

## Swift Story

Garth Lowe

During the late summer I heard through a conversation with a friend that she had a friend who was hand rearing a young swift. Intrigued, as this is so unusual I asked if she might ask him if I might see it and offered to put a BTO ring on it just in case there was an off chance it might be found again.

I duly met the gentleman in the remoteness of Witley and listened to his story about the bird. He had been hand rearing birds for over 50 years and had acquired this bird through a vet. Three of these birds had somehow been dislodged from their nest but two had died. This one he called Suzi had hardly any feathers and was also nearly dead but with much care he revived it with mashed mealworms giving it intensive care for 24 hours.

As it got stronger it was fed every hour and soon started to put on weight. It was also weighed morning and night and by 27<sup>th</sup> June had reached 43 gms. From then on it ate about 15 mealworms a day being fed every 90 minutes. It was kept in a bird cage on hay in a bowl and was perfectly happy. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> July it had reached 62 gms hovering around that figure but then started to lose a little, which is normal in young swifts when they are preparing to fly.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> July I called and ringed the bird, and as it was an ideal day he decided to release it in the afternoon after an interview for BBC Radio 4. I heard later that it all went well and after sitting on his hand acclimatising for a few minutes while he stood on a step ladder in the middle of his field, the lucky young bird took to the sky on the first part of its long journey south.

It may seem odd for this bird to set off with no parents around but in fact they normally desert the youngsters leaving them to fledge the nest on their own and hopefully join other young swifts heading south.

This was wonderful dedication to give this bird a fighting chance. Swifts are now declining and in various places groups have formed to keep a watchful eye on their nesting sites which are vulnerable to rebuilding and repair. In some places where there are swifts, builders have been encouraged to insert swift nest bricks in the building.

I am grateful to the gentleman for providing the notes for this article.