**HOUSE MARTINS**

The House Martin is a small bird with glossy blue-black upper parts and pure white under parts. It has a distinctive white rump with a forked tail and, on close inspection, white feathers covering its legs and toes and a black beak. They are 12cm long; weigh 15 – 23g in weight and have a 26 – 29 cm wingspan. They can live up to 10 or 14 years but most only live 5 years or less. They spend much of their time in flight, hunting for small flying insects such as aphids and spiders. If you hate mosquitoes, then love house martins!

They are summer migrants who usually arrive in April and leave in September/October to spend their winters in Africa, though we still don't know exactly where our UK birds go. It used to be thought that house martins and swallows hibernated during the winter in the mud at the bottom of ponds.

HOUSE Martins nests in the eaves of … HOUSES, and also on bridges, ledges and cliffs. They build a mud nest, shaped like a convex cup. They are often in small colonies. You can see these in Bradford on Avon at The Old Batch and Church Acre most years.

Although still numerous (510,000 pairs in UK), recent declines have placed them on the **Red List**. This is because House Martins face a number of threats, some natural but the biggest threats come from us –

- Some people still knock the nests off their houses though **this is illegal**. Others obstruct them with wind chimes etc. We like to think that it is a wonderful privilege to have House Martins nesting near us
- When upgrading homes, often wooden soffits and weatherboards are replaced with plastic and mud nests don't stick to plastic
- Agricultural changes have dramatically reduced the number of insects due to the use of insecticides and the use of herbicides has reduced wild flowers and therefore the food for insects. All of this means there's less food for the birds. So please make your gardens/allotments insect friendly to increase the biodiversity and number of insects
- Climate change is having an effect too. Some years it takes House Martins a long time to build nests if there is no rain and hence no mud! If you can have wet areas, such as ponds with wide, muddy margins in your gardens and farmers have fields that have muddy areas, then this will greatly help the House Martins. Extreme weather can kill **several hundred thousand** of them such as unusual heavy snowfalls, very low temperatures and storms.

So the Swift and House Martin Group is surveying House Martins each year to see how many we have in Bradford on Avon and to check on their status year after year. To help people understand the problems, we have stalls, walks and talks during the year. So please stand up for House Martins in Bradford on Avon!