

BMC reduces housing shortage for the threatened swift



Photo: Annika Rastén

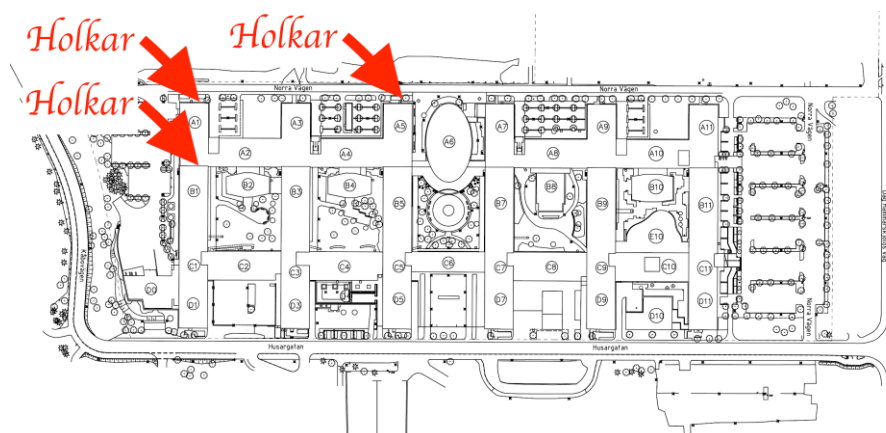
The swift, *Apus apus*, is often perceived as the ultimate summer bird, and for many their screaming joyfulness signifies the start of the Swedish summer. Swifts are skilled flyers that spend almost all of their lives on the wings. Fast like arrows they hunt along our streets and around house roofs with an ease that conveys to us a feeling of freedom. Swifts are migratory birds that spend the winters in tropical Africa, but when they return to us in May, we know that summer is here.

Swifts are followers of human settlement. When man started building houses, new habitats were created for the swifts who moved into our villages and towns. Instead of nesting in rock crevices or tree holes, they could build their nests under roof tiles or in niches, gaps, cracks and other cavities under roofs and in the outer walls. However, the birds' nesting sites in buildings are threatened by renovations and reconstructions. Cavities disappear during renovations and large-domed tiles are replaced by tin roofs or flat concrete tiles. Moreover, rain gutters often prevent the swifts' free inflight to the nest. The lack of suitable nesting sites is believed to be an important reason for the recent decline in the swift populations and the species is now listed as endangered on the Red List.

The Biomedical Centre (BMC) in Uppsala has housed a colony of swifts for several years, with smaller satellite colonies in the vicinity. The main part of the colony has nests under the eaves on the eastern side of BMC, where during the summer the birds welcome visitors above the main entrances to BMC and SciLifeLab. During late summer, when the swifts gather for the migration south, large flights of parents and young swifts can be seen circling BMC. During the

renovation of the roofs at BMC, a collaboration was initiated between Akademiska Hus, the Swift Project Uppland, and dedicated researchers and staff at BMC and Scilifelab to preserve and expand the swifts' nesting sites. Nine nest boxes for swifts,

donated by the Swift Project, have been installed on the western part of BMC's northern side. Although it may take some time before the swifts establish nests in the new boxes, the hope is that it will eventually lead to more swifts finding nesting sites on the building.



“The swifts population has been reduced drastically during the last decades, mainly because of lack of suitable nesting sites. By creating new nesting opportunities for swifts during the renovation of BMC we are contributing to biodiversity and species richness on campus.” says Marie Löwling, Property Manager at Akademiska Hus.

“A simple way to help swifts is to integrate, or mount, bird boxes in suitable places, like here at BMC. These boxes are adapted to swifts and we now cross our fingers that swifts will find a new nest site for life!” says Debora Arlt, Swift Project Uppland.

The swift boxes, which are made of wood-based concrete and adapted for mounting on walls, were mounted at the end of August 2023. The boxes are oblong since the swifts prefer creeping a bit into the dark. The opening is directed downwards because the swifts make a fly-in from below to slow down before landing in



the bird box. For the same reason the swift boxes are placed to avoid trees or other obstacles in front of the boxes. It is now only a few days until the swifts return to Uppsala in the middle of May and the summer can start for real. We are looking forward to following the development of the BMC swift colony and how the new bird boxes are received.

We who have been involved in the Swift Box project are:

Debora Arlt, The Swift Project, Uppland, UOF BirdLife Uppland

Patrik Eklund, Technical Manager, Akademiska Hus

Caroline Jernlöf, Property Manager, Akademiska Hus

Elin Lindkvist, Communicator, Akademiska Hus

Bengt Sennblad, NBIS, Scilifelab, Dept of Cell- and Molecular Biology, Uppsala University

Anders Tengholm, Dept. of Medical Cell Biology, Uppsala University

Rebecka Wichmann, Superintendent, BMC, Uppsala University