



Hopessay Parish in 2015 Breeding Swallows, House Martins and Swifts this year.

My thanks to everyone who helped the survey by sending me their survey forms (62) or when I visited you to enquire. Between us we produced the information needed to count and map all the known nests this year – 261 of them.

Below are some highlights of the results and overleaf are the maps for the three species; one each for Swallow and House Martin. The Swift nests, at one address, are on the Swallow map, in the Aston detail.

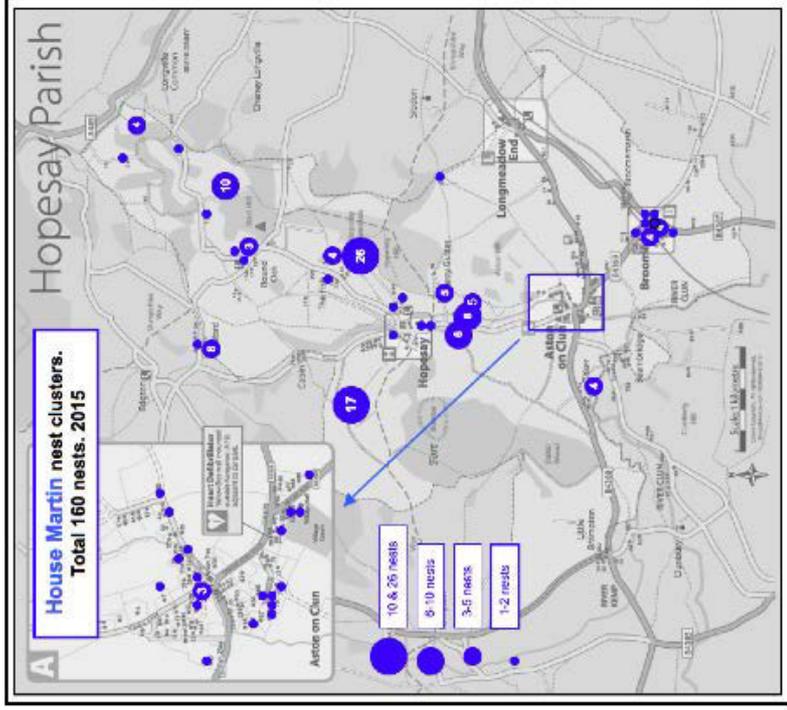
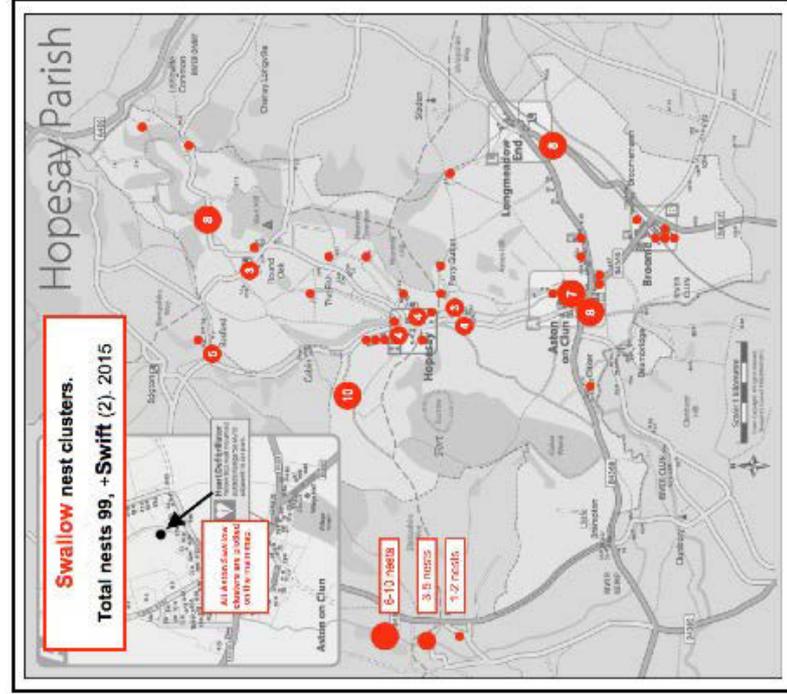
- In all there were 99 Swallow nests, 160 House Martin nests and just two Swift nests: House Martin nests outnumbered Swallow nests by 1.6 to 1.
- **House Martins** favoured nesting in the villages though the highest of their numbers – colonies of 10 or more nests - were at farmsteads or isolated houses. In contrast most **Swallows** nested away from the villages - see the maps overleaf. There may have been more than the two **Swift** nests and a closer search will be made for them next year.
- As a group the birds tended to nest together in clusters around certain favoured places – for reasons I don't currently understand (see Figures 5 of the full report).
- Among the clusters the mere 26 houses, (out of 247) just 11% of them, together held two thirds (66.8%) of all the nests in the parish.
- Of all 247 houses in the parish 176 of them (71%) had no nests at all of the three species.
- There were many reports that nest numbers were down this year compared with the last 1, 5 10 and 20 years – a partial resurvey next year will start to identify any trend in the future.

I will follow up this survey with a partial repeat in 2016, revisiting every house on the Aston map along with the largest House Martin colonies throughout the parish.

If you would like to encourage either or all these species to nest with you – and it appears that they do need help – there are some notes on the attached sheet. If you would like additional advice at your particular property then do contact me and I'll see if I can help.

Contact: swallows@lanius.org.uk

For more detailed results the 9-page report is available as a PDF file on 'Histo' at www.lanius.org.uk/sos. Go to 'The Historical Record', then 'All historical documents' and scroll down to 2015 to locate and open the file.



Swallows, House Martins and Swifts nesting in Hopesay parish in 2015.

The highest numbers of **Swallows** were centred on farms and a few houses with outbuildings and access through open doors or windows allowing the birds in to construct their nests on ledges or adhere them to walls or other objects. Elsewhere Swallows were few and scattered, again restricted to sheds, garages and porches to which they have access.

House Martins outnumbered Swallows by 1.6 to 1 and appeared to be reliant, for large numbers, on available food and suitable nesting opportunities – sizable overhanging soffits under which to plaster their dome-shaped nests. They occupied a considerable number of houses, in low numbers, and were the more familiar bird around settlements, notably Aston. Modern houses tend to lack the overhanging soffits on which they depend.

Swifts (on the **Swallow** map) were only reported nesting at one address in Aston at which there were two pairs.

Surveys will be carried out in 2016 onwards, at a selection of sites, to monitor changes in numbers.

John Tucker, November 2015
 Full report online, see www.janlus.org.uk/soas.at.2015



How to encourage the three to nest with you.

Also see Figure 1 on page 1 of the full report.

Swallows need to be able to fly into barns, garages, sheds, porches and other constantly accessible covered buildings. Here they will be able to cement their mud-mixed-with-reinforcing-dry-grasses nests to the walls, on top of beams and ledges etc. - Swallows can adapt. Leaving garage and shed doors or windows slightly open should allow them in – they will then find nest sites with you, if enough food is available nearby.

If you are worried about the mess made by their droppings then wait until the nest is built and the eggs laid and then fix a platform of wood beneath the nest to catch the mess. Most of the mess will be created during the period in which adults are feeding the young in the nest.

House Martins want to nest under eaves, usually but to always on the east or north-facing walls away from the heat of the sun, unless wide eaves will give them shade. They like wide eaves with wood soffits (they are not keen on plastic ones) and brick, stone or rendered walls – easier to plaster their dome-shaped nests, with top entry-hole, to.

If you don't have wide eaves, at least 15cm overhang (more will be very attractive) then you probably will not be able to attract them.

However you could try putting up artificial House Martin nests – preferable facing north or east away from the sun - and hope that the birds move in. Search the internet for 'house martin nests'.

To avoid the mess of their droppings, as with Swallows, you can use wooden ledges under the nests to catch it, if you can get high enough to fix them. Or just put wood on the ground to catch it and clear up when nesting is finished.

Swifts are a different matter. If you have the right house with the right gaps they will probably find you, wherever you are. Attracting them may be possible.

They like to swoop high up into the roof-space – so old Victorian buildings are a delight to them. They enter the roof-space through tiny gaps between the wall and the slates at the very top; other small gaps giving access to nest-ledges inside the building may be used.

Special nest-boxes can attract Swifts - you can search the internet for them. They are not cheap and will be awkward to install but they may be successful; a challenge for you. Well worth a try if you have a tall building – they are not likely to nest at ground floor level. Please let me know if you try – I'd be interested in the result and we currently have so few nesting in the parish.

Good luck.

PLEASE NOTE. It is illegal to remove nests which are in use.

AND BEWARE: <http://www.birdwatch.co.uk/channel/newsitem.asp?c=11&cate=16117>

- an example £515 fine for knocking down a Swallow's nest.

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