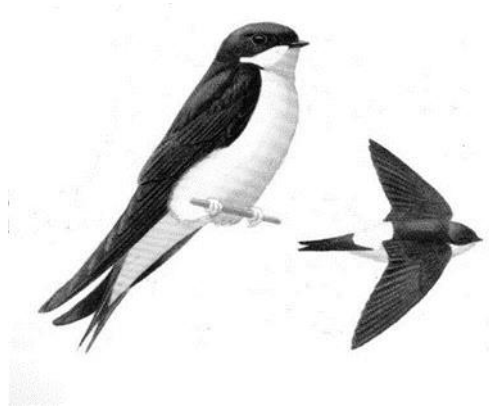


## House Martins

Those of you who live in Dale will no doubt be aware of the sizeable colony of House Martins which nest each year on the houses at the top of Blue Anchor Way. Every summer they return and build or repair their mud nests under the eaves where they raise up to three, but more usually two, broods of chicks. There are also House Martins in Marloes (a traditional site being on the shop) and at St Brides Castle. I am not sure about St Ishmaels – perhaps you could let me know?

Some people are confused about the difference between House Martins and Swallows. Swallows are larger, have long tail streamers and build their cup-shaped nest in barns and porches, whereas House Martins have shorter tails, with very white underparts, a white chin and a bright white rump.



House Martins are not doing very well in some parts of the UK - they are completely dependent on a good supply of insects for food and where these insects have been eradicated by pesticides or pollution they struggle to feed their young. Surprisingly little is known about their actual UK population, their breeding locations and their breeding success – much of the information is anecdotal rather than scientific - so the British Trust for Ornithology is carrying out a survey over the next two years which will hopefully answer those questions. It is not even clear where they go in the winter – Swallows are regularly seen in South Africa but not House Martins. They just disappear so the presumption is that they frequent dense rainforest in central Africa along with our Cuckoos. Some tagging experiments using very tiny geolocators should provide the answer to this conundrum.

House Martins are a very clean and dapper little bird – they have white feathering on their legs which they manage to keep clean even when building their mud nests – but their habits (particularly the youngsters) are not so clean. The nests can be a nuisance where they are positioned over windows or doors, where the droppings causing mess and stains. The best solution to this is to fix a shelf about 2 metres below the nest to catch the droppings.

It is worth noting that it is actually a criminal offence to remove a House Martin nest during the breeding season. However, if they are causing real problems you can remove a nest in the winter and put up wire or a commercial deterrent. Most people, however, are only too pleased to share their house with these delightful little creatures for a few months each year.

*Rosemary Royle*