

OVERVIEW OF NATURE LONDON SWIFT MONITORING PROTOCOL 2023

prepared by Winifred Wake, Apr 8, 2023

To sign up to participate and receive information on scheduling, sites to be monitored, field data form, sunset times, link to data entry portal, etc., contact the Swift Monitoring Committee (address at bottom of page).

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Nature London's 2023 swift monitoring season. After two years of reduced monitoring during the pandemic, in 2022 we resumed a full program that ran from early May to early October. In 2023, with help from a dedicated core of returning monitors plus new volunteers, we look forward to another full schedule.

Nature London shares its data with the provincial database maintained by Ontario SwiftWatch. Our information helps inform conservation decisions and contributes to the knowledge of swift numbers in Ontario and in Canada.

In 2023, we again plan to monitor on Tuesday evenings, starting May 2 and continuing until late September, with a slight adjustment to include May 24 (Wed), May 28 (Sun), June 1 (Thur), and June 5 (Mon). These are the dates of the National Chimney Swift Roost Monitoring Program of Environment and Climate Change Canada.

For a number of years, it has been our custom to rotate monitors among chimneys on a weekly basis. Once again, Glenn Berry (assisted by Sandy Symmes and Susan Berry) is looking after the scheduling – matching monitors, partners, chimneys, and dates. Monitoring assignments will be generated primarily by a computer program that Glenn has developed, supplemented by tweaks inserted by hand to ensure a good fit for everyone. As in 2022, the schedule will be circulated four weeks in advance and updated each week. If you have any problems or concerns, Glenn will be happy to help (contact info at bottom of page). A summary of monitoring results will be emailed weekly.

In 2022, thanks to stupendous efforts by a very loyal crew of volunteers, we carried out weekly monitoring at 18 chimneys (up from 13 in the previous few years). At these sites, we collected information on how nesting activity was progressing and tracked numbers of non-breeding swifts as they moved around among communal roosts. During August and September, we made additional visits to the busiest roost chimneys on behalf of out-of-town wildlife rehabilitators who specialize in raising orphaned Chimney Swifts. Our efforts enabled them to identify optimal release sites for their young charges.

Some of our monitors from 2022 have retired or are available for fewer weeks in 2023. Fortunately, several new people will be joining our ranks. We could still use some extra hands to help on a regular basis or to fill in at times when people are away on vacation or have to cancel on short notice. The number of chimneys we can cover in 2023 will depend on the number of monitors available each week. If you or friends or family members would like to join our team, please let us know (contact info below).

All monitors should read this document carefully before deciding to take part in the Nature London swift monitoring program in 2023. By participating, you assume full responsibility for all aspects of your personal health and safety during a monitoring session and while travelling to and from the site. This includes compliance with all provincial regulations and local health-unit directives, if any, that might be in effect re COVID-19. It is also your responsibility to ensure others whom you invite to join you are aware of these conditions of participation.

Our goal is for everyone to stay safe and healthy while experiencing a variety of different chimneys and collecting important information about London's swifts. We also hope you enjoy the swifts and the monitoring sessions. We extend a warm welcome and a big thank-you to all participants. Happy swifting! Be safe!

There is one point of contact for all members of the Swift Monitoring Committee (Glenn, Susan, Sandy, Ric, Dave and Winnie): londonswifts@gmail.com.

THANK YOU TO ALL VOLUNTEER MONITORS (MORE ARE WELCOME!)

A big THANK YOU goes out to all returning monitors from 2022 and to the new people who will be joining us for the first time. As mentioned on page 1, we could still use a few more volunteers. Additional monitors will help ensure coverage of all chimneys each week and permit better flexibility in accommodating monitors' vacation plans and last-minute cancellations.

Recruitment is currently underway. If you or friends or colleagues or family members might enjoy swift monitoring, this is your invitation to join our crew. See contact information on page 1. New recruits will be mentored by experienced monitors.

If you are a new monitor, we extend a very WARM WELCOME! If you are a returning monitor, we welcome you back as a friend. When you have the opportunity, please welcome the newcomers too.

SAFETY

In the past few years, the number of unhoused people living on London's streets has increased. These are fellow citizens, so please treat them courteously but do keep your wits about you, as many have multiple complex issues related to poverty, homelessness, mental health, addictions, etc. Here are some simple, common-sense suggestions to help ensure your safety.

- Always monitor with a partner and carry a phone. While one person primarily keeps tabs on swifts, the other can be generally aware of what is going on in the surrounding area and be alert for inappropriate activities.
- If possible, set up in a spot that allows for quick and easy departure in case of trouble.
 - Try to place lawn chairs in an area of high visibility, or consider monitoring from a vehicle.
 - Be particularly cautious when monitoring in locations where unhoused people tend to gather.
- Don't dress too well or make yourself an easy potential target of petty crime.
 - Leave visible valuables such as jewelry or purses at home.
- Keep personal possessions close by, but not in a position where they can be easily snatched.
 - Don't place your backpack behind your lawn chair; try looping the strap over the chair's arm.
 - Keep your wallet out of sight (e.g., in an inner pocket).
 - If you have binoculars, keep them close to your body, or loop the strap over the arm of the chair.
- At any time during the watch, if you become uneasy about safety, leave immediately.
- Many honest, pleasant Londoners are on our streets too and may simply be interested in what you are doing.
 - Always carry swift ID to share with passersby, chimney owners, security personnel, etc., as needed.
 - You may have leftover swift "postcards" from past years; these are fine to use.
 - Nature London swift business cards are now available (see contact information on page 1).
- Follow safety precautions, but do enjoy the evening, the swifts, and the companionship of your partner.

At the time of writing, COVID rates are not at a high level. It is possible, however, the status of the pandemic may fluctuate over the swift season. It is up to each monitor to take precautions for your own health and safety. Always follow current advice/recommendations of the Middlesex-London Health Unit.

GUIDELINES FOR NATURE LONDON'S REGULAR EVENING MONITORING PROGRAM 2023

Organized Tuesday evening monitoring at up to 18 chimneys is Nature London's flagship swift monitoring program. Scheduling is coordinated by Glenn Berry, assisted by Sandy Symmes and Susan Berry (londonswifts@gmail.com). For anyone who wishes to monitor in the daytime, adapt these guidelines as needed.

Goals:

- Conduct weekly counts (or estimates) of swifts overnighing in up to 18 targeted chimneys, May through September (maybe later). Such counts provide an indication of the changing numbers of swifts (both nesting and non-nesting birds) present in London during the breeding season and spring and fall migration.
- Record times and numbers of all swifts entering and exiting a chimney (before big flock arrives) to obtain evidence of possible nesting activity; for big numbers, note down estimates and approximate time intervals.
- Compile data on swift activity and numbers at London chimneys, for local use and for contribution to provincial and national swift database.
- Create enjoyable experiences for volunteer monitors.

When:

- On Tuesday evenings from May to Sep, then more often at a few sites until last swifts leave in early Oct.
- In late May and early June, instead of Tuesdays, monitor on May 25, May 29, June 2, and June 6.
- Watch, starting 30 min (or more) before sunset to 30 min after. Sunset times are included with monitoring schedules.
- If it is cold (≤ 13 °C), cloudy or rainy, arrive 45-60 min before sunset. If weather is severe, stay home.

Where:

- If sufficient volunteers are available, at up to 18 targeted chimneys, all of which have hosted swifts in past years and were monitored in 2022.
- Coordinator assigns chimney locations and dates. Directions and tips for individual chimneys are provided.

What to Bring:

- Printed field notes form (downloadable form provided upon registration), one for each chimney to be monitored, pencil/clipboard or tablet, timepiece, swift postcards from past years or new business cards (available from Swift Committee – see contact info above).
- As appropriate, lawn chair, seasonal clothing, water, insect repellent, phone, buddy, binoculars.

Getting Set Up:

- Try to monitor from a safe "public" location; avoid trespassing or incursions onto property that is clearly private. One can usually see and hear swifts better from a lawn chair set in an open space but, if safety is a concern, viewing from a car may be a better choice. Tips are provided for each site.
- Try to station yourself with the chimney silhouetted against the northwest sky, not buildings or trees, not facing security lights. If feasible, have two sides of the chimney visible.
- Sometimes it is not possible to find an optimal viewing location that meets all criteria mentioned above; if so, use your own best judgement. Keep in mind that your chances of seeing swifts as light levels fall in the latter part of the watch are best if the chimney can be silhouetted against the lightest/brightest part of the sky (i.e., as close to a northwesterly direction as possible).
- Follow any COVID-19 guidelines that are in place at the time (e.g., keep lawn chairs 2 m apart, wear mask). If you feel unsafe at any time during the watch, depart immediately.
- Fill in preliminary data on field form: date, location, observer(s), sunset time, weather codes, start time, count method.
- During the watch, if passersby show an interest in what you are doing, unless it is a very busy time, one member of the monitoring pair may wish to engage in conversation while the other focuses on taking data. Have available swift postcards or business cards to pass along. Maybe you can make a new friend for swifts.
- For sites that have two chimneys, complete a separate field form for each chimney, deciding in advance which monitor is responsible for recording data at each chimney. Four locations have two chimneys each.
- At sites that have just one chimney, one monitor watches the chimney and calls out numbers of swifts entering and exiting, while the other records the numbers and times. If desired, roles can be switched part way through the watch.

Recording Data:

- Have printed field notes form on a clipboard ready to use (downloadable form provided upon registration).
- Try to keep your eyes on top of chimney at all times (if two people, decide in advance who records data).
- On table, record in sequence the times and numbers of all swifts entering or leaving chimney.
- When counting swifts entering the chimney, avoid counting any that dip behind.
- If many swifts arrive and enter at once, switch to counting/estimating by 5s, 10s, 50s, etc. as needed.
- When a lull occurs, on table jot down time interval and number of entries to that point, subtracting departures as they occur. Start counting again at 0.
- If you are the only monitor at a chimney, minimize as much as possible the time your eyes are off the chimney.

Optional:

- Record maximum number of swifts in air at one time – omit if a large number enters the chimney for night (max number in air is of most interest if few swifts enter for night but more were present earlier).
- On table, note any interesting swift behaviours, possible predators, other observations.
- During breeding season (early June to early August), record maximum number of Common Nighthawks seen or heard at one time, but, during migration (May to early June, and mid-August to October), if nighthawks passing by seem to be different individuals, enter the total number seen.
- Record maximum numbers of Barn Swallows and bats seen at one time.

Finalizing Field Notes Form:

- Insert on field notes form: finish time, times of first and last entries by swifts, plus any other info of interest.
- To calculate number of swifts inside chimney for night, add and subtract entries and exits in order of occurrence.

Submit Evening Monitoring Data ASAP:

- Use the link on the field notes form to enter data online:
 - For a preview of what you will find at this portal, check out the link in advance.
- Each chimney monitored must be entered separately in the online portal.
- Data from all 18 chimneys will be compiled and weekly reports sent to participants.

Questions or Problems (e.g., if you can't make a scheduled shift, or have trouble with the online portal):

- Contact the address below, and Sandy, Glenn, Susan or Winnie will reply.

Weekly coverage of the 18 chimneys monitored in 2022 is our top priority, but the number actually monitored each week will depend on the number of volunteers available.

In case we ever have more monitors than needed to cover 18 chimneys, we have prepared a supplementary list of selected additional nest-only swift chimneys in London. Any monitors who wish can visit one of these to help us learn more about what swifts are up to at these sites.

Advice and mentoring are available for anyone who wishes to try out video-monitoring.

If you monitor at any chimney other than the 18, please use the monitoring guidelines (above), field form (downloadable form provided upon registration), and data entry portal (link given on field notes form). Be sure to include the address of the chimney in the Comments box.

You may also use the field form and data entry portal for daytime monitoring, the casual observation of a swift dropping into or leaving any chimney at any time of day, or a monitoring visit to any chimney on a night other than a scheduled monitoring evening.

Direct questions about any of the above possibilities to the address below.

To sign up to participate and receive information on scheduling, sites to be monitored, field data form, sunset times, link to data entry portal, etc., contact the Swift Monitoring Committee at londonswifts@gmail.com.

We look forward to welcoming you as part of our team.

- Glenn, Susan, Sandy, Ric, Winnie, Dave