

Proposal for a swift nestbox project at Exeter Cathedral.

Introduction

Swifts have recently been appointed 'Red-Listed' species status with the BoCC (Birds of Conservation Concern). This is due to their dramatic population decline by 60% in the last 20 years. One of the main reasons for this decline is the reduction in nesting sites available to them upon their 6000 mile return trip from sub-Saharan Africa in early May each year. Swifts rely, almost exclusively, upon our buildings for nesting sites and unfortunately modern construction techniques have unwittingly destroyed such sites. Exeter Cathedral's south bell tower rises above the city and is perfectly located with louvred windows. Fortunately, the design of the louvred windows at the Cathedral is similar to other projects which have been successful in attracting and accommodating these amazing birds!

Numerous projects supported by the Action for Swifts Group and other community groups have been successful in church bell towers. These include:

St John's the Virgin, St Neots (21 pairs in 2017)

St John's, Bury St Edmunds (6 pairs 2017)

St Michael's, Kingsteignton (3 pairs 2022, 6 pairs 2023)

All Saints, Landbeach (6 pairs 2017)

Proposal

The proposal for the nestbox project is to fabricate and install 18 colony boxes within the south bell tower; 6 each on the north, south, and west elevations, fitted to the louvred windows, internally (*see Design in Appendix*). All work will be completed by Jerry Horn who is an insured, Level 3 Advanced Craft Joiner with 30 years of experience, including listed building projects, and other successful church installations. Previous installations by Jerry have gained Archdeacon approval via the online faculty service and have fulfilled the specified conditions. Nestbox installations are included within List B 'Matters Which May Be Undertaken Without A Faculty, (B1-19) – The introduction of birdboxes'.

The louvred windows are currently internally sheathed with a plywood access door which is fixed to the stone reveals, restricting avian access into the tower. The softwood louvres and surrounding stonework are structurally sound and are sufficient for the proposal. The colony boxes will be arranged as per the design, between the plywood access door and the inside of the louvre (see below) and will not conflict with the door, bell activities, or visitor access. Fixing into the architectural stonework and/or mortar is not permitted and the installation process will be compliant with this requirement.

The colony box cabinets will be fabricated from 12mm marine ply with a water-resistant finish. All fixings for the cabinets will be marine grade stainless steel and all joints will be glued with PVA. The internal nest shelves will be dadoed into the side panels to add strength and longevity to the cabinets. The cabinets will be fixed into the louvres and will be supported by a timber brace, bearing the load from the stone cill.





Fig 1. Current internal louvre design.

Method Statement

- 1.. Gain access to the bell tower and take measurements of all apertures and relevant dimensions. Evaluate the stability and strength of the surrounding timber framework which will be used to secure the nestboxes. Issue the Clerk of Works the necessary supporting documentation including, Risk Assessment, Insurance, and Working At Height Certification.
- 2.. Fabricate the colony boxes (18no.) offsite from 12mm marine grade plywood. All joints will be glued and screwed with A4 marine grade stainless steel fixings for longevity (*see Fig. 2 below*). All boxes will be sealed externally with a non-toxic coating to further provide longevity to exposure.
- 3.. Co-ordinate with Clerk of Works to arrange a suitable time to install boxes. Proceed to install boxes under supervision, to the louvres in the bell tower.
- 4.. The individual boxes will be fixed together with A4 marine grade stainless steel screws to form a single unit, providing strength. Thereafter, the unit will be fixed to the louvre surround and supported by legs, braced from the cill. No fixings will be inserted into the architectural stonework. Boxes are easily removed if maintenance work is required at any point in the future.
- 5.. Ensure that all voids are completely closed with mesh as applicable to prevent any access into the bell tower itself. Thereafter, the Cathedral staff will install stainless steel mesh as a permanent fixture.
- 7.. Install a timed, mini tweeter, acoustic lure to alert swifts to the presence of the new boxes. The volume of the device is very low and is only used until the swifts colonise the nestboxes. The timer will ensure that the calls are turned off during congregations or other times as requested, even though the volume is so low that it is very difficult to hear at ground level. This is a proven and widely accepted method of attracting swifts. The unit itself is approximately the size of a small mobile phone. The low voltage required can be supplied by a mobile phone charger, plugged into a typical household socket which already exists within the tower.

- 7.. Little maintenance is required, however, the nestboxes will be inspected and maintained, at the end of the nesting season, each year when suitable to access. Access will be organised to suit Cathedral staff schedules.
- 8.. The main installation will be undertaken with at least two installers present. They will follow a '3-point of contact' approach during access and installation and will read and sign the Risk Assessment and Method Statement. The main installer will use a harness whilst undertaking all works.

Constraints and potential concerns

1.. Will the nestboxes interfere with the bell ringing in any way?

- The nestboxes will not interfere with the bellringing activities or the intonation of the ringing bells as the windows will only partially be covered with the nestbox.

2.. Will the Cathedral incur any financial liability for the project?

- No, the materials, labour, and maintenance is provided completely free of charge.

3.. Will the nestbox scheme alter the appearance of the church externally?

- No, the nestboxes will be darkened to blend with the existing aesthetic of the church.

4.. Will there be a mess from nesting swifts?

- Swifts are particularly clean birds; many people have swifts nesting in their houses and are unaware. They remove faeces of their young and they use very little in the way of nesting material which degrades over winter.

5.. Reaction to the attractant calls?

- As the colony is located high up in the tower and the calls are played at a low volume, people are very unlikely to hear the calls. They are played for two hours in the morning and evening and will be turned off when the colony establishes. The call system is turned on in early May and turned off again in mid-August.

6.. Are swifts affected by the bellringing?

- Swifts have been observed being momentarily startled when the bells begin, but soon settle down and most don't even react at all!

7.. Will other birds gain access into the bell tower through?

- There will not be any gaps left during any part of the installation process. After the installation, mesh will be securely fixed to prevent any access into the bell tower.

For further information, please contact Jerry on 07968160586 or abacuscarp@gmail.com. Thankyou very much for your consideration.

For more information about Swift nest-boxes in churches see:

<http://actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk/search/label/churches>



Proposed design for the swift nestbox scheme at Exeter Cathedral, South Tower.



Fig. 2: Proposed design of nestboxes and location in relation to existing features.

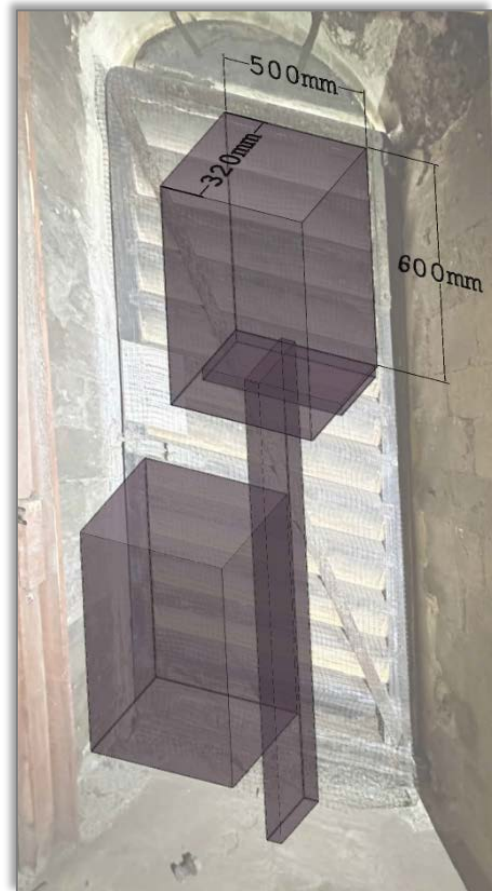


Fig. 3: Proposed design of nestboxes showing dimensions

Previous installation photos




Fig. 2: Example of a colony box design used on previously successful installations. Four separate, 8 nest colony boxes shown (stacked).



Fig. 3: Example of 2 separate colony boxes (with back section removed for illustration) installed with the remaining louvre meshed to restrict access into the bell tower.

Credentials



Certificate of Insurance

Issue date: 26 June 2023


Simply Business certifies that the information for J Horn Carpentry shown here is correct, as of the issue date above.

For full policy terms and conditions, please refer to the policy wording document.

Company name	J Horn Carpentry
Policy number	CHBI4051592XB
Trade/Business	Carpenter
Public liability	up to £1,000,000
Policy start date	27 June 2023
Policy end date	26 June 2024

David Summers
David Summers
Group CEO, Simply Business

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TO

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(Q1021712)

Details of this award are recorded overleaf and are also held by the Construction Industry Training Board Record and Registration Office.

Issued Month/Year: 07/99 Registration No.: 00684305

Signed: *N.A.D. Carey*
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Director General
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Signed: *Hugh Fry*
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