

# HOMES FOR HOUSE BIRDS

Primary Education  
Resource Pack



**YORKSHIRE DALES**  
National Park



**YORKSHIRE DALES**  
MILLENNIUM TRUST

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# HOMES FOR HOUSE BIRDS

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**Welcome to the Homes for House Birds Primary Education Resource Pack. We hope that you and your pupils enjoy learning about these four iconic 'house' bird species and are inspired to safeguard their future.**

The Homes for House Birds project seeks to provide homes and feeding sites for house martins, house sparrows, starlings and swifts.

All four species nest in close proximity to people and all four species have seen a massive decline in numbers and are now on the UK Red List for endangered species.

Luckily, we see healthy populations of these birds within the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Nooks and crannies in unimproved houses, barns and farm buildings provide suitable nest sites and the surrounding landscape provides food. However, their future looks uncertain as land use changes, buildings are retrofitted and nesting sites are lost.

Between 2025 and 2027 the Homes for House Birds project will be working with communities in the Yorkshire Dales National Park to:

- Create, enhance and restore vital habitats for house birds
- Create suitable long-lasting nest sites
- Gain a better understanding of the current populations through citizen science monitoring
- Lay foundations for future support of house nesting bird communities.

This pack includes a variety of cross-curricular activities. You might also decide to explore your school grounds and buildings to see if your school provides any suitable nesting sites or feeding habitats or if these birds already use your school as a home.

**To find out more visit:**  
[www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/homes-for-house-birds](http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/homes-for-house-birds)

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# PROJECT MAP

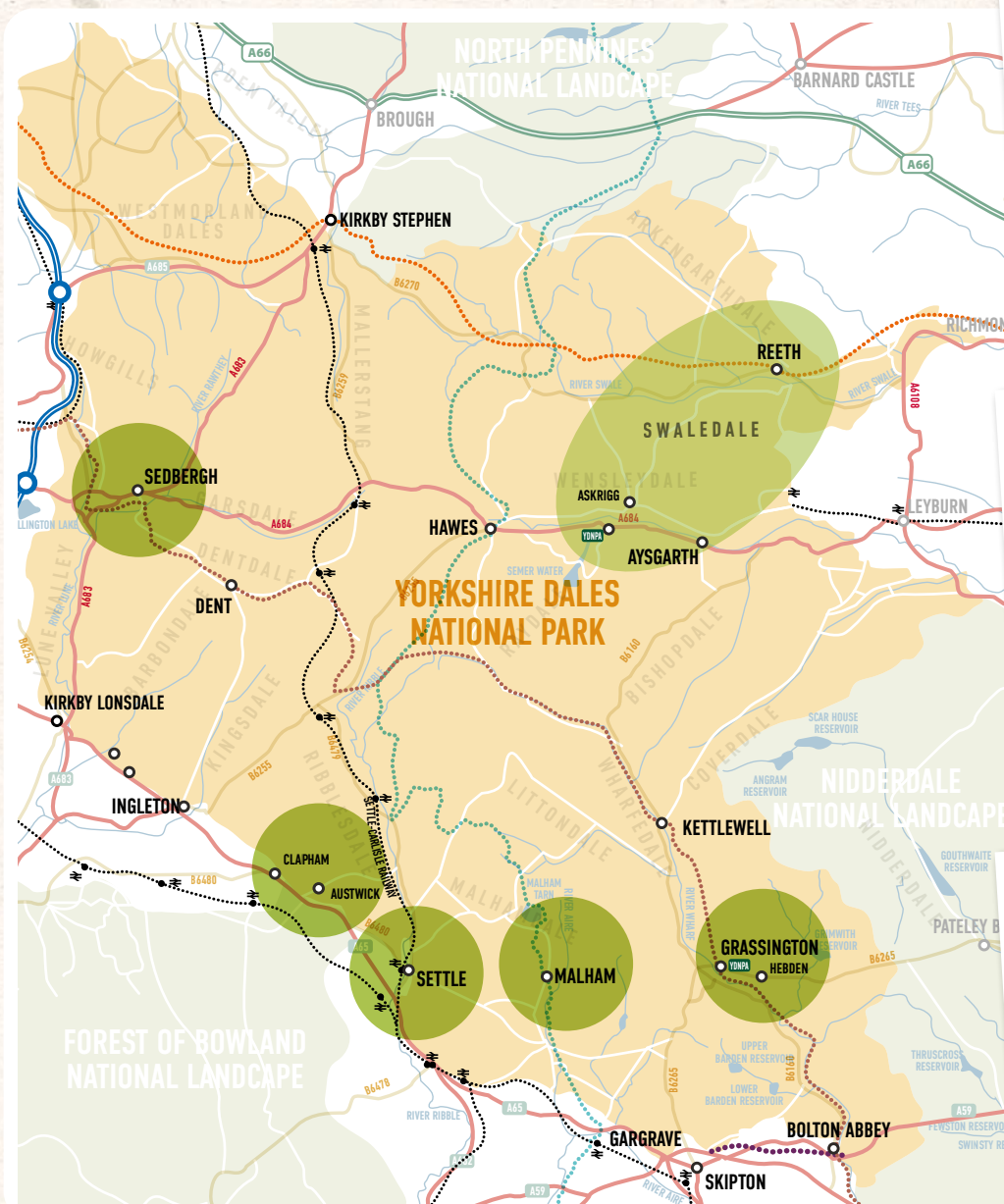
## HOMES FOR HOUSE BIRDS

**This map shows the communities involved at the start of the project.**

This project will provide long-lasting homes and improve nearby feeding sites for the birds in the pictures in the areas of the Yorkshire Dales National Park

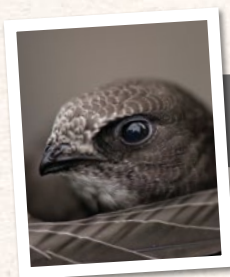
highlighted on the map because many of their feeding and nesting sites have disappeared.

Local people can monitor the success of the project, as these birds often use our houses to build their nests.



# GET TO KNOW THE DALES HOUSE BIRDS

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## Swift

Swifts are dark brown with curved wings and forked tails. They fly high in the sky and make 'screaming' calls.

### Nests

Swifts nest at the same site each year. They squeeze into tiny gaps inside roofs or walls.

### Food

Flying insects (including airborne spiders!).

### Did you know?

Swifts sleep, eat, wash and mate while flying. They only land to nest.

### Likes

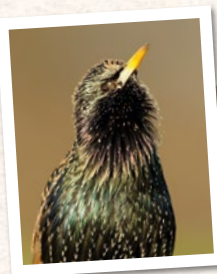
Clean air.

### Dislikes

Pesticides.

### When to see

Summer migrant – April to August.



## Starling

Starlings are a glossy black with iridescent purples and greens; they are flecked with white spots in winter.

### Nests

Tree holes, drystone walls or farm buildings.

### Food

Invertebrates and fruit. They will visit bird feeders.

### Did you know?

Starlings sometimes form huge 'dancing' flocks on autumn/winter evenings, these are called murmurations.

### Likes

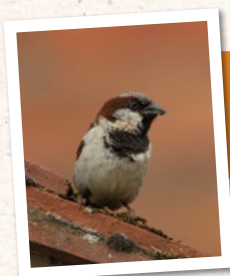
'Chattering' with other starlings and flying around in flocks.

### Dislikes

Artificial grass.

### When to see

All year around. Populations grow in autumn and winter with migrating birds from Northern Europe.



## House sparrow

Males are chestnut on top with black markings and grey caps, females are light brown on top. Both have a stout head and short, thick bill.

### Nests

In building crevices or untidy nests made from vegetation.

### Food

Mixed: seeds, berries, scraps and insects. They will visit bird feeders.

### Did you know?

House sparrows are the most widespread birds in the world. They are found in 6 of the 7 continents.

### Likes

Hedgerow habitats and meadows.

### Dislikes

Flying long distances.

### When to see

All year round.



## House martin

House martins are a glossy blue-black on top with a white underneath and a short v-shaped tail.

### Nests

Below the eaves of buildings in nest cups made from mud. They reuse the same nests year after year.

### Food

Flying insects.

### Did you know?

House martins often collect mud for their nests from puddles. It can take 1,000 mud pellets to build a nest.

### Likes

Wetlands, lakes, ponds and streams where there are lots of tasty insects.

### Dislikes

Dramatic changes in weather.

### When to see

Summer migrant – April to August.

# GET TO KNOW THE DALES HOUSE BIRDS

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**1** Look at the silhouettes and decide which bird is which

answer

answer

answer

answer

## **2** Questions

1. Which bird sleeps while flying?

answer

2. Which bird makes its nest from mud pellets?

3. Which bird dislikes flying long distances?

4. Which birds are summer migrants?

5. Which bird 'dances' in the sky in the autumn and winter?

6. Which birds come back to the same nest site?

7. Which birds are you likely to see at a bird feeder?

8. Which bird gets white spots in the winter?

9. Which bird is found on almost every continent in the world?

10. Which bird would you most like to see?

# GET TO KNOW THE DALES HOUSE BIRDS

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**Working with communities in the project areas we are laying new hedgerows, creating new meadows and planting new trees.**

Improving or providing good feeding habitats close to nest sites means that the adult birds spend less energy searching for food to feed their young.

**Below are four great feeding habitats for our house birds.**

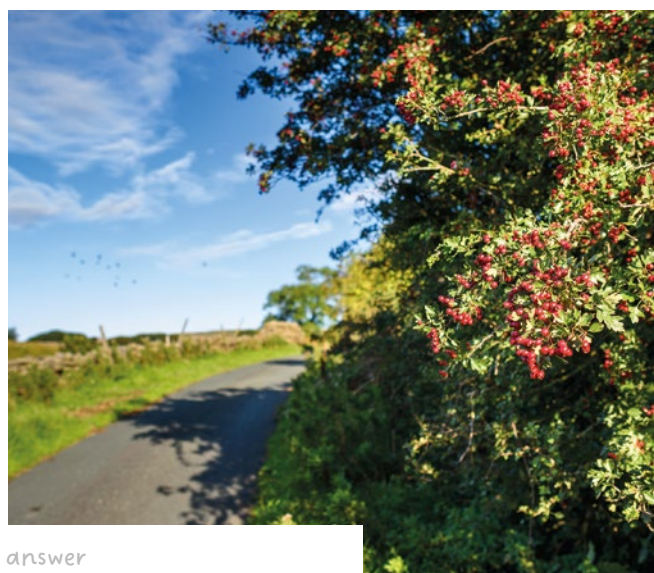
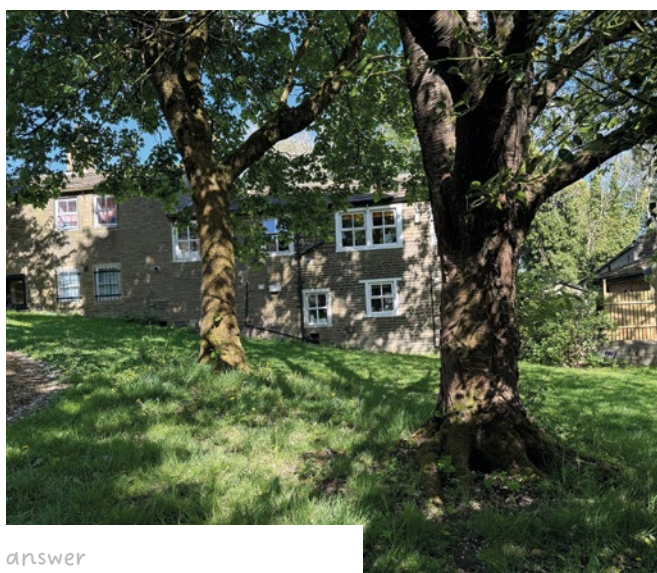
Label each picture with one of the titles.

**Hedgerow**

**Garden**

**Veteran tree**

**Meadow**



Are there any good feeding sites for the house birds in your local area?

# RSPB FACTS AND FIGURES

## DALES HOUSE BIRDS

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### Facts & figures

|               | Length  | Weight | Wingspan  | UK breeding pairs |
|---------------|---------|--------|-----------|-------------------|
| House martin  | 12cm    | 15-23g | 26-29cm   | 480,000           |
| House sparrow | 14-15cm | 24-38g | 21-25.5cm | 5.3 million       |
| Starling      | 21cm    | 75-90g | 37-42cm   | 1.8 million       |
| Swift         | 16-17cm | 36-50g | 42-48cm   | 59,000            |

### Questions

1. Which bird is the longest?

answer

2. Which bird is the shortest?

3. Which bird is the heaviest?

4. Which bird is the lightest?

5. Which has the longest wingspan?

6. Which has the shortest wingspan?

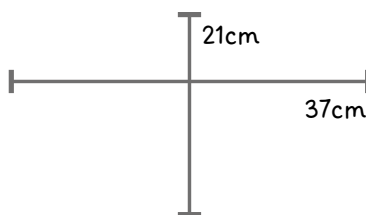
7. Which bird is the most common?

8. Which bird is the least common?

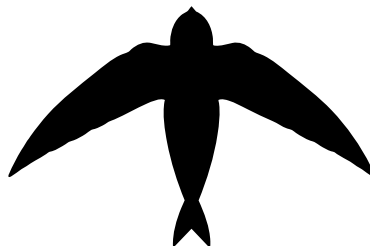
### Activity ideas



**1** Weigh flour, beans or rice into a paper bag to get an idea of the weight of each house bird.



**2** Draw the length of each bird and their wingspan as a cross using a ruler then discuss why they are such different shapes.



**3** Make a swift dart using the template on the next page.

# SWIFT DART HOMES FOR HOUSE BIRDS

## What you need:

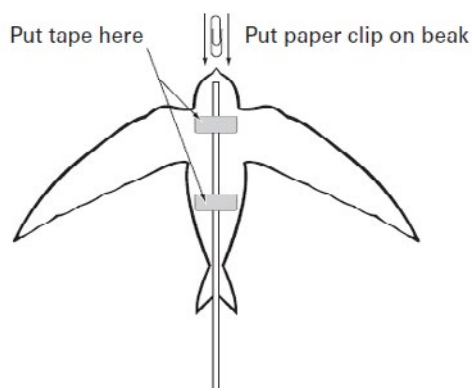
- Coloured pencils
- Scissors
- Two straws – one larger than the other
- Sticky tape
- Paper clip



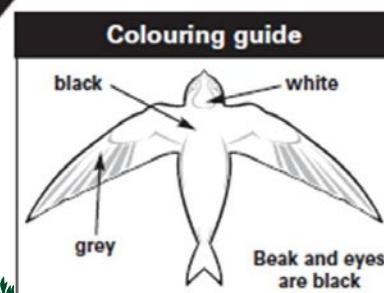
## How to make your swift fly

- First colour the bird as suggested on the colour guide
- Cut around the outline of the bird and turn it over

- Cover one end of the large straw with tape and stick it to the back where shown
- Put the paper clip on the beak



- Now put the small straw inside the large straw and blow
- Your swift should fly through the air!



# SPOTLIGHT ON: SCIENCE HOMES FOR HOUSE BIRDS

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## Activity

Can you match these seven scientific nouns to their meanings?



## Meanings...

**1** Migration

Animal without a backbone.

**2** Population

Seasonal movement of animals from one place to another.

**3** Murmuration

Protecting nature and using resources carefully to look after our planet.

**4** Habitat

Place where plants or animals make their home.

**5** Pesticide

Number of people, plants or animals in a particular place.

**6** Invertebrate

Chemicals used to control, reduce or kill 'pests', often to protect crops.

**7** Conservation

Name given to a large group of starlings 'dancing' in the air.



# SPOTLIGHT ON: FOOD CHAINS

## HOMES FOR HOUSE BIRDS

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Food chains show how animals obtain their food. They can also show us the flow of energy.

### Activity 1

Can you put these food chains in the right order?



Starling



Leaf



Snail



House sparrow



Seed



Sparrowhawk



Kestrel



Swift

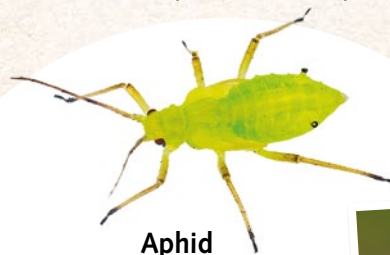


Flying insect

### Activity 2

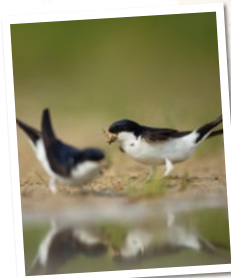
Label the different parts of the food chains.

You could use words like producer, primary consumer and secondary consumer or predator and prey.



Aphid

Flower bud



House martin

### Challenge

As a class, create a food web linking some or all of these food chains together.

# SPOTLIGHT ON: SWIFTS

## HOMES FOR HOUSE BIRDS

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We know that the weather changes depending on the season.

In the UK it is warmer in the spring and summer and colder in the autumn and winter.

Migration describes how some animals move long distances at different times of the year to find food and stay warm.

### Time for some 'swift' maths

Swifts migrate 3,400 miles twice a year. During its lifetime a swift can fly around two million miles (four trips to the Moon and back!)

- Southward migration
- Northward migration
- Winter range and movements



Watch this video to see:  
**One Swift's Migration Journey | RSPB**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1dyhNM6FUA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1dyhNM6FUA)

### Geography challenge

Make a list of some of the countries this swift flies through on its migration.

answer

.....

.....

.....

### Maths challenge

1. How far do swifts migrate each year?

answer

2. How far is a trip to the Moon?

.....

# SPOTLIGHT ON: LITERACY

## HOMES FOR HOUSE BIRDS

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N S T A R L I N G B V F Q C R N K P  
 E D F N S M I G R A T I O N F T H O  
 S H O U S E M A R T I N S H K W T P  
 T R W D C N N D F V K E W W L V C U  
 T C O N S E R V A T I O N Z I P T L  
 E N P M B K L X H B I J E Y W F L A  
 P W S H R E E N L N H A B I T A T T  
 O R G Z B F T F U O U Q B U D R A I  
 V P U L N U F W R U X U R N H E E O  
 H O U S E S P A R R O W J S I A E N  
 M M U R M U R A T I O N Y O A H J V  
 A N D E C L I N E W Z B R Y I E L Y

### Find the words in the wordsearch

|              |                            |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| Swift        | House sparrow              |
| House martin | Starling                   |
| Murmuration  | Migration                  |
| Habitat      | Nest                       |
| Conservation | Decline                    |
| Population   | © Super Teacher Worksheets |

### Activity 1

### Perform this 'acrostic' poem

**S**pringtime arrivals, screaming and soaring high in our skies  
**W**andering on the wing to wetlands for water and food  
**I**nsect after insect devoured in the air  
**F**aithful to their mates and faithful to their nest sites  
**T**iny travellers all the way from Africa

### Activity 2

### Read or listen to the starling poem

from **The Lost Words** by  
Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris

### Activity 3

### Create your own poem about one of the Dales house birds

### Challenge



# SPOTLIGHT ON: POPULATION HOMES FOR HOUSE BIRDS

Why do we need to help the Dales house birds?

## Facts & figures

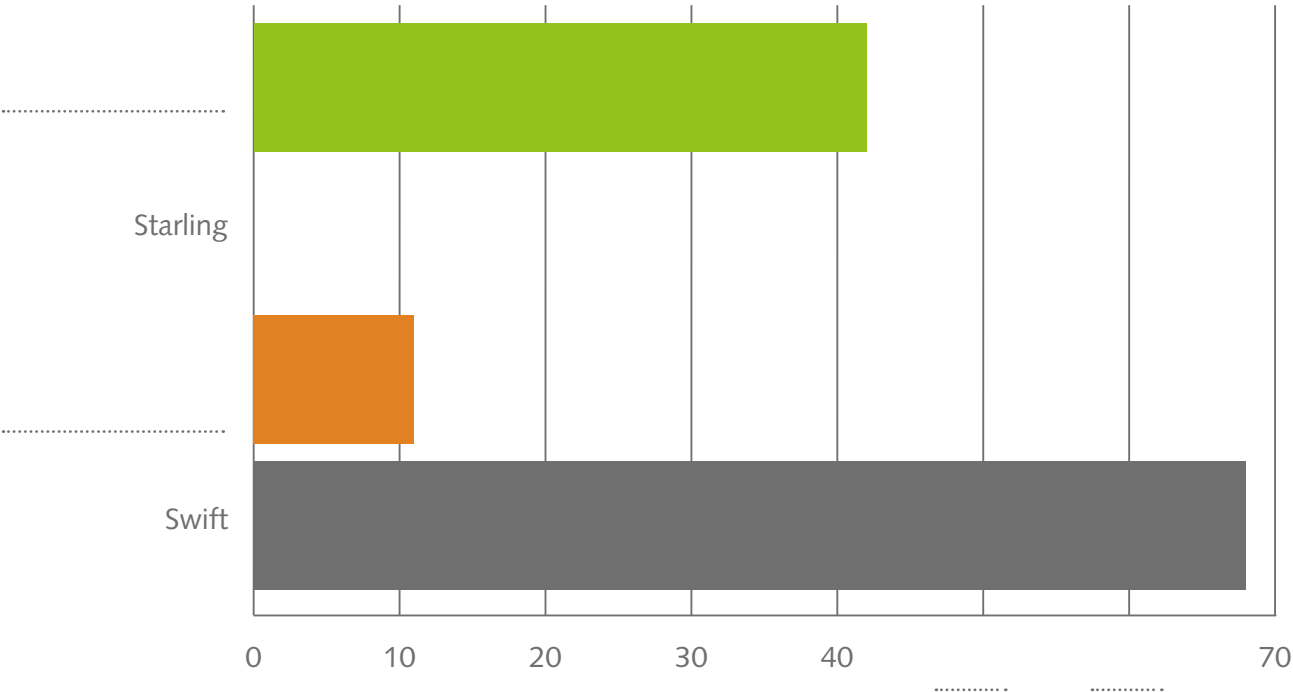
| Bird          | UK Red List birds of conservation concern since | Decline between 1995 and 2023 | Breeding pairs (2016 data) |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| House martin  | 2021                                            | 42%                           | 480,000                    |
| House sparrow | 2002                                            | 11%                           | 5.3 million                |
| Starling      | 2002                                            | 57%                           | 1.8 million                |
| Swift         | 2021                                            | 68%                           | 59,000                     |

Use the information in the table to complete the bar graph to show how the populations of these four birds have fallen.

## Activity

### % decline between 1995 and 2023

Add the missing bar, titles and numbers



# SPOTLIGHT ON: HABITATS HOMES FOR HOUSE BIRDS

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## Activity

Are you a Dales house birds champion?  
Which options would be best for our birds?

1



Hedge



Fence

or

2



Lawn



Patio

or

3



Wooden eaves



Plastic trim

or

4



Rake moss



Weed kill moss

or

## Habitat information

A good habitat provides everything that a plant or animal needs to survive.

All animals need the same important things to survive: water, air, shelter and food.

Some of the places that these birds make their homes are disappearing and some of their food sources are disappearing.

## Spotlight on action

Don't be too tidy in your garden – habitat piles for insects provide food for birds. Old leaves and twigs can provide materials for nesting.

## ... How did you score??

Answers: 1. Hedge, 2. Lawn, 3. Wooden eaves, 4. Rake moss

# SPOTLIGHT ON: NEST BOXES HOMES FOR HOUSE BIRDS

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## Activity

Can you choose the best bird house for each bird?

### Starling

A bigger nest box with a larger entrance hole for starlings.

### House martin

House martin nest boxes mimic their natural mud cup nests.

### House sparrow

House sparrows are colonial nesters, they like neighbours.

### Swift

Swifts need wider entrances to make sure they don't damage their wings when they fly into the nest box.



answer



answer



answer



answer

**Climate change means that some of our weather patterns are changing. This can cause problems for migrating birds.**

### Example:

House martins find it difficult to find mud to build their nests when it is too dry in springtime.

### Solution:

Provide a readymade nest for house martins.

# WHAT NEXT: ACTION HOMES FOR HOUSE BIRDS

**You can take action to support our birds, in your school grounds and at home.**

## Challenge:

Explore your school grounds, looking closely at your school buildings.

- Can you spot any of these birds or their nests?
- Where could you put a bird house?
- How many feeding habitats can you find in your school grounds?



## Action 1

### Create better habitats

Plant wildflowers in your school grounds to attract insects and invertebrates for these birds to feed on. Could you plant trees, lay a hedge or create a pond?

Find funding or support at:

[www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities)



## Action 2

### Don't destroy good nesting sites

Apply for free nest boxes through this project, or build your own nest box.

Find out more at:

[www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-you-can-do/activities/all-about-nest-boxes](http://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-you-can-do/activities/all-about-nest-boxes)

## Action 3

### Get involved in things like planting hedges, creating meadows or monitoring birds

Find out more at:

[www.ydmt.org/what-we-do/landscape-and-wildlife/homes-for-house-birds](http://www.ydmt.org/what-we-do/landscape-and-wildlife/homes-for-house-birds)



The project is a partnership between the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, RSPB and the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust, and was started in 2025 with the support of a grant of £250,000 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

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