



INTRODUCTION TO CHIMNEY SWIFTS IN LONDON, ONTARIO



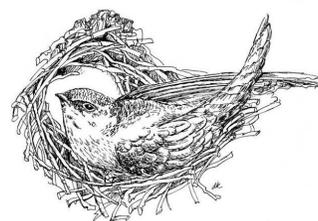
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What is a Chimney Swift?

- A Chimney Swift is a small, sooty-coloured bird with long pointed wings and a stubby tail.
- Swifts fly from dawn to dusk, catching approximately 1000 insects a day (many more if feeding young).
- The design of their feet prevents swifts from landing on the ground or perching in trees or other structures.
- Swifts traditionally nested and roosted inside large-diameter hollow trees or dark corners of barns.
- Swifts land only inside chimneys (or hollow trees) where they tend their nests or rest at night by clinging to the bricks with their claws.
- There is only one nesting pair per chimney, but some non-breeders sometimes roost in the same chimney.
- Chimney Swifts breed in southern Canada and eastern United States and winter in the upper Amazon basin.
- Because swifts fly high and never land where they can be seen, few people even know they exist!
- Swifts are present in London from late April until early October.

A Threatened Species

- Chimney Swifts were once one of our commonest summer birds.
 - From 1970 to 2015 (45 years), Breeding Bird Survey Data show
 - decline in Canada 90%
 - decline in Ontario 94%
 - From 2005 to 2015 (10 years)
 - decline in Canada 43%
 - decline in Ontario 47%
 - annual decline rate (Can & Ont) 6%



- In 2009 the Chimney Swift was designated as **THREATENED** in Canada and in Ontario.
- Chimneys Swifts and their habitat are protected under federal and provincial species-at-risk legislation:
 - but provincial legislation was greatly weakened in 2013 by cabinet regulation.
 - but federal legislation applies only on federal lands and is not necessarily enforced.
- Under federal and provincial legislation, Recovery Plans were required by 2011 but none yet prepared.
- Swifts and their nesting habitat in London are mainly protected by the Migratory Birds Convention Act i.e., birds and nests of migratory species cannot be harmed.

Why Chimney Swifts Are in Trouble

- Problems with their food supply (insects caught in flight):
 - ◆ Widespread use of pesticides, including neonicotinoids, on farmlands.
 - ◆ Loss of insect-producing habitat, e.g.,
 - wetland drainage, woodland clearance, removal of hedgerows;
 - mowing of ditches and roadsides, and expansion of mega lawns;
 - industrial agriculture: increase in monocultures of farmed crops;
 - expanding cities and roadways;
 - proliferation of non-native trees, which produce very few insects edible to native birds.
 - ◆ Changes in timing of peak insect abundance – now out of synch with peak nestling needs.
 - ◆ Insect species now available to swifts are smaller and less abundant than in former times.
- Shortage of nesting and roosting sites:
 - ◆ Few large-diameter hollow trees (and raccoons may be present where they do occur).
 - ◆ Ongoing loss of large, uncapped, unlined brick chimneys of the type favoured by swifts.
 - ◆ Very slow progress in developing designs for artificial chimneys that Ontario swifts find suitable.
 - ◆ BUT, in Ontario, swifts are decreasing faster than suitable old chimneys are disappearing.
- Extreme weather events (increasing in frequency and severity in recent years):
 - ◆ Hurricanes, temperature swings and heavy-rain events may affect migration, disrupt food supply and wash away nests.
- Problems along migration routes and on the wintering grounds (e.g., logging, fire, land clearance, pesticides)



Where to Find Swifts in the London Region

- Since 2004, 170 chimneys used by swifts in London have been identified; almost one-third have since been demolished or capped.
- There are undoubtedly other chimneys used by swifts in London that have not yet been “discovered”.
- Also look for unlined, open-topped brick chimneys in the many small towns and villages throughout southwestern Ontario, as they may harbour swifts.
- Pre-1960s buildings such as churches, schools, businesses, factories and older homes with large chimneys hold potential for housing swifts.
- From May to September, listen for chattering swifts high overhead; then look for swifts entering chimneys.
- For tips on watching swifts and suggestions for the best sites for seeing swifts in London, go to the swift page at www.naturelondon.ca; find the document “Where to See Chimney Swifts in London, Ontario”.

How You Can Help Chimney Swifts

- Help Nature London learn more about local swifts and the chimneys they use:
 - ◆ Learn to identify swifts and how to detect nest/roost chimneys.
 - ◆ In London, report date, location and numbers of swifts seen entering or exiting chimneys to chimneyswift@naturelondon.com.
 - ◆ Sign up to help with regular monitoring of chimneys used by swifts (chimneyswift@naturelondon.com).
- To report swifts entering chimneys outside of London, contact ontarioswiftwatch@birdscanada.org.
- Help protect the habitat needed by swifts for nesting and roosting and for production of the insects they eat:
 - ◆ Advocate for protection of older chimneys used by swifts.
 - ◆ Promote protection of woodlands, wetlands, roadside verges and other places where insects eaten by swifts and other birds are produced.
 - ◆ Support (and donate to) conservation organizations that preserve healthy natural landscapes where native plants, animals, birds, insects, etc. can thrive.
- Take personal action at home:
 - ◆ If you have a chimney used by swifts:
 - Keep the top open; don't use your fireplace during swift season.
 - Clean your chimney and do other maintenance between October and April.
 - If converting to a gas furnace, keep chimney available to swifts by venting elsewhere.
 - ◆ Turn your property into an oasis of native vegetation that supports the insects that feed native birds:
 - Plant only native trees, shrubs and flowers (avoid non-natives or cultivars).
 - Gradually remove non-native plants and trees, as few insects live on them and they take up space that could be more productively occupied by native trees, shrubs and flowers.
 - Start by planting just one native plant, shrub or tree; then add more over time.
 - ◆ Reduce your ecological footprint to help slow climate change and loss of native habitat.
- Take action in the community:
 - ◆ Promote community plantings of native vegetation (e.g., schoolyards).
 - ◆ Educate neighbours and friends; celebrate swifts!
 - ◆ Advocate for reduction in use of pesticides, especially neonicotinoids.
 - ◆ If you find an injured or orphaned Chimney Swift, contact Swift Care Ontario (519-434-0763 or swiftcareontario@gmail.com or <https://www.facebook.com/SwiftCareOntario>)

Learn More about Chimney Swifts

- Visit the Nature London website (www.naturelondon.ca) and go to the swift page.
- Schedule a free PowerPoint presentation; contact chimneyswift@naturelondon.com.

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