

Swift Survey  
Church House  
Nuns Island  
Co. Galway  
2022



Ecological Services

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## Introduction

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A Swift survey of Church House, Nun's Island, Co. Galway has been requested by OBFA Architects on behalf of Galway county council. Acceptance of the survey quotation was communicated on the afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2022. The house is being proposed for renovation and the section of building joining it to the Nuns Island Theatre building is proposed for removal.

Church house is located in Nun's Island in Galway city. It is bounded by a waterway to the west which connects to green areas and the river Corrib. There is built infrastructure on the other three sides.

Nuns Island Theatre, beside Church house, is built of cut stone – a favoured building type for nesting swifts. See Fig 1, 2 & 3.

Fig.1: Location of Church House, Nun's Island, Co. Galway Irish grid reference: M 29481 25151.

(Irish Grid Reference Finder – IGRF)




Fig.2: Front or west facing view of Church House, Galway, with the south wall of Nuns Island Theatre to the rear and right of the house. 



Fig 3: Close up of Nuns Island Theatre – Cut limestone, leaving ideal nest spots for swifts. Possible swift nesting example below. (Note: No bird species was observed at this location during the surveys)



## Swifts in Ireland - *Apus apus*

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The Common Swift is a summer migrant that breeds in Europe and much of Asia and winters in southern Africa. Their numbers have been in decline in recent decades and ongoing surveys in Ireland such as the Countryside Bird Survey show a 39% decline between 2008 and 2013. Throughout most of its breeding range the Swift nests in cavities in walls or under eaves of houses and old buildings. Because of this, they are a well-known bird species in towns and cities in Ireland.

It is thought the reason for the loss of available nest sites due to renovations of old buildings and modern building techniques that restrict the availability of nesting cavities, is a significant factor in their decline. Swifts are long lived and faithful to their nest sites and new pairs are more likely to be attracted to an existing swift colony.

## METHODS

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An external visual inspection was carried out on Church house and its attached buildings on the 30/06/2022 looking for signs of swifts. Particular attention was given to gaps at a high level and areas where guano was present.

Three swift surveys were carried out at Church House. Surveys were carried out in fine weather between dawn and 10.00am and from 8pm until dark. Dates of survey were 30/06/2022, 01/07/2022, and 22/07/2022.

## Results

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### Site inspection

No signs of nesting swifts were noted at Church House. Guano on the south wall of Nun's Island Theatre were noted below an ideal nesting spot near the top of the wall. See fig 3.

("Swifts had been seen at the site in previous years, but none have been seen this year" – personal coms with a member of the theatre group).

### Bird surveys

No swifts were noted entering or exiting Church House during any of the surveys.

Swifts were seen and heard flying over during the morning of 01/07/2022, but none paid any attention to the building.

## Discussion

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No swifts were recorded at Church House during the surveys. However as there has been potential records of them nesting at Nun's Island Theatre in the past and a suitable nest site at this building, there is an opportunity for biodiversity gain to be made at this site. A chance to expand their nesting capability by providing new nest boxes at this location could be considered.

## References

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Sunrise and sunset times - Accuweather.com

Swift Survey (2019), Annie Birtwistle, Ricky Wheelan, Brian Caffery