

# AMAZING FACTS ABOUT CHIMNEY SWIFTS

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## Introducing London, Ontario's Chimney Swifts in 30 Amazing Facts

- Δ Reside in eastern North America – US and southern Canada.
- Δ Threatened species in Ontario and Canada; population decline >90% since 1970s.
- Δ Enliven summer skies with exuberant chittering and acrobatic flight.
- Δ Often unnoticed, high-flying, widespread across London; heard before seen.
- Δ Nest and roost inside unlined, open-topped, chimneys on pre-1960s buildings.
- Δ One-third known London swift chimneys capped or demolished in last 15 years.
- Δ Among fastest flyers in the bird world (100 km per hour or more).
- Δ Spend far more time in the air than other land-based birds.
- Δ Have amazing maneuverability, and can change directions on a dime.
- Δ Large eyes focus quickly at high speeds and when suddenly entering dark spaces.
- Δ Can echolocate (though bats are much better at this).
- Δ Dine exclusively on flying insects, eating one-third of body weight per day.
- Δ Despite small size (ca 21 g), can fly up to 800 km a day while hunting insects.
- Δ Forage at great heights – above buildings and treetops – 20 m to 1000 m or more.
- Δ Capture more than 1000 flying insects a day (up to 12,000 when feeding young).
- Δ Swift food supply shrinking as insect numbers decline (pesticides, habitat loss, etc.).
- Δ When not in air, cling woodpecker-like to vertical surfaces, usually inside chimneys.
- Δ Unable to walk or perch horizontally, as feet not designed for such activities.

- Δ Nest in dimly lit places (once hollow trees, now chimneys, rarely old barns).
- Δ Both parents build and tend nest, usually 2 or 3 m down inside chimney.
- Δ Use saliva to glue tiny twig nest together and to inner chimney wall.
- Δ Pure white eggs incubated 3 weeks; 4 or 5 hatchlings are jelly bean size.
- Δ Ten-day-old nestlings resemble prickly porcupines; eyes open at 14 days.
- Δ At 3 weeks of age, young leave nest, spend 1 week learning to fly inside chimney; fly from chimney at 4 weeks.
- Δ Last North American bird to have wintering grounds found (upper Amazon, 1944).
- Δ While migrating, 100s or 1000s roost together at night in large unused chimneys.
- Δ Annually fly 10,000 km round trip to South America and back.
- Δ One swift can fly 2 million km in a year.
- Δ Can live up to 14 years in the wild, but life span for most is about 4 years.
- Δ Regional First Nations names:  
*memitigoningwegaaneshiinh* or  
*mizaatigoningwiisii*.

Photos: Dave Wake; sketch: Diane Kristensen.



**SPECIES  
AT RISK  
in Ontario**

## LEARN MORE ABOUT LONDON'S CHIMNEY SWIFTS:

<http://www.naturelondon.com/chimney-swifts-resources/>

Watch for swifts in London, April to September. Happy Swiftling!