



# KESWICK SWIFTS

Promoting & supporting the conservation of Swifts in the Keswick area

## NEWSLETTER May 2024

### SWIFTS HAVE BEEN SEEN IN KESWICK!

Welcome to the new Swifts season! There is an ever-increasing number of reports of sightings, and the re-occupation of nest boxes and bricks, coming in from places further south, and most recently from Sedbergh; and we've now had our first solitary sighting in Keswick, as well as others elsewhere in Cumbria!

The first birds to be seen are often what writer Charles Foster calls the "vanguard party" – a small number of birds seen briefly but not apparently staying on in an area. They get followed in a week or so by the first breeding birds returning to their nest sites; then a few weeks after that, the younger non-breeding adults that come looking for somewhere to breed in future years.

So be prepared to start using your calling system very soon, if you have one, and have some unoccupied boxes or bricks to advertise to birds that are seeking somewhere to nest!

### MORE BOXES AND BRICKS GOING UP AROUND KESWICK...

By the end of 2022 we had 22 Swift boxes and bricks in the town. This number grew to 46 during the course of 2023, and we've already got quite a few more put up, ready for the imminent breeding season, with quite a few more in prospect.



The Keswick Mountain Rescue Centre has put up 3 boxes, and has a call system ready for use. They hope to get some interest shown by Swifts investigating nearby colonies.

Dave Piercy and Kathy Morris have got a third box put up in The Headlands, and will shortly get a fourth one. These join the three that have been up on their house, and a neighbour's. All of these got occupied over the last 3 summers, so with luck the new boxes will soon attract residents.

Dave and Kathy have also installed Keswick's first Swift nest webcam, so they'll be able to keep watch over how that box gets used in due course!

The installation of their boxes was the first to be done by Peter Garner. He's the founder and CEO of Fjell Event Tipis, who rent out tipi-style marquees for weddings and events, so he's extremely well qualified to do this. **Peter is very kindly**

**offering to put up Swift boxes, for free, for anyone who has boxes to be put up, but no-one to do this!**

If you're interested in getting Pete's help, please get in touch with me (Nicki) in the first instance.



## **KESWICK SWIFTS' FIRST GATHERING, 18<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2024**



We held our first Gathering on 18<sup>th</sup> April, to bring together as many as possible of the ever-increasing list of people who have a real interest in Swifts in this area. The event went really well – more than 40 people attended, and by the end of the evening there was a real buzz – possibly aided by the wine and nibbles that were on offer!

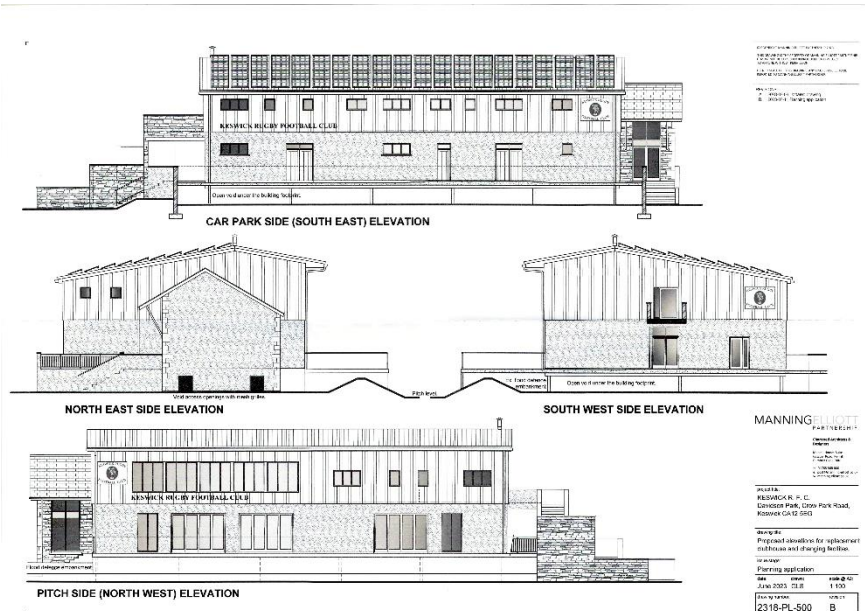
Keswick Swifts' Core Group all contributed to the running of the event, and worked seamlessly together.

Our grateful thanks go to all who participated!



## KESWICK RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

The Rugby Club has now achieved planning permission to demolish the existing clubhouse and squash court, and to build a grand new clubhouse. Their plans will incorporate both Swift bricks and Swift boxes – there’s scope to use Swift bricks on the north-east facing gable wall, with some Swift boxes also going under the eaves of the south-east wall, facing the car park. All the bricks and boxes are being sponsored by a number of Swifts supporters – to whom we and the club are hugely grateful!



As the new clubhouse will be very close – just 20 metres at closest – to Lakehead Court, which hosts a sizeable colony of Swifts under its eaves, we expect it won’t be too long before the new facilities attract their first expressions of interest from Swifts!

## ANCHOR HOUSING ASSOCIATION & LAKEHEAD COURT

Keswick Swifts met up in March with Mark Hough, Surveyor with Anchor Housing Association, whose responsibilities include Lakehead Court. The Court is home to the town’s second-largest colony of Swifts, which makes it very vulnerable to any building works that may need to be done. So it was with great relief that we found that Mark himself loves Swifts, and was very willing to commit to avoiding doing any building works, or having scaffolding in place, during the Swifts nesting season. Further, he was very willing to commit to putting up replacement Swift bricks or boxes, in advance of any works that may

be needed, to entice birds returning to nest sites that no longer exist to move into them. This, we are told by colleagues with much more experience, can work very well, and minimise the losses to a colony when building works have to be carried out.

For our part, Keswick Swifts will need to ensure that annual nest site surveys pinpoint just where birds are gaining entry to the eaves, so that as and when building works happen, we can make sure that Anchor Housing Association put up boxes or bricks as close as possible to those old entry points.

## **DEVELOPMENTS AT CASTLE INN**

Last year, Simon Ireland discovered that the staff quarters at the Castle Inn houses a magnificent colony of Swifts – he counted 17 different nest sites in the walls.

While this is wonderful news, it also raises concerns, as the Keswick Reminder recently reported that the Inn is changing hands – but we don't know who's taking it over.

We will want to contact the new management at the earliest opportunity, to alert them to the Swifts that they host, and to ask them to take very good care of them – specially if they have to do any building works to the staff quarters. So if you find out more, do let us know!

## **WATCH OUT FOR OUR NEW WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK PAGE!**

Keswick Swifts have been aware that we might benefit from having an online presence, so we've been working to set up a website, and hope to start a Facebook page soon.

The website – which will be at [www.keswickswifts.org](http://www.keswickswifts.org) – is aimed at providing some basic information about Swifts, for anyone who wants to know more. And it will signpost users to the much bigger, hugely authoritative websites that are well-known to so many: Swiftmapper, Action for Swifts and Swift Conservation, among others.

Steve Bogle, a freelance consultant, is very kindly doing the technical work of setting up the website for us, in his (rather limited!) spare time. We're hoping to "go live" with it – albeit possibly not in a perfect state! – by the end of May.

Kathy Morris will then set up, with Steve's guidance and help, a Facebook page for us, and we intend that this will also be embedded on the front page of the website. It will be great to have this up and running, so everyone can contribute their Swifts news, easily and speedily, to all our community!

And in the meantime, **please send in all your Swift observations and news to us at the email address below** – we always love hearing from you!

Happy Swift-watching from all at Keswick Swifts!

**Nicki Baker**

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