

SAND MARTIN – ADVISORY SHEET

Sand martins (*Riparia riparia*) are a summer migrant to Britain and Ireland, arriving in March in order to breed. They are related to swallows, and spend much of their life on the wing catching small flying insects. Their natural nesting habitat is small vertical faces of sand along rivers, but this habitat has been constricted over the years through canalisation of rivers. They are currently listed as Amber on the list of Birds of Conservation Concern as they are vulnerable to pressures of drought on their wintering grounds in Africa and to loss of nest sites and chicks in Britain and across Europe.



NESTING AND QUARRIES

Sand martins are very adaptable and have taken to man-made faces; from purpose built nesting walls to old pipes in dock yard walls. One such man made nesting opportunity is presented in sand and gravel quarries, and sand martins are very quick to move into new sites. Sand martins nest in colonies from a few pairs to several hundreds, nesting in deep burrows and raising up to three broods of youngsters a year. Quarries can play a part in helping the birds breed safely and increasing their populations to withstand any future threats or declines.



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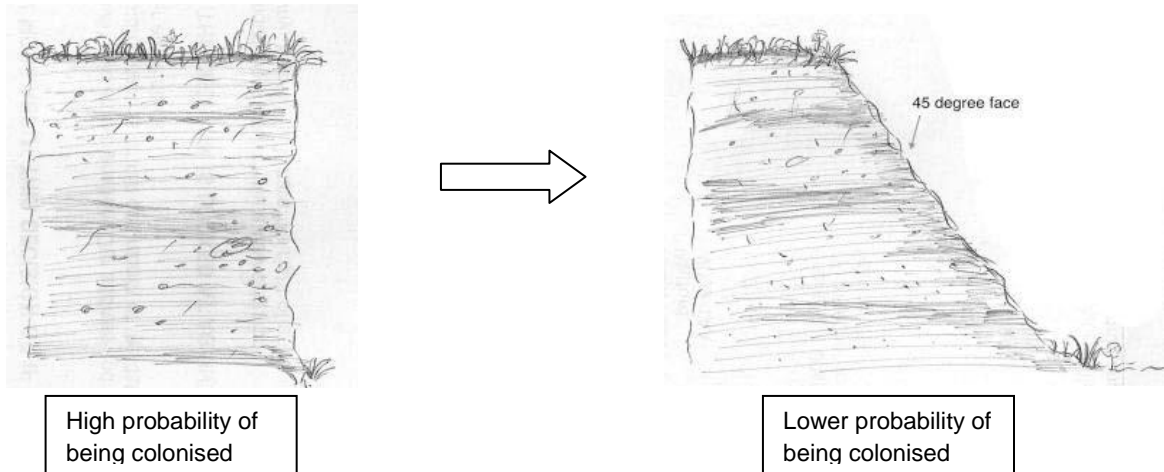
If sand martins do colonise an active quarry face, then all work must stop between **April and September** as all birds and their nests are fully protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 which makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird.

It is also an offence to intentionally take damage or destroy their eggs or nests while they are in use or being built. It should be remembered that nesting burrows can be up to 1m in length, and therefore vehicle movements should be stopped above the vicinity of the colony as this could cause the tunnels to collapse, potentially making the face unstable.

Measures can be easily taken to accommodate sand martins, especially with a small amount of forward planning. It should be assumed that a colony will establish in every sand and gravel quarry, and therefore all faces should be assessed for suitability for breeding sand martins before the end of March.

KEY MEASURES

- Before each nesting season, set aside a suitable face for sand martins. This should ideally be a different face than one used in previous years, and should be away from the main quarrying areas to avoid any potential conflict.
- Before each nesting season, re-profile active faces to 45° to make them less attractive to sand martins. This may have to be done on a daily basis, as sand martins may colonise a face overnight.



- Place netting over those active faces that it is not practical to re-profile. This should discourage sand martins from becoming established.
- Regularly check all operational faces for evidence of sand martin nest, particularly after quarry closures e.g. Easter.
- Clearly mark out areas which should not be disturbed and routinely monitor activities, making changes to these marked areas as necessary.
- Consider the effect of passing machinery to ensure that it does not cause damage / disturbance through vibrations
- Ensure that all personnel are aware of individual and company **legal obligation** to prevent harm

SUMMARY

- Sand martins will often use active quarry faces, and even heaps of loose sand, to nest between March and September
- Sand martins and their active nests are fully protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, and **protected from the moment the birds begin burrowing.**
- It is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird. It is an offence to intentionally take, damage or destroy the eggs or nest of a sand martin while it is in use or being built
- **Individual employees as well as companies can be prosecuted**, with penalties including **fines and imprisonment**

These simple steps should ensure that sand martins co-exist happily with normal quarry operations. If you require any further information, please contact Nature After Minerals on 01767 693441 (www.afterminerals.com)

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