Annual Report, 2022/23, of Nature London Chimney Swift Program

This account covers the 13 months from November 1, 2022 to November 30, 2023, a period that includes the 2023 swift season and the subsequent wrap-up period. Nature London's swift program has continued to operate independently, while collaborating and sharing information with other swift stakeholders. The 2023 London program was overseen by Glenn and Susan Berry, Sandy and Ric Symmes and Dave and Winnie Wake.

During 2023, organized monitoring at 18 chimneys was carried out on 20 evenings by more than 65 volunteers. Extra visits to these and other sites produced data for a total of 501 visits to 98 swift chimneys.

During the year, the organizing team held regular discussions (Zoom, in-person, e-mail) regarding swift programming in 2023 and beyond. Sandy and Ric retired from the committee at the end of August. At the end of November, Winnie stepped down as Chimney Swift Liaison to take on a much-reduced role.

Glenn and Susan have assumed full leadership of the organized monitoring program. In October, they sent a survey to all previous monitors, who indicated strong support for both participating in and assisting with the 2024 monitoring program. A committee was formed. It held its first Zoom meeting on November 20.

A summary of 2022/2023 swift activities is presented below in three categories (with some overlap): Education/Outreach, Conservation/Advocacy and Monitoring/Data Collection.

Education/Outreach

- Revamped swift page on NL website; new and updated materials; password-protected page for monitors.
- Prepared new/updated business cards, pamphlets, handout sheets, etc.
- Delivered Zoom PowerPoints on swifts to 2 naturalists' clubs:
    - Manitoulin Island, Jan 27 (30 computers); follow-up PowerPoint on citizen science possibilities re swifts.
    - Niagara Falls, May 10 (24 computers connected).
- Responded to multiple e-mails on swift-related subjects, e.g.,
    - How to find swift chimneys, capture methods for swifts, summary of construction and use of artificial swift towers in Canada, suggestions for best places to see swifts.
- On Apr 22 at EarthFest in Citi Centre Plaza, created/staffed swift display with handouts (in conjunction with NL).
- Through info sharing, developed/strengthened relationships with swift stakeholders in MB, QC and Maritimes.
    - Continued regular communications with Ontario SwiftWatch.
- On Aug 10, led evening walking tour of downtown swift chimneys for 10 delegates to American Ornithological Society conference; display, handouts; observed 1 active nest chimney, watched 120 swifts enter roost for night.
- Throughout season, monitors acted as swift ambassadors, engaging passersby, and providing info on swifts.

<u>Publications</u>

- Chimney Swift Monitoring: Highlights from 2022, G Berry, *Cardinal* 270, Winter 2023, p 33.
- Releasing Hand-reared Chimney Swifts in London, G Berry, *Cardinal* 270, Winter 2023, pp 34&35.
- Flying Free: Chimney Swifts Released at Huron College, W Wake, *Cardinal* 273, Autumn 2023, pp 28&29.
- In Memoriam: Remembering Debbie Lefebre [swift rehabilitator], W Wake, *Cardinal* 273, Autumn 2023, p 42.

Conservation/Advocacy

- Provided info to discussion on possible harms of fireworks to wildlife.
- At request of members of biology dept at Western, provided suggestions for possible research topics on swifts.
- Handled the transfer of frozen swift cadavers from Debbie Lefebre (former operator of Swift Care Ontario) to Professor Keith Hobson at Western for use in research.
- Facilitated 2 releases of hand-reared Chimney Swifts; reports and brief PowerPoints prepared for each event.
    - Aug 27 – 11 banded swifts (2 with Motus tags) from Le Nichoir of Hudson, Quebec, at Huron College.
    - Sep 2 – 2 swifts from Destined to Fly of Harrowsmith, Ontario, at Mount Brydges.
- Searched (unsuccessfully) for new roost chimneys in nearby towns that might serve as potential release sites.
- Advised city ecologist that swifts nest in the chimney of a building in east London where redevelopment is planned and urged that no inappropriate alterations or construction activity be permitted.

- Provided input/comments on paper on weather and human disturbance re outcomes of breeding Chimney Swifts.
- Provided 6 owners with customized info on best practices and summaries of swift use of their 15 chimneys.
- After federal government released Chimney Swift Recovery Strategy in August, responded to chimney owners who contacted Nature London seeking clarification on their responsibilities.
- Completed digitization of all London swift data (2003-2023), ~5900 entries; shared with researchers at Western.
    - Data currently being used for an honours project: "Effects of Weather on Chimney Use and Roosting Dynamics in *Chaetura pelagica*"; more student projects on London swift data expected in future.
- To assist Breeding Bird Atlas, visited small towns in region and confirmed swifts nesting in five chimneys.

Monitoring / Data Collection

Organized weekly Tuesday-evening monitoring in London
(including four extra spring migration dates for national roost monitoring program of Canadian Wildlife Service).

- Tried to create meaningful and enjoyable experiences for volunteer monitors.
- Updated monitoring guidelines, parking info, field forms, online data entry portal, safety protocol, etc.
- Revamped delivery of communications to monitors, with focus on privacy and security of personal information.
- Recruited new monitors via NL e-newsletter, *The Cardinal*, club Zoom meetings, EarthFest, personal contact, etc.
- Engaged >65 volunteer monitors (core of ~50), rotated weekly to different assigned chimneys.
- By July, welcomed >12 new monitors; mentored by experienced volunteers.
- Monitored 18 chimneys weekly May to September (plus additional daytime and evening visits).
    - Terminated monitoring 3 weeks earlier than in 2022, as swifts headed south on migration earlier in 2023.
- Sent weekly updates: assignment schedule, memory joggers, table, and analysis of recent results.

Other monitoring

- Monitored 80 other chimneys (mostly 1 visit each, some in daytime); 75 in London, 5 out of town.
- Identified 2 new active swift chimneys in London and 4 out of town.

Collected total of 501 data entries from 98 chimneys (spreadsheet sent to Ontario SwiftWatch at end of season).

- Prepared end-of season swift monitoring report for 2023 (38 pages); distributed to monitors, other stakeholders.

Highlights of monitoring in 2023

- Start of spring monitoring delayed one week due to very cold weather.
- In late June and at other times, smoke from northern wildfires interfered with scheduled monitoring nights.
- Compared to recent years, lower spring migration numbers, higher roost numbers during nesting season.
- Compared to fall migration in past 6 years, numbers peaked lower and earlier, roosts emptied earlier.
    - Combined tally for 13 chimneys peaked at 675 on Aug 8, lowest and earliest fall peak in 6 years.
    - Largest single-night count at 1 roost = 374 (Labatt's, Aug 22), lowest high fall count at 1 site in 20 years.
    - Last chimney occupied was Smith Fruit on Sep 12 (1 bird), 3 weeks earlier than 2022.
        - Earliest last date of occupancy since monitoring began in 2003.
- Of 18 chimneys, 10 produced no young; results are inconclusive for others, though some young likely fledged.

Collected sightings of Common Nighthawks, Barn Swallows, and bats.

London data appear to be showing a long-term trend of decreasing swift numbers and earlier fall departure (though no corresponding earlier spring arrival).

- As no equivalent fall monitoring is done elsewhere in Canada, London data may hold key insights.

Though 2023 was not a great year for swifts, the support from monitors, organizing committee members, and Nature London was unsurpassed. Sincere thanks to all. What a truly amazing team, and what important work is being achieved on behalf of swifts!

Winifred Wake,
(outgoing) Chimney Swift Liaison for Nature London, November 30, 2023