

# Talk for Trieste

31<sup>st</sup> May 2024



**SWIFT** CONSERVATION

KEEPING THE SKIES ALIVE

[www.swift-conservation.org](http://www.swift-conservation.org)

# Helping Swifts - What Can Go Wrong?

Using our influence to prevent  
urban environment degradation & biodiversity loss



Photo: Courtesy of Carolyn Knowlman



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# **UK Swallow, Swift and House Martin populations have nearly halved over the past 10 years**

**The reduction in insect numbers contributes to this plus intolerance and the loss of nest places**



# **Why help wildlife?**

## ***Because our survival depends on it***



**“Our civilisation depends utterly on the plants, animals, and microorganisms of Earth that supply it with essential ecosystem services ranging from crop pollination and protection to supplying food from the sea and maintaining a liveable climate”**

**Prof Paul Ehrlich Stanford University**

# We also know Nature is good for us



Data from 25,000 Londoners whose description of their mental wellbeing was matched to their addresses & distance from local green spaces

Dr Vikki Houlden of Newcastle University

# But Nature is Under Attack

**“EU nature restoration laws face collapse as member states withdraw support”**



**More than 70% of environmental journalists have been attacked for their work since 2009, according to a UNESCO report**

**Farmers protest at St Etienne against proposals for laws to restore biodiversity**

Photograph: Kakoula 10 - Wikipedia

# Nature Recovery *is* Possible



**Most of Europe's population live in cities and towns & lack green places & wildlife, but application of Biodiversity Recovery concepts can create new environments for wildlife like here at the "Brutalist" London Barbican**

# **But people know very little about birds & how to help them**



**Promoting urban biodiversity is vital but there are very few experts  
and many plans support poor solutions**



**They assume birds will use almost any nest place - however bizarre**



**All available on E-Bay – All useless?**

# People are easily persuaded by unrealistic visions

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**Wildlife can live in new developments – but this is far too optimistic  
Dogs, cats, children and thoughtless adults will stop this happening**



# The Cardiff Bay Animal Wall

Many of the intended species do not tolerate neighbours, others are predators  
There are far too many nest places for a realistic population level



Designed by an artist the Animal Wall at Century Wharf in Cardiff  
has 1000 nest boxes – but no occupiers?

Photo: Courtesy of Seth Wales & Wikipedia

# Very big, very black, and a mistake?



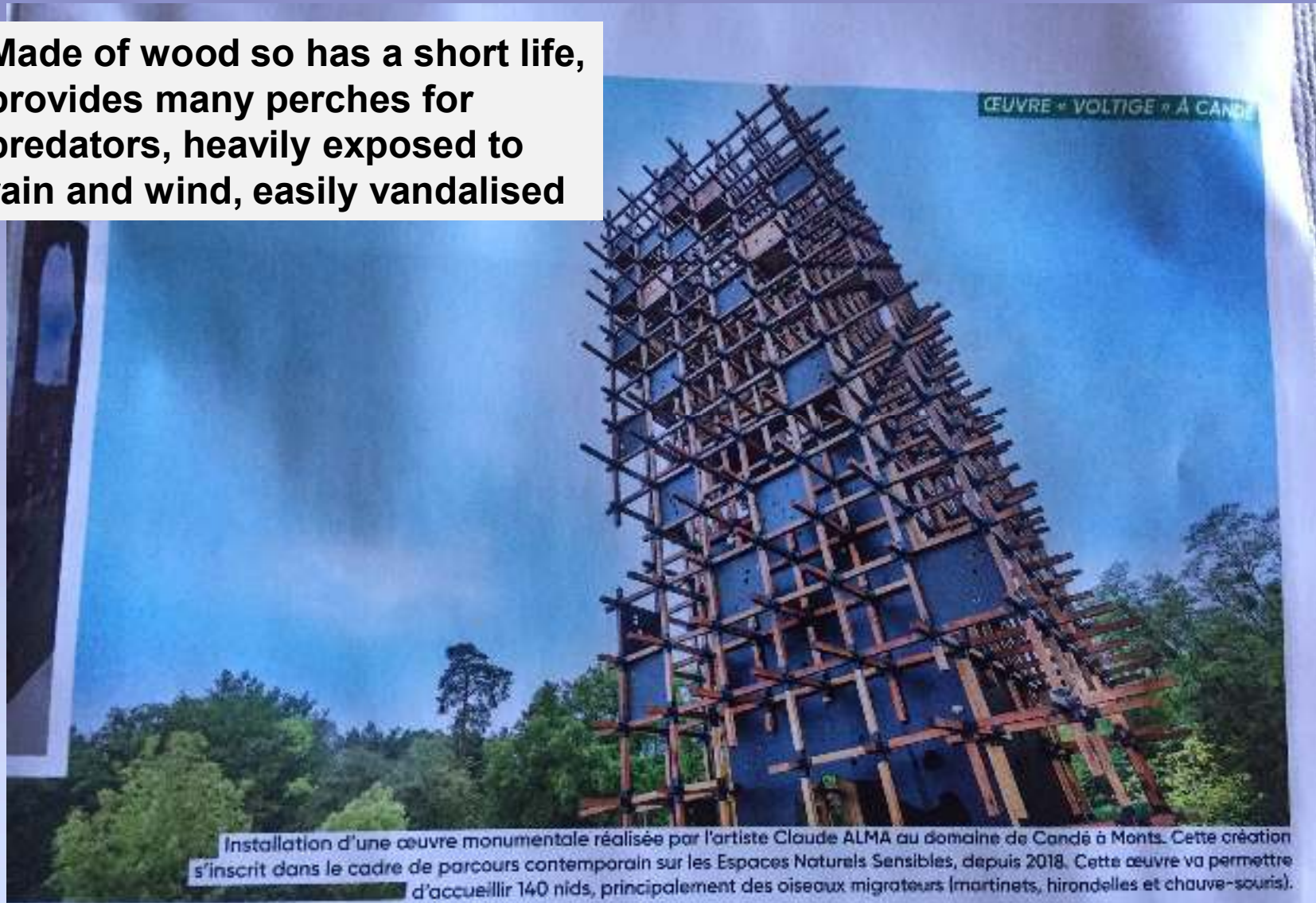
Exposed to the rain and wind, made of wood so can rot, black so it will get very hot, with easy access for predators, & easily vandalised



Photos: Courtesy of Carolyn Knowlman

# Monumental? Yes! But will it work?

Made of wood so has a short life, provides many perches for predators, heavily exposed to rain and wind, easily vandalised



**23,000 Euros  
totally  
wasted?**

**What wild birds will use it?**

**Whoever designed and  
approved this seems to  
know nothing about wild  
birds & their needs**

**Photo Courtesy of Carolyn Knowlman**



# This could be dangerous!

**“Bird Friendly” planted balconies in Milan, close to bird killing mirror glass buildings – illogical, tragic**

Photo: Courtesy of Maurizio Ghidoli - Wikipedia



**Schemes like these divert huge amounts of money that might be better spent on more modest sustainable ventures**

**When they fail they make people think that Wildlife and Swifts cannot be helped**

**They can destroy public confidence & give us a bad reputation!**

# **Why do these projects get built?**

**It's easy for developers - one job, one bill,  
minimal management**

**Why do useless nest boxes get made?  
People who design, make, sell and buy them  
know nothing about birds' needs**

**Where is the input from Ornithologists?  
Nowhere!**

**This has to be changed – Expertise must win!**



# **We Must Challenge the Mistakes & Educate!**



**We must be brave!**

**Denounce (politely!) the mistakes**

**Promote good design & practical solutions**

**Intervene when things go wrong**

**Use our expert knowledge**

**Disseminate the facts about Swifts & other birds**

**Prove our case with good examples**

**You are probably doing this already – If not, please start now!**

# Guide, Enthuse, Provide Examples!



**Ibstock Swift Bricks installed in the Public Library in Antrim, Northern Ireland, UK**

# **Offer Assistance: London Olympics 2012**



**Swift Conservation got Swifts made one of the 4 London birds associated with the 2012 Olympics & advised on how to build in places for them to nest across the Olympics site at Stratford**

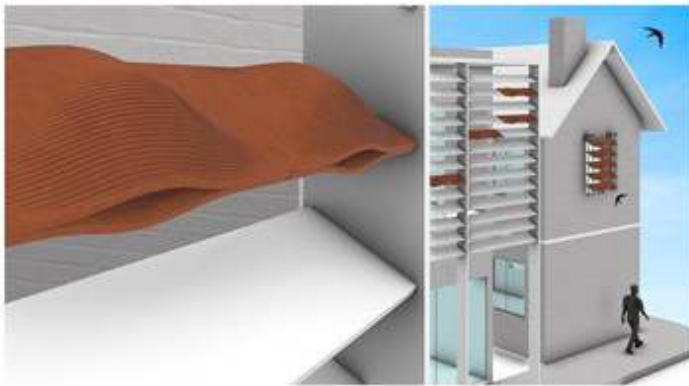
# Teach, Train, Inspire



## Swift Blinders

Multifunctional Modular Swift Nest

Manthan R Modh  
manthan.modh@mail.bcu.ac.uk



Swift Blinder is a modular nesting box designed to fit seamlessly into new and existing buildings. This concept is derived from sun-blind curtains, which make this design a multifunctional product. Through the blinds buildings will be protected from sun light. This Swift nest will be more functional and attractive as a part of the building.

This design will allow individuals to adapt to new Architectural facade elements as louvres (Blinders) which can be placed in institutional, commercial, residential buildings. People can install this nest under the roof (eaves). Swift blinds are made from Terracotta and wood, 100% sustainable materials. Swift Blinders will mimic natural swift tree caves which will also help to maintain a consistent temperature. In addition, this versatile design will also attract individuals to adopt nests for spreading awareness.

Swift are dramatically becoming extinct due to their urbanisation and the high usage of pesticides. Additionally, Swift birds are also facing harsh climate issues, coming from an extreme hot climate to cold. If they are unable to find shelter, then it is very difficult for them to survive in urban areas. There is no doubt that several individuals have designed Swift nests which work well.

There is a big scope for design, affordability, and adoptability which will allow to create an awareness of Swift conservation through putting a Swift nest on commercialised buildings. This allows students and workers to find a space of silence in a loud city, bringing wildlife into urban areas.vv



**Teaching Birmingham City  
University MA Design  
students how to design nest  
places for Swifts  
In 2022**

# Obtain Official Accreditation



**Action for Swifts and Swift Conservation spent several years negotiating for a British Standard for Swift Bricks, covering materials, sizes, use and location – it is now the accepted standard for manufacturers and builders, and well worth all the effort**

# Promote Proven Swift Bricks



**The AfS "S" Brick, the Schwegler Swift Brick and Ecosurv Swift Bricks all in use!**

# Promote Proven Nest-boxes



**Impeckable, Schwegler, home made & Zeist nest boxes all in use**

# Go for simple viable installations



**Battle Public Library in East Sussex, England, a multi nest brick project funded by Swift Conservation with AfS "S" Bricks & managed by House Martin Conservation UK**



# Prioritise attractive projects that will get good publicity

111 Tyers Street Battersea London



# Copy successful projects like Eugenia Parisi's work in Campiglia Marittima

Photo: Courtesy of Eugenia Parisi



# Make progress everywhere you can

Work with local government to get Swift Bricks into all new buildings – the towns of Brighton and Hastings have both agreed!

## WELCOME TO BRIGHTON & HOVE

**Guidance note for provision of swift boxes (including swift bricks) in new development**

**The requirement**

**What are swift bricks and swift boxes?**

Swift bricks and swift boxes are bird boxes designed for swifts. They provide a space for the birds to nest. Swift bricks fit in place of a brick in a wall. Swift boxes fit on the outside of walls, below the eaves.

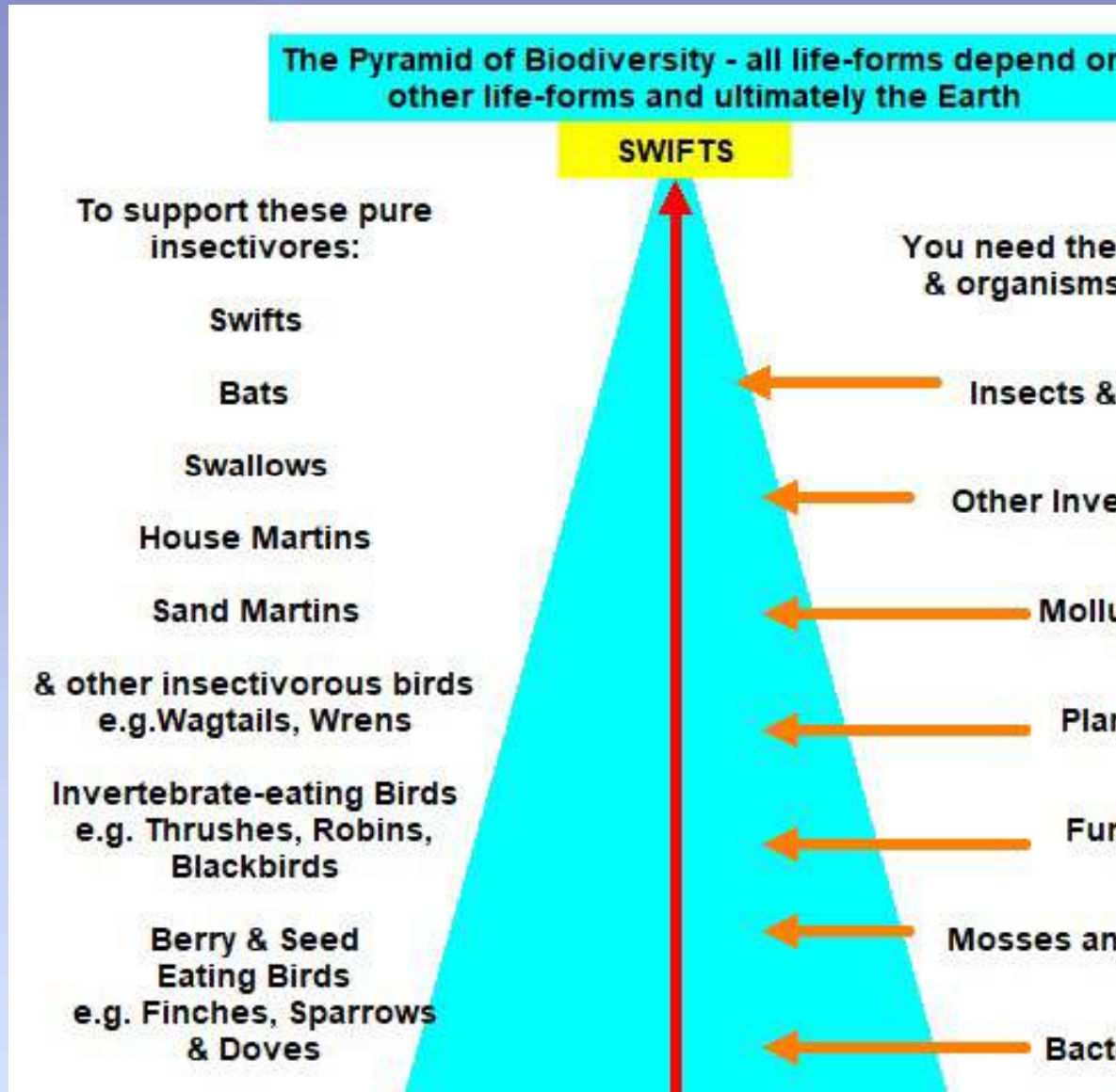
**When are swift bricks or swift boxes required?**

All new developments in the city of 5 metres or greater in height need swift boxes or swift bricks. The best option are swift bricks as they integrate into a building. As such, they are permanent and provide better temperature control.



Photo: Courtesy of Qmin & Wikipedia

# And don't forget Biodiversity!



Swifts need insects – you can guess the rest!



**And we will succeed in helping Swifts and the  
diversity of our Planet too**



Photo: Courtesy of Piotr Szczypa

Piotr Szczypa ©

# Swifts - we need more!

Photo: Courtesy of Piotr Szczypa



# And we need Biodiversity...



Photo: Courtesy of Piotr Szczypa

**...if we are to survive!**



Photo: Courtesy of Piotr Szczypa



# Beauty, Drama, Action, Life!



Photo: Courtesy of Piotr Szczypa

Piotr Szczypa ©

# And they share our homes!



*What more can you ever want than Swifts in your own home  
and in the skies above?*

Photo: Courtesy of Piotr Szczypa

# Thank you so much for being here!

Photo: Courtesy of Piotr Szczypa



# Now let's go out and help Swifts!



Piotr Szczypa ©

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Thanking all contributors especially Piotr Szczypa for their photographs & Erich Kaiser  
& Ulrich Tigges for their help and inspiration and for setting us all out on this road**

Photo: Courtesy of Piotr Szczypa

# Hoping to see you again in 2026!



Photo: Courtesy of Erich Kaiser



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