

Swift colony 2016 results

This year my colony has increased in size, but the overall it's performance has been much worse than in 2015. The biggest differences have been in eggs rejected and chick fatalities, caused by the poor weather in May and June. This resulted in a lack of food at a crucial time just when the eggs were hatching. All three fatalities were all from clutches containing 3 chicks and in each case the smallest chick died.

It's been a bit of a topsy-turvy year with adult numbers. By the end of May all 16 birds (8 pairs from 2015) were safely back in their boxes. Not to have lost any existing birds was fantastic as the annual adult mortality rate is about 1 in 6. Two new pairs joined these in early June making it a total of 10 pairs. Unfortunately in early July I lost a complete pair, back down to 9 pairs. Unfortunately this pair had 3 chicks. I lost one chick but managed to foster the other 2 into my other boxes and they both fledged successfully a few weeks later. Then in mid-July I gained another pair, back up to 10 pairs.

The totals for 2015 & 2016 are as follows;

Number of breeding pairs. 2015 - 7, 2016 - 9.

Number of pairs in colony. 2015 - 8. 2016 - 10

Number of eggs rejected. 2015 - 3 (18.75%). 2016 - 5 (20%).

Number of chick fatalities. 2015 - 1 (6.25%). 2016 - 3 (15%).

Number of adult fatalities. 2015 - 1 (6.25%). 2016 - 2 (12.5%).

Number of chicks fledged. 2015 – 15 from 7 nests averaging 2.14 chicks per nest.

2016 – 17 from 9 nests averaging 1.88 chicks per nest.

Increase in overall colony size. 2015 up 1 pair from 7 to 8.

2016 up 2 pairs from 8 to 10.

I hope you have enjoyed reading about the daily exploits from my colony. There's been plenty of high points and a few low ones as well. But that's nature as it's meant to be. It wouldn't be real life if we didn't have any ups and downs along the way. There are lots of things I really love about swifts but the one I get the biggest kick from is when they first return in the spring. The sound of that first scream and the sight of those familiar crescent-shaped wings fill my heart with joy. Here's a wonderful line about swifts taken from a Ted Hughes poem, which says it so much better than I ever could.

“ They've made it again,

Which means the globe's still working, the Creations

Still waking refreshed, our summers

Still all to come”

Now all that is left for me to do is turn off the cameras and dream of their return next year.

PS. The blog will be up and running again in 2017. I hope you will join me again then, in the meantime if you have any questions please contact me anytime.

All the best

Mark