

# AMAZING FACTS ABOUT CHIMNEY SWIFTS

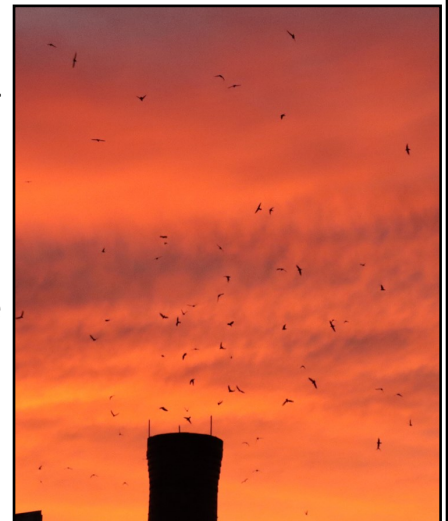
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August 10, 2023

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

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

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