

Nature London's Program of Chimney Swift Initiatives, 2018/2019

This account covers the 12 months from Nov 1/18 to Oct 31/19, a time period that enables reporting on a single (April-to-October) season of swift activity in London.

Introduction

It was a banner year for Nature London's multi-pronged program of Chimney Swift initiatives.

Sandy Symmes organized by far the biggest and most visible component – regular evening monitoring. A new pilot tested the feasibility of using daytime monitoring to assess fledging success. In one way or another, about 55 core and 10 casual volunteers participated in monitoring.

Under the conservation umbrella, input was made to several planning processes that may impact local swifts; advice was offered to chimney owners where construction, alterations, repairs or demolition were planned or underway; and information obtained during monitoring helped Swift Care Ontario determine optimal release sites.

Outreach endeavours included dissemination of educational materials (e.g., via website, displays, flyers, articles, reports, PowerPoint presentations); making contact with chimney owners and the public; promotion of biodiversity gardens to produce swift food; and the development of strong connections with other swift stakeholders in Ontario and beyond.

Read on for details of the many activities of Nature London's dedicated swift community in 2019.

Monitoring / Data Collection

- Recruited volunteers via *The Cardinal* and at Nature London meetings, Jan to Mar 2019.
- Established NL's monitoring programs as independent from BSC (but continued to share data).
- Organized orientation session at downtown library, Apr 27 (attendance 37).
- Developed new NL evening protocol, manual, field form and online data-entry system.
 - Commenced evening monitoring May 1, continued to Oct 6, mostly weekly.
 - Hosted outdoor training session for evening monitors, May 21 (attendance 13).
 - Held ~25 monitoring evenings at 13 chimneys, each followed by report to participants.
 - Collected sightings of Common Nighthawks.
 - ~320 monitoring visits to 13 chimneys (7 held roosts), ~30 visits to 14 other chimneys.
 - During fall migration, numbers peaked much earlier and at a lower level than in 2018.
 - For the first time, peak number of fall migrants was lower than peak of spring migrants.
 - In 2019, swifts were present in London from April 30 to Oct 2.
- Established a pilot project to assess feasibility of using daytime monitoring to gain info on success rate of nesting swifts.
 - Developed protocol, created manual, field form and online data entry system.
 - Eight volunteers monitored 14 chimneys (mid-May to early Aug); 12 weekly reports sent.
 - ~175 monitoring visits, 265 hours of observations (10 to 26 hours per chimney).
 - Conclusion: one to two hours per week is inadequate to reliably determine nest outcome.
 - Likely outcomes at monitored nest chimneys:

▪ Success or possible success	5	Failure or probable failure	4
▪ No nest (but activity at 2 sites)	4	Too little info to determine	1
 - By mid-Aug, some non-breeding swifts stay in roost chimneys till mid-morning or later.
- Provided support for some independent monitoring; three new active chimneys found.
- Hosted monitors' end-of-season gathering at Cherryhill library, Oct 17/19, (attendance 34).
- Prepared detailed end-of-season reports for both daytime and evening monitoring.
- Liaised with Bird Studies Canada (now Birds Canada) Ontario SwiftWatch program:
 - Participated in conference call Nov 18/18 for swift monitoring groups around Ont.
 - Encouraged development of better approaches for monitoring swift populations.
 - Shared data from NL's two monitoring programs via weekly spreadsheets.

Conservation

- Submitted information relating to swifts to the One River Environmental Assessment.
- Urged city politicians, during redevelopment of old psych hospital lands, to retain some natural habitat for production of food for area swifts.
- Successfully advocated to have protection of chimneys used by swifts included in Old East Village Secondary Plan.
- Made input to SoHo riverfront planning process, recommending natural habitat be included to create healthy foraging opportunities for swifts and swallows.
- Supplied info on timing and other adjustments for ongoing or planned construction and roof/chimney repairs for eight active swift chimneys on five buildings.
- Provided advice on possible approaches for saving a swift chimney in Woodstock.
- Shared ideas re chimney-top modifications that allow swift entry but reduce water damage to heritage chimneys.
- Helped Swift Care Ontario identify two suitable release locations for 14 hand-reared swifts.

Education/Outreach

- Provided information in response to phone and e-mail inquiries.
- Prepared swift display materials (Doors Open, Sep 16/18; UWO Envirocon, Mar 23/19).
- Created flyer of general info on swifts and distributed swift info “postcards”.
- Contacted businesses, institutions and others, supplying tips for accommodating swifts.
- Promoted biodiversity gardens as a means of producing swift food (airborne insects).
- Gave PowerPoint on swifts to Ingersoll District Nature Club, Nov 25/18 (attendance 45).
- Welcomed Debbie Lefebvre to Birding Wing to speak on Swift Care Ontario, Mar 22/19.
- Led swift walk in downtown London, May 26/19 (attendance 32).
- Published articles in *The Cardinal* (photo essay on swifts nesting in a chimney, report of 2018 NL swift initiatives, updates on Nature London eco-grant for swift sign and viewing bench).
- Board reps participated in eco-meditation garden opening, First-St. Andrew’s church, Jun 23/19.
- Updated and added materials to swift page on Nature London website, Mar 2019.
- Enlisted Paul Nicholson to write column in *London Free Press* to mark World Swift Day (Jun 7).
- Exchanged information and ideas with other swift stakeholders in Ontario and elsewhere.

UWO: Western University; NL: Nature London; BSC: Bird Studies Canada, Ontario SwiftWatch.

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