

Common House Martins nesting in a hole

January 2025



On 30th June 2023, I noticed Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum* droppings beneath one of the apexes of my children's primary school in Steam Mills, Gloucestershire. Looking up, I could see the remains of several old House Martins nests, but there was no complete nest. When picking up my children later in the day, I saw an adult House Martin fly up to the apex. However, there seemed to be no reason why a House Martin should be flying up there, and I assumed that the bird was simply inspecting the site.

On 6th July, I saw several House Martins flying up to the apex; I waited and eventually saw an adult fly up and disappear into a hole between the stonework and the wooden apex. The adult then flew out again and I could hear birds, presumably young, calling from within.

House Martin

15. Adult Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum* emerging from nest hole, Steam Mills, Gloucestershire, July 2023.

During the afternoon of 7th July, I watched the adults fly to and from the hole, apparently feeding young inside. By the following week, visits by adults to the nest had stopped and the outcome of the nest is unknown.

The birds returned to the same site in 2024, where they attempted to raise three broods of chicks. The first brood failed, but the second and third broods successfully fledged.

Although there was rain at the beginning of May 2023 and again in the second half of June 2023, there was a four-week period between with no rain and the soil was dry. It seems possible that the dry weather encouraged the pair to seek a nest within the roof space where less wet mud would be required than to make an external nest, and to use the same nesting space again the following year. There was no mud around the entrance hole. I am aware of just three

records of House Martins nesting in similar holes: in the eaves of buildings (Reade 1964; Harding 1984) and in a wall (Waldon 2004).

References

Harding, B. D. 1984. Nesting adaptability of House Martins. *Brit. Birds* 77: 158.

Reade, W. 1964. Unusual nesting site of House Martin. *Brit. Birds* 57: 33.

Waldon, J. 2004. Sand Martins and House Martins nesting in a wall. *Brit. Birds* 97: 352–353.

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