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Power company takes swift action

When a bird group needed a nesting box installed high up on a village hall before swifts returned from Africa, a power company flew in to help.

A team from UK Power Networks brought in a cherry picker and installed the specially-made box on the village hall in Albury near Bishops Stortford, just in time to offer an attractive nesting home for the migrating swifts.

The special nesting box was made to take six bird couples and needed to be hoisted eight metres high on the side of the building to attract the birds that have been declining over the past 25 years.

Gavin Vicary, founder of North East Herts Swifts Group asked the power company if they could help. He said: “The original plan was to install the box in conjunction with redecoration of the village hall when scaffolding was in place. With all the Covid disruption last year, there were delays and we missed the opportunity. We are really grateful that UK Power Networks has come to the rescue with a cherry picker.”

He added that they know swifts come to the area and they have installed a ‘tweeter’ which plays swift calls and should attract birds to investigate the nest box. Swifts nest colonially and come back to the same nest site to nest year after year and so once a new colony has started they should have them for many years to come.

Gavin, who lives in Albury, has also put up four double house martin nests on the village hall, but the swift box needed to be placed over five metres high.

Paul Stancliffe from the British Trust for Ornithology, said, “For many the return of the swift is the sign that summer is here and a moment for celebration, however, all is not well with our swifts; we have lost over half of the UK breeding population since 1995. It is unclear what might be driving this decline but it is likely a combination of things – loss of nesting space, as we block up all those nooks and crannies to make our homes more energy efficient, a reduction in the winged insects that form the largest part of a swift’s diet and pressures on their long migration to southern Africa and back.

“What we do know is that we can help by providing new nesting space in the form of swift nestboxes. Swifts are gregarious birds and like to nest in colonies and readily take to nestboxes but even space for a single box will help, so it is great to see the installation of this new nestbox.”

UK Power Networks is delivering a Green Action Plan to increase biodiversity at its substation sites. The company’s environment adviser, Heather Patrick said: “Swifts are definitely in need of

help and I'm really pleased that we could help North East Herts Swifts Group to provide a potential new nesting site for swifts on Albury Village Hall. “ **Ends**

Picture Caption: 1. Swift nesting box (pic Ray Murdoch)

2, A swift (credit Philip Croft)

3 Uk Power Networks team Lukasz Grabowicz and Simon Giblin with Gavin Vicary (pic Ray Murdoch)

4 After installation of the swift nesting box (pic Ray Murdoch)

For further information please contact UK Power Networks press office on 0330 159 1712.

Notes to editors:

UK Power Networks is the country's biggest electricity distributor, making sure the lights stay on for more than eight million homes and businesses across London, the South East and the East of England.

Network operators aren't the same as energy suppliers; network operators manage local power lines and substations, while energy suppliers sell the electricity that runs through the power lines.

UK Power Networks continues to be listed in the Sunday Times' Top 25 Best Big Companies to Work For, and made industry history by becoming first company to win Utility of the Year two years running (2015 and 2016 also 2012).

The company invests more than £600 million in its electricity networks every year, offers extra help to vulnerable customers at times of need, and is undertaking trials to ensure that electricity networks support the transition to a low carbon future. It also moves cables and connects new electricity supplies. If you have a power cut ring 105, see www.ukpowernetworks.co.uk or tweet us @UKPowerNetworks