

This Species Action Plan sets out to maintain and enlarge populations of swallows, swifts and martins on Caravan Club-owned sites, and has been drafted for Club Site Teams and Site Wardens. It provides background information and makes recommendations on sympathetic habitat management for these species.

## Introduction

*Swallows, swifts and martins are highly specialized birds, having scythe-shaped wings for sustained flight, and short, wide beaks for catching insects on the wing. They so rarely land that their legs have become very small, but their feet remain strong enough to provide a good grip on ledges, wires or twigs. Summer migrants to the UK, most individuals over-winter in Africa.*

**The Caravan Club audit 2006 revealed that swallows, swifts and/or martins are present at 81 Club sites**

## How to recognise these species

- **Swallow** has a very dark blue back and cap, red chin, white belly and deeply forked tail with streamers
- **Swift** has a longer wingspan (42-48 cm), all-dark body which often looks black against the sky. Body becomes browner in late summer. Tail deeply forked
- **House martin** has brown-black back, under-wings and tail, and white belly, throat and rump. Tail is forked but without streamers
- **Sand martin** is smaller (26-29 cm wingspan), with all-brown upperparts, wings and breast band over white belly and chin. Tail forked, without streamers



## Current status

- Swallow populations have declined recently, due to loss of habitat quality in both their breeding and wintering grounds. As a species with unfavourable conservation status across Europe, according to IUCN (The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) criteria, swallows are also on the RSPB Amber list of Birds of Conservation Concern. There are approximately 375,000 UK breeding pairs
- Swift numbers have declined steeply over the last century, but there are signs of recovery. There are currently an estimated 85,000 UK breeding pairs
- House martin populations are currently stable, but have suffered some recent losses. As a result of moderate (25 – 49%) declines in the UK breeding population over last 25 years, house martins also feature on the RSPB Amber list. There are thought to be between 270,000 - 530,000 UK breeding pairs
- Sand martin populations have crashed twice over the past 50 years, as a result of extreme drought in African wintering grounds. The species has unfavourable conservation status across Europe, and is on the RSPB Amber list. There are approximately 160,000 UK breeding pairs

## Ecology/management requirements

**Habitat:** Swallows, swifts and house martins can be found in a range of habitats, including urban, wetland and agricultural areas. Originally cliff nesters, most now build their nests under the eaves of buildings. Swifts require old buildings, usually building the nest in a wall cavity. The sand martin lives in river valleys or near water, and nests in earth bank holes (usually in river banks).

**Food:** All are aerial feeders, taking flying insects and dispersing spiders.

## How to look after these species

	Site safeguard and management	Species management and protection
DO'S	<p><b>DO</b> <u>Allow lush and diverse grasslands to develop</u>, by cutting infrequently and avoiding fertilizer and herbicide use (encourages plant, and therefore insect species diversity)</p> <p><b>DO</b> <u>Encourage healthy insect populations</u> and prevent poisoning by reducing insecticide use</p> <p><b>DO</b> <u>Provide a pond</u> if other aquatic habitats are absent – these will provide further flying insects, and wet mud for nest-building (birds will soak dry mud in it if needed)</p>	<p><b>DO</b> <u>Provide nest sites</u> under roof eaves. Artificial cup-nests work, but are ugly, expensive, and are not as favoured by birds. Better (and simpler) is a large nail, partly hammered into the wall. The nail provides a scaffold which swallows and house martins readily use to build their own nests</p> <p><b>DO</b> <u>Provide small roof and wall cavities</u> during building renovation/development, to allow swifts to nest</p> <p><b>DO</b> Start a weekly <u>bird sightings board</u>, to educate visitors, and monitor birds on site</p> <p><b>DO</b> <u>Protect earth or sand banks</u> near water from erosion, trampling or excessive disturbance, using fencing. Sand martins need this habitat for nest burrows</p>
DON'TS	<p><b>DON'T</b> Use <u>fertilizers, herbicides, or insecticides</u> on site if possible</p> <p><b>DON'T</b> <u>Cut more than ½ the available grassland</u> at any one time. Rotate cutting so that there is always some longer grassland present for insects</p> <p><b>DON'T</b> <u>Renovate walls or roofs with nests between April and September:</u> Disturbance of active nests is illegal</p>	<p><b>DON'T</b> Directly <u>disturb nests</u> when they are in use (although nesting swallows and house martins are used to the presence of humans, and windows opening/closing)</p> <p><b>DON'T</b> <u>Close gaps into abandoned building spaces</u>, as they provide access for birds nesting inside</p>

For further information on this species visit:

The Caravan Club Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for swallows, swifts and martins: <http://www.caravanclub.co.uk>

London Biodiversity Statement for swifts: [http://www.lbp.org.uk/03action\\_pages/ac32\\_swifts.htm](http://www.lbp.org.uk/03action_pages/ac32_swifts.htm)

North Lanarkshire Local BAP for swifts:

<http://www.northlan.gov.uk/leisure+and+tourism/local+environment/biodiversity+species/swift+.pdf>