

## Room to breed: Sand Martin 'des res' at Woolbeding

Sand Martins naturally use their bill and feet to dig 50 – 90cm burrows for nesting in, dug into steep sandy faces, in areas of multiple habitation. Droughts in the Sand Martin's African winter sites have, more than once, notably decreased the numbers arriving here to breed. Both human development and riverbank erosion can make finding just the right spot in which to burrow increasingly difficult for these, our smallest Hirundines, and so a few places have started creating Sand Martin Nesting Banks.

Some, like the one at Blashford Lakes in the New Forest is made with pre-formed burrows:



The Sand Martins seem perfectly happy with this design, I have watched dozens of them flitting in and out of these holes as they come out to hunt for insects over the lake, but such concrete or wooden constructions are not a thing of beauty and look so unnatural in such beautiful settings.

As part of the Woolbeding Reimagined project, the National Trust wanted to try a more natural solution, and HNHS was happy to financially support the creation of a sandy bank which would look more in keeping with its surroundings and will hopefully be much enjoyed by the Sand Martins once they discover it.



This approach has been tried successfully elsewhere, such as the one Surrey Wildlife Trust created at Spynes Mere, near Redhill. SWT say that this 'naturalistic solution is similar to building a sand castle on the beach with a bucket and spade, just on a grand scale'.

Now all that is needed at Woolbeding is a big dollop of patience as it has taken years for some other Sand Martin nesting banks to be discovered by the birds, but once they know it is there the colony size does have a habit of growing year on year! Luckily the National Trust have also identified a suitable spot for observing this nesting bank and the Society will certainly plan a Field Meeting to watch the Sand Martins once they are well established in their new 'des res'!

If you build it, they will come – so we wait, confidently!