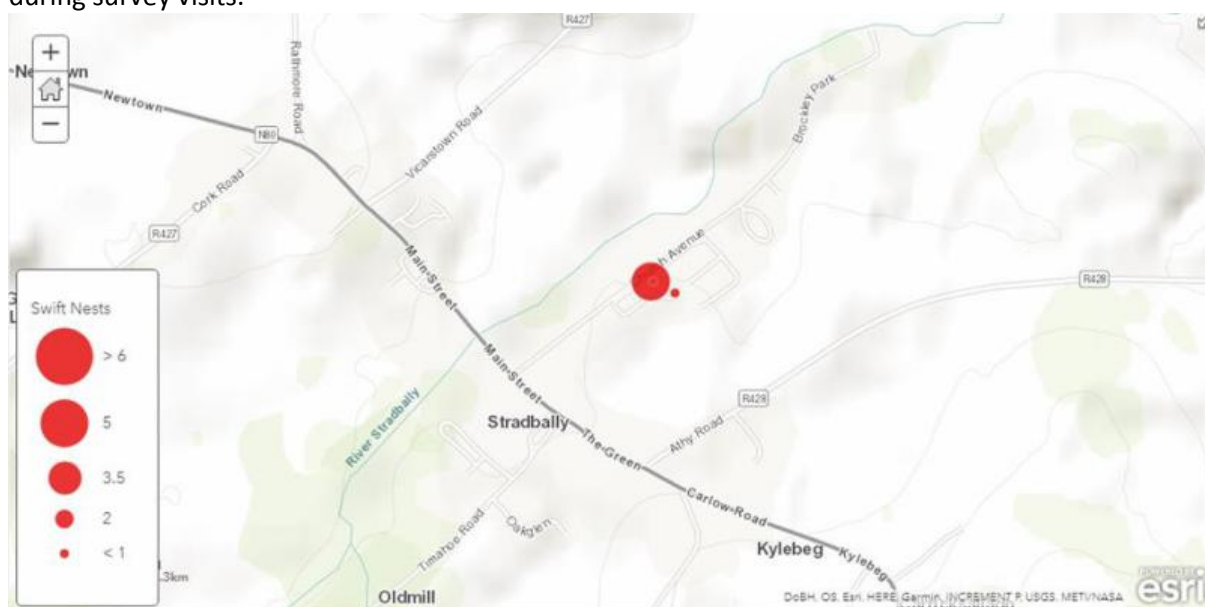


Figure 35: Confirmed nests in Stradbally represented with graduated scale symbols using (ArcGIS (Online) ESRI, 2018)

Table 21: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in Stradbally

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
1,2,3,4,5,6,7	Church Avenue	29	11	House/Residential
			Total 11	



7.20 The Swan



The Swan is a small village in the south-east of the county. There were no Swift nests sites found, however one Swift was observed in the area. There are few suitable buildings in the locality to potentially contain nesting Swifts, however with only one Swift observed during surveying this does not give a strong indication that Swifts are breeding in the locality.

Table 22: List of all confirmed nest sites and Swift sightings in The Swan

Photo Reference No:	Address	Peak no of Swifts observed	Number of confirmed nests	Building type
		1	-	NA
			Total	

8 Publicity

Events

Several public events were hosted by BirdWatch Ireland and partners in Laois to promote the survey and raise awareness for Swift conservation more generally.

- **Laois Tidy Towns Event:** We addressed the attending groups at the Laois Tidy Towns Federation AGM on Monday, May 14th. The meeting was well attended, and members of Tidy Towns Groups showed a high level of support for the project. We provided suggested text to each group to be included in individual reports giving mention to the survey and follow up aims of the project.
- **Laois LAWCO Event:** We presented to the Water and Communities Office – River Awareness Event in Portlaoise on Wednesday May 23rd inform participants about the survey and raise awareness locally on the topic of Swifts generally. The event was well attended and involved a walk to the local Pairc An Phobail where the group were able to observe a myriad of avian species (including Swifts) which use the park as a feeding and nesting site. The park has undergone various improvements for wildlife enhancement purposes in recent years.
- **Laois BWI Branch Event:** The BirdWatch Ireland Laois Branch hosted a Swift event on Tuesday May 29th. We presented an indoor illustrated talk outlining the Swift ecology and conservation and followed it with a walk to a local housing estate that supports a high proportion of Portlaoise nesting Swift population. We observed large numbers of Swifts and spoke to local residents.
- **Laois SAW Event:** To celebrate Swift Awareness Week in Laois we hosted a walk in Mountrath. Meeting at St Francis's RC Church on June 21st. The neighbouring convent buildings have a small Swift colony which is easily observed. We took a walk around the town to observe Swifts feeding over the river and neighbouring fields and to spot previously unrecorded nest locations. We had a small crowd, but the Swifts and excellent weather made an enjoyable event.
- **Laois Heritage Week Event:** Presented preliminary results of Laois Swift Survey 2018 during Heritage Week on August 23rd in Portlaoise.

Media coverage

The project enjoyed coverage in both print and broadcast media before and during the survey season.

- **Wings Magazine:** The project was highlighted on an article in the Summer 2018 edition of BirdWatch Ireland's members magazine Wings (page 15) attached in Appendix 3.
- **Midlands Radio 3:** Swift Special on Open Door program with Ann-Marie Kelly broadcast on Monday June 18th at 7pm. Follow link here:
<https://soundcloud.com/midlands103official/the-open-door-why-swifts-are-in-need-of-our-help>
- **Leinster Express:** Online June 15th, carried the press release about Swift Awareness Week and the Mountrath event. Follow link here:
<https://www.leinsterexpress.ie/news/news/318867/laois-hosting-swift-awareness-week-event-this-coming-week.html>

Social Media

In addition to our events and traditional media outlets we publicised details of the County Swift Surveys extensively through BWI social media platforms – Twitter and Facebook. See Appendix 2

9 Community Involvement

In total, 10 Tidy Town Groups took part in the project. Their involvement was crucial to help to engage the wider community for the common goal to protect the nest sites of Swifts. In addition to the formal arrangements made with community groups we met many residents and community groups during survey visits.

Table 23: Meeting dates of Tidy Towns across county Laois

Tidy Town Groups	Date of Initial Swift Meeting/Workshop
Abbeyleix	03/08/2018
Borris-in-Ossory	26/07/2018
Castletown	02/08/2018
Cullohill	21/07/2018
Erril	09/08/2018
Mountmellick	24/07/2018
Mountrath	07/08/2018
Portarlinton	04/08/2018
Portlaoise	09/08/2018
Raheen	-----



Figure 36: Mountrath Tidy Towns Group with Anton Krastev of BirdWatch Ireland – A.Krastev

10 Discussion

The Laois Swift Survey 2018 is an innovative step towards safeguarding Swifts in the county. It is heartening to see Laois County Council and the Heritage Council recognising the importance of Swifts as an integral part of the urban landscape and of the counties heritage and putting in place proactive measures to help conserve the species. This project and associated findings provide our first detailed picture of distribution of nesting Swifts in the Co. Laois. Indeed, this project is pioneering in many respects and should be used as a case study, from which many other Local Authorities, organisations and communities can learn.

Gathering basic nest site location and density information of Swift colonies is the essential first step in conserving Swifts in towns and villages across Ireland. These existing colonies act as the source populations from which new colonies can be encouraged to establish through proactive measures. Of the 46 localities surveyed in Laois, observations of Swifts were made in 19 with 16 found to contain nesting Swifts. Of the 16 localities where Swift nest sites were confirmed, 8 hold five nest sites or less, some of these concentrated in just one single building. This emphasises the extremely vulnerable nature of Swifts in many locations, where planning decisions and later construction work to just one building can lead to the complete loss of Swifts from a locality. The survey results also clearly identify some of the most important towns in the county for Swifts particularly, Mountmellick, Portlaoise, Portarligton, Stradbally, Donaghmore and Mountrath all of which hold 10 or more nest sites.

The detailed survey work allowed us to identify what building types were of particular importance to Swifts in Laois. The data shows us that Swifts are heavily reliant on residential buildings which are the most commonly occupied building by Swifts in the county. A total of 66 houses in the county provide nest locations and contain 67% of all nests found. This high percentage of Swifts nesting in residential properties creates an issue for the conservation of the Swifts contained. To protect each of these nest sites, it would be required to visit each home and inform the residents of the Swifts and how they can play an active role in their protection. This can be a risky strategy depending on the resident's attitude towards the birds, it is also a hugely time-consuming undertaking. Homes also change hands often and although one family might be content with Swifts the new occupants may have other views.

Heritage Sites contained 17% of all nests found which is significant. Although labelled as Heritage Sites not all are deemed protected structures and are vulnerable by virtue of being ancient and quite often in disrepair. There is also a question of heritage sites such as castles and other ruins that may have been missed during surveying. Where these structures were identified or known to us we made efforts to survey each, however sites radial to the towns and villages may have been missed. Sites not included here that potentially suit nesting Swifts should be surveyed in future.

The remaining nest sites were distributed between, Church/Religious, Small Business, School and Public buildings respectively. Religious buildings such as churches and convents provide homes for 6% of all nests confirmed. This is mainly due to the age and design properties of these buildings that were often similar from town to town. These too are vulnerable as many religious orders in Ireland have sold properties with many more falling derelict >Colonies in these buildings are vulnerable when change through development, demolition or modernisation may happen.

Small business equates for 5% of places where Swift nests are found, these buildings are often two and three-story period terrace buildings along main streets of towns. They are defined by having shop fronts or other commercial activities present and upper levels of these buildings are often disused/semi-derelict again facilitating occupancy by Swifts. These buildings are however undergoing increased development and refurbishment as Ireland continues to prosper economically meaning the Swift colonies contained are at risk of loss once more.

Schools make up for 4% of buildings where Swift nests were found during the survey. As school buildings generally have very long lifespans and don't change ownership, there have considerable potential to offer long-term safe places for Swifts to nest. Schools have been categorised separated from Public Buildings, to allow for opportunity for further awareness raising and biodiversity studies to be undertaken at schools with active Swift colonies.

Lastly and most surprisingly Public Buildings in Laois contain only 1% of all nests found. This is in contrast to 21% in Tipperary where the county's hospitals contain large proportions of the county's nesting Swifts. Public buildings can be good places for Swifts as they tend not to change ownership and by making appropriate staff within Local Authorities aware of the colonies, protective measures can be put in place.

The site-based results and accompanying detailed maps and photographs in this report, provide an excellent user-friendly account of Swift nest site locations across each of the 16 towns and villages where Swifts nest across Co. Laois. It is hoped this will be a valuable resource for both the Local Authority and local communities to help safeguard these important colonies into the future. In addition, the collaborative approach taken with this project to secure buy-in from local communities, volunteers and groups has established a strong and energetic county wide network of Swift Champions, a key component to future conservation efforts. That said it is vital that follow up measures are taken to promote Swift conservation in Laois to come up with novel ways to create awareness and action projects throughout the county.

11 Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the Laois Swift Survey 2018 has been a tremendous success. We now have, for the first time, a detailed picture of the distribution and density of Swift nest sites in the county. We have identified and mapped 149 confirmed nest sites throughout towns and villages across the county, a basis on which conservation measures can be performed. Other results include new information on the building types used by Swifts for nesting, which will help inform conservation priorities and policy. The engagement with local communities, volunteers and groups has established an extensive network of skilled and knowledgeable of Swift Champions across Laois, who will now form the backbone of future Swift conservation efforts in the county.

High-level Recommendations

- Measures should be taken to protect every colony identified through this project. Laois County Council should ensure that any planning applications for redevelopment or new developments at location highlighted in this report– takes the existing swift nests into account so that existing nest sites are preserved – or where that cannot happen – that alternative accommodation for swifts are provided to mitigate the loss of existing sites. Ideally these should be built into any new structures using specialised “Swift Bricks”. Alternatively, external swift boxes and call systems can be provided by the developer/property owner.
- Local authority should include Swift conservation measures in the County Development Plan which should advise provision to incorporate artificial nest sites for Swifts e.g. Swift bricks, Swift nest boxes into all new public building and renovation works and in large-scale commercial developments. Incorporate measures for Swifts into future county Biodiversity Action Plans which outlines their status, conservation measures and management practices needed - architects and planners should be involved delivering these results.
- Recommend that all suitable new developments (outside of Local Authority works) of large buildings such as schools, apartments, housing estates and offices to include provision for Swifts. This can be achieved by using specially designed inbuilt bricks which meet the requirements of Swifts nest and load bearing capacity of the building or by using externally fitted nest boxes. This measure can be used to offset the environmental impact of such large-scale developments.
- Ensure the results of this report are made available and utilised for the protection of Swifts in Co. Laois. Publish a link to PDF report on relevant section of council website for access by the public.
- The map data associated with this report (nest site grid references) should be made known and available to relevant personnel in the council (e.g. planners/architects) or incorporated into council systems to help prevent future loss of Swift nest sites. It could be made available as a layer in the Heritage Maps Application.
- More work is needed to raise awareness about the status of Swifts and the conservation measures needed to prevent their future decline with all members of the county council responsible for heritage, planning, environmental management and administration.
- Continue at county level to encourage local volunteers and community groups to continue surveying for Swifts each summer and entering records to the online mapping system. This has been shown to work in county Offaly where members of Tidy Towns groups have re-surveyed their own localities to ensure Swifts are present at known colonies whilst identifying new and previously unrecorded sites.

- Following on from this project work with local community groups to establish Swift conservation projects where suitable in towns and villages across the county.
- Swift conservation should be highlighted through Tidy Towns on an annual basis as the current awareness raising initiatives have only a limited impact and lifespan.
- Develop a school's programme to engage and educate school teachers and students about Swifts, their conservation and to establish school's conservation projects. This could be integrated into teaching, Green flag initiatives and the overall school ethos of environmental protection.

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.

11.1 Town and Village Specific Recommendations

A key recommendation for all towns and villages is to ensure the protection of existing Swift colonies.

Locality	Recommendations
Abbeyleix	Local effort needed to locate nests in the town during 2019. Abbeyleix Heritage House provides fantastic opportunity to strengthen the Swift colonies in Abbeyleix by making small modifications to the roof in order to allow Swifts access to the roof space but restricting other species such as Starlings.
Ballinakill	Look for new nests during 2019 and ensure to retain the existing nest sites. There may be more unconfirmed nests at Ballinakill National School.
Borris-in-Ossory	Immediate measures are required to provide nest sites for the Swifts in Borris-in-Ossory. There are many potential buildings for box projects. Additionally, some buildings could alter their soffits in a way to suit Swifts requirements. Consider making provision for Swifts if and when the old convent building is being restored.
Castletown	Ensure to protect the existing nest sites.
Clonaslee	Provision of nesting areas is required in Clonaslee, because the breeding population is holding on by a thread. There are nest boxes installed at the church tower (tourist office) however they must be replaced to more suitable location on the church tower.
Cullohill	Ensure to protect the existing Swift nests sites.
Donaghmore	Donaghmore House Museum can sustain increases in Swift population in the near future. If there are any renovations or maintenance work required in the near future they must be carefully planned to avoid the loss of Swift nest holes and to avoid disturbance of adult birds between May and August.
Durrow	Provision of nest boxes or retrofitting soffits is advised on the basis that Swifts are present only in two buildings across the whole village thereby indicating vulnerability and potentially lack of nesting areas.
Errill	Protect the existing nests in Ballagh Castle, it may be of benefit to engage with the nearby school in a nest box project. Clonburren Castle is in the vicinity of Ballagh Castle, it has been observed that Swifts may be present and nesting there too. Survey These sites in 2019
Mountmellick	Protect existing nests sites, re-survey for nests during 2019.
Mountrath	Protect existing nests sites, re-survey all sites during 2019. Consider buildings which may be suitable for nest box project.
Newtown House Mill	Protect existing nests and monitor for new nests.
Portarlinton	Protect existing nests sites, survey for new nests during 2019.
Portlaoise	Ensure that new proposals for buildings are incorporating inbuilt Swift nest bricks or boxes. This recommendation is based on the fact that majority of the Swifts are concentrated in one estate which makes them vulnerable. Ensure that no more nests are lost in St. Brigid's Estate due to the installation of soffits and/or new gutters.
Raheen	Survey for the presence of Swifts.
Rathdowney	Provide nesting areas for the Swifts, recommendation based on the observation that Swift nests were only confirmed in O'Daly Terrace Estate.
Rosenallis	Survey the village in order to locate the breeding pair, and potentially provide new nest sites.

Stradbally	Protect the existing nests and provide nesting areas. Anecdotally Swifts have been observed to occupy buildings near the centre of the town.
The Swan	Survey for the presence of Swifts.



Figure 37: Swift coming out of a nest from Donaghmore House Museum (A.Krastev)

Acknowledgements

Birdwatch Ireland would like to acknowledge the support of The Heritage Council and Laois County Council in funding this project with special thanks to Catherine Casey Laois Heritage Officer for her support and enthusiasm.

Tidy Towns Groups and local groups have been involved in their respective communities and in no particular order we would like to thank:

Abbeyleix Tidy Town Group

Borris-in-Ossory Tidy Town Group

Castletown Tidy Town Group

Cullohill Tidy Town Group

Erril Tidy Town Group

Mountmellick Tidy Town Group

Mountrath Tidy Town Group

Portarlinton Tidy Town Group

Portlaoise Tidy Town Group

Raheen Tidy Town Group

We thank all the residents and business owners that allowed us access to their properties to aid with survey work and aims of the 2018 Laois Swift Project.

A special thanks to BirdWatch Ireland Laois Branch members whom voluntarily undertook a preliminary survey during 2017. Their efforts laid the foundation for the 2018 study.

Thanks to Stephen Downey for his ongoing help and expertise in designing the ArcGIS online data application system and his help with data management throughout project.

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Appendices

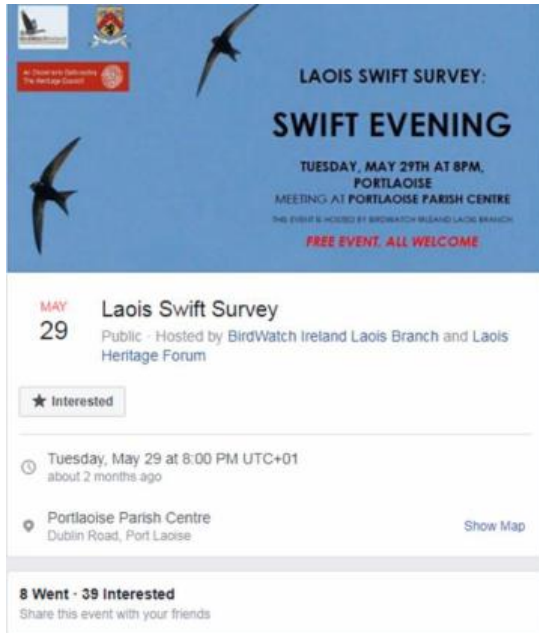
Appendix 1

Swift Survey 2018

Observer Name	
Date/Time	
County	Westmeath Tipperary Laois
Town/ Village	
Weather	
Final Peak Swift Count	
Total Confirmed Swift Nests	
Local Tidy Town Group Contacted	Yes / No

Nest Site Form							
Time 24hr format	Nest Location (12 Pearse St, Trim)	Building Type: (e.g. House/Residential, Industrial, Church/Religious, School, Castle/Heritage Site)	Using Nestbox (Yes/No)	Swifts Peak Count	Confirmed Swift Nests	Description of Nest Site Location	Photo Tag (as per phone)
		House/Residential, Business , Industrial, Church/Religious, School, Castle/Heritage Site	(Yes/No)				
		House/Residential, Business , Industrial, Church/Religious, School, Castle/Heritage Site	(Yes/No)				
		House/Residential, Business , Industrial, Church/Religious, School, Castle/Heritage Site	(Yes/No)				

Appendix 2



The Open Door with Ann-Marie

Monday
10:00 - 20:00



See All

Appendix 3

Wings Magazine: Article in the summer edition 2018 of BirdWatch Ireland's members magazine Wings (page 15)

national

News

2018 Swift season has begun!

By Ricky Whelan

Making Swift survey plans and scheduling Swift-related events in February, as I do, always seems strange. It feels like the Swift season is never going to come...until mid-April, when we impatiently await their imminent arrival. Our Swift survey and monitoring begins the very day the first birds arrive back from Africa...and it can't come soon enough!

This will be our busiest season yet, with projects planned throughout the country. Currently, we are putting things in place for our **National Swift Survey**, which has been generously funded by the **Heritage Council** since its inception in 2014. Swift nest-site records are vital to the protection of Swifts, and they have resulted in many interventions to save nest sites over the years.

Work also continues at some of our nation's most historic sites, as we enter our fourth year of Swift monitoring at **heritage properties** maintained by the **Office of Public Works** (OPW). Over that period, we have found active nests in castles, abbeys and even round towers. These finds on historic buildings allow

us to guide the OPW on retaining Swift nest-sites while carrying out restoration work.

During 2017, we undertook our first **whole-county Swift survey**, in County Offaly. Supported by the Heritage Office of **Offaly County Council**, the project was an enormous success, with BirdWatch Ireland members, Tidy Towns groups and other interested parties rising to the challenge of locating almost all of the Swift nest sites in the county. We plan to develop this project further during the year.

This year, three more counties will follow Offaly's lead, with **Tipperary, Laois and Westmeath** all getting stuck into Swift surveys. If you live or work in any of these counties, please make sure to help out with these surveys. The surveys rely completely on the people who get involved. So, to get the word out, to update and up-skill citizen scientists, we are planning a host of **Swift walks, talks and workshops**. A full schedule of these can be found on the Swift Project webpages on the BirdWatch Ireland website – go to the 'Our Work' section and find it under 'Volunteer



Swift
Photo: Graham Catley

Surveys,' or just go to bit.ly/2q1qJoT. It will be updated as our plans progress.

Acknowledgments

A big thank you to all of you volunteer **citizen scientists** who have contributed to our Swift surveys. Without even realising it, you may have already saved a Swift nesting colony! Our thanks, too, to the **Heritage Council** for appreciating the importance of our Swift work and supporting it, and to the **OPW** and all of its heritage site staff for their enthusiasm and support. Our thanks, also, to the **Heritage Office of Offaly County Council** for backing the county survey, and to the Heritage Officers of **Tipperary, Laois and Westmeath** for getting involved and supporting our Swift work in 2018.

➡ Keep an eye on our Swift blog, *Life on the Wing* at birdwatchirelandswifts.blogspot.ie for event information, project updates and Swift news ■