

Swift Count Summary – June 2019

This year we decided to repeat the counts of 2001 and 1995/96. Statistically, the best time to estimate breeding numbers is on warm, dry and relatively calm evenings in the first two weeks of June. It was also vital that we chose this period so that we could compare our data to previous counts. Most birds seen and heard screaming in the evenings (from 9pm) will be the male; the female should be incubating eggs. Counts taken after this period will probably include females out with her mate catching food for their newly hatched chicks!

Unfortunately, the weather wasn't ideal during the count period!

I am grateful to those who took part in the activity and below is a summary of the data: -

Site Name	Area	week com	May		June					July			Maximum		
			19	26	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	21	2019	2001	1995 / 96
Fields Rd	Alsager					0						0	2	6	
Station Rd (south end)						0						0	5	6	
Sandbach Rd North						4						4	8	10	
Crewe Road						6						6			
Station Rd (north end)						7						7	2	4	
Caldy Rd						8						8	8		
Talke Rd			8			8					13	13	11	10	
Ruskin Rd/Rook St	Crewe - Central						3					3	6	30	
Tynedale/Carlisle/ Lunt Av							9					9	c60	c50	
Tipkinder Park					20							20			
Rockwood Ave/Alton St							30					30	6	11	
Alton St	Crewe - NE			0	16	60		15				60	80	50	
Micklewright/Charlesworth							15					15	13	30	
Surrey St/Vincent St				3		6	18					18	10	11	
Ford Ln/Badger Ave	Crewe - NW						4					4	12	17	
Stamp Ave							8					8	3	10	
Cliffe Rd/Bradfield Rd	Crewe - S&W						12					12	30	20	
Claughton Ave							30					30	60	20	
Frank Webb Ave		Crewe - West End	20	20	20	20	20	15					20		9
West End SBI										50	35	50	120	450	
Middlewich Rd	Elworth				12			8				12		3	
Sandy Ln, Wheelock Heath	Haslington					0				4		4	7	31	
Cartwright Rd / Vicarage Rd						37						37	35	90	
London Rd	Holmes Chapel											0	5	15	
Macclesfield Rd												0	0	c12	
Chadwick Rd	Middlewich			0								0	22	15	
Queen St				5								5	31		
Sandbach Town Centre	Sandbach					10						10	c45	22	
Shavington	Shavington		2			1			1	2	2	2			
Hinging Bank Covert	Wistaston			6								6			
Total												393	581	932	
% reduction												28%	47%		
% reduction 1995/96 to 2019												58%			

NB - I have included a column for the two previous count for comparison purposes. Where a more recent count is higher, I have highlighted the cell red. Sites visited during the count period but birds not seen/heard, are highlighted green. The columns in grey are the two-week period we specifically wanted to monitor. Blank cells – no significant data or no count.

Observations: -

- of the c25 sites counted this year, most (19) were included in the 95/96 count. 19 were also counted in in the 2001 count (not the same 19 – some were different)
- there may be some overlap with another colony in the vicinity
- 7 sites indicate higher number of birds, than previous, but count was after the ideal count period possibly 'skewing' the data
- despite some buildings being modernised, repaired, etc. birds are still able to nest
- some of this year's observers returned to sites they counted in 2001 (and 95/96)
- % reduction - 28% of the 2001 Count

Comments: -

- as this summary covers the comparison of this year's count to previous counts, sites not counted this time are not listed in the table
- as the weather this year wasn't favourable, we would like to repeat the activity next year and hope for better weather and therefore a more accurate assessment of the state of our local Swift population, then leave it for 10+ years before doing it again

Before distributing the summary, I asked my predecessor, Colin Lythgoe, for his feedback, comments, etc. on the document. He: -

1. suggested that the weather leading up to the 'ideal' count period might have delayed breeding cycle by a week or two and that as the table shows that the bulk of this year's count occurred after the ideal count period and possibly is a more accurate account of our Swift population
2. asked if we can compare our findings to those in another area

Brian Martin, the Swift Count Co-ordinator in 1995/96 has commented "*As far as the status of Swift is concerned the latest BTO population trends from their 2018 BBS records indicate a decline in numbers of about 50% since 1995 which incidentally was the year of the County Swift survey*". Our own count shows a reduction of 58% for the same period.

Recent property modernisation (uVPC, etc.) and the installation of nest-boxes will also be a factor when the Swifts return to their natal / breeding sites. It has been suggested that it is probably worthwhile visiting traditional Swift sites to 'assess' whether this could be a reason for a reduction in numbers recorded.

I would like to thank, again, those who took part in the activity and I would especially like to thank Colin Lythgoe for providing me with the template of the Count Form and for giving me access to his data of the previous counts.

NB - For the sake of brevity, this summary doesn't include the methodology, etc. If you are interested in taking part in the activity, please either: -

- contact me
- read Colin's report in the 2001 SECOS Bird Report (see SECOS website)

All bird sightings are welcomed - regardless of species or date as it will help us to understand our local avifauna, particularly this iconic species.

John Thompson
Count Organiser and SECOS Bird Recorder