



## HOW TO BE A GOOD CHIMNEY SWIFT LANDLORD

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Updated April 1, 2022



### TIPS FOR HOSTING CHIMNEY SWIFTS: QUICK SUMMARY (details start page 3)

**If there are swifts in your chimney, consider yourself not only lucky but honored! You have the rare privilege of hosting a species at risk and seeing its life story unfold right on your own premises. Here are some tips for being a good swift host:**

- Clean your chimney every year (best done in early April before swifts return).
- Don't use your furnace or fireplace during the season swifts are present.
- Keep the damper of your fireplace closed during swift season.
- Do not cap the chimney or line it with metal; if considering a conversion to gas, vent elsewhere.
- If a metal lining is installed, cap the chimney to prevent swifts and other wildlife from being trapped inside.
- Make chimney and roof repairs when swifts are out of the country (mid-October to mid-April).
- To keep nuisance animals out of the chimney, trim back overhanging foliage and securely wrap a 60-cm-wide band of metal flashing around the outside of the chimney near the top.
- If pruning trees, leave some dead branches with fine twigs at the tips for swifts to use as nesting material.
- If you are bothered by food-begging calls in the two weeks before young swifts leave the chimney, stuff foam rubber (not fiberglass insulation) above the damper in your fireplace; be sure to remove it later.
- Welcome swifts to your chimney – they eat huge numbers of flying insects, make minimal mess, do no structural damage to the chimney, and pose no fire or health hazard.
- If swifts are occupying your chimney, please send details of location, dates, numbers, etc. to organizations studying swifts and working to conserve them. In London contact [chimneyswift@naturelondon.com](mailto:chimneyswift@naturelondon.com).
- Elsewhere in Ontario submit data at <https://www.birdscanada.org/naturecounts/ai/aicasual.jsp>.

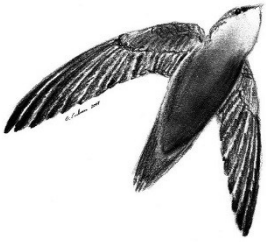
Read on to learn more about swifts, how to determine whether they are using your chimney and for additional ideas on how to be the best swift host ever, or how to be a good swift friend (if your chimney has no swifts).

### Amazing Facts about Chimney Swifts

- 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.
- Can echolocate (though bats are much better at this).
- 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 per day while hunting insects.
- Forage at great heights – above buildings and treetops – 20 m to 1000 m or more.
- Capture about 1000 flying insects a day (up to 12,000 when feeding young).
- 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 inside dimly lit spaces (once hollow trees, now chimneys, rarely old barns).
- Use saliva to glue tiny twig nests together and to inner chimney wall.
- Eggs are pure white; at hatching, the 4 or 5 nestlings are size of jellybeans.
- Ten-day-old nestlings resemble prickly porcupines; eyes open at 14 days.
- 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 flies more than 10,000 km on 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.



## Introducing Chimney Swifts



Chimney Swifts are small sooty-grey birds that spend their days on the wing capturing flying insects. Watch high overhead for cigar-shaped bodies; long, rapidly beating wings; short, stubby tails; and exuberant twittering.

Chimney Swift vocalizations are distinctive and easy to recognize. Check them out here: [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chimney\\_Swift/sounds](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chimney_Swift/sounds). Under “Calls,” press play button.

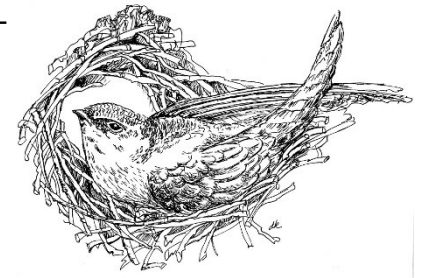
The earliest swifts arrive in Ontario in late April and the last ones depart for South America in early October. During migration, swifts gather to spend nights together inside old chimneys. In London, spring migration peaks in late May and early June, and fall migration in late August and early September. Non-breeding swifts continue to roost communally throughout the nesting season. Chimneys used for roosting usually have larger diameters than chimneys used only for nesting.

While nesting, only one pair of swifts occupies a chimney at a time, though sometimes one or two helper birds may also be present. Nests are placed at least 2 m down inside the chimney shaft but are often much lower (below roof level). Swifts occasionally nest in silos or high up inside old wooden barns. Rarely, they may use large-diameter hollow trees. A nesting pair may occupy a chimney at the same time it is being used by roosting swifts. If so, the nest is usually placed lower down in the chimney than the area used by the swifts roosting there overnight, and the nesting birds often enter earlier for the night.

Upon return in the spring, a pair soon reoccupies the chimney it used the previous year. Here is a very rough approximation of the nesting-season schedule:

◇ nest construction	1 week
◇ egg-laying	1 week
◇ incubation	3 weeks
◇ nestling period	3 weeks
◇ youngsters outside nest but inside chimney	1 week
◇ outside flight practice	<u>1 week</u>

for a total of about 10 weeks.



Depending on how early in the season a pair of swifts begins the nesting cycle, the family may leave its nest chimney as early as mid-July or as late as mid-to-late August. If a nest fails, adults may abandon the chimney. If the failure happens early enough in the season, the parents may make a second nesting attempt.

The Chimney Swift was once a very common species in both urban and agricultural landscapes of southwestern Ontario. Numbers began to decline after World War II. By the 1980s the population was much diminished in rural areas and steadily shrinking in urban centres. In 2009, with the Canadian swift population having dropped by 90% since 1970, the Chimney Swift was designated as Threatened, a status confirmed in 2018.

Among reasons cited for swift declines are loss of suitable chimneys and old-growth trees, deteriorating quantity and quality of the food supply, increase in extreme weather events, and hazards encountered during migration and while wintering in South America. In Ontario, old brick chimneys are in steady decline, and swifts are rarely encountered in the rural landscapes where they were once widespread. Urban renewal, habitat loss, and industrial agriculture (e.g., land clearance, drainage, monocultures, chemical pesticides) have implications for the availability of nesting and communal roosting sites and for the swifts' food supply – airborne insects.

Chimneys suitable for swifts have not been built since the 1960s and many existing swift-occupied chimneys are being capped or demolished. Of a sample of 180 London chimneys known to be used by swifts since 2004, by 2020 only 120 remained available. In the past number of years attempts have been underway to develop “artificial chimneys” suitable for swifts in Ontario. Unfortunately, these cost many tens of thousands of dollars to build, and swifts have generally been reluctant to adopt them. Although a shortage of chimneys for swifts seems not to be a limiting factor for London swifts at present, it is expected to become so in the future.

Little more than half a century ago, the Chimney Swift was a common sight above Ontario cities and farms. As swifts darted about snatching insects from the air, their aerial acrobatics and pleasant chattering brightened summer days and evenings for people on the ground below. Today, as swift numbers dwindle, very few Ontarians are lucky enough to have a pair of these remarkable little birds in their chimney.

If you have the good fortune to host swifts, read on for ideas on how to be the best swift landlord ever. And, if you currently don't have swifts in your chimney, there are suggestions for helping swifts in other ways.

## Detailed Tips and Information for Being a Good Swift Landlord

Rarely do private citizens have the opportunity to make a truly personal contribution to the well-being of a species at risk. The owners of chimneys occupied by swifts are among the fortunate few! Here are some suggestions for making the experience as positive as possible for both the chimney owners and the swifts.

See Appendix A (page 8) for advice on determining whether swifts are using your chimney. If they are . . .

- Late April to early October: keep chimney top open and fireplace damper closed.
- Do not use the fireplace or furnace while swifts are occupying the chimney for the season.
- Hire only an ethical chimney cleaner who is able to recognize Chimney Swifts and understands the implications of their status as a protected species.
  - Δ In Ontario and Canada, Chimney Swifts, their nests, young and habitat are protected by law.
  - Δ Some chimney sweeps may say that swifts cause disease and their nests are a fire hazard – untrue.
  - Δ They may mistake swifts for European Starlings or House Sparrows, which have bulky nests.
  - Δ Chimney cleaning and wildlife removal companies may have a vested interest in wanting people to wrongly believe that Chimney Swifts are hazardous because this may result in increased business.
- Have the chimney cleaned annually in late March or early April, after fireplace and furnace season and before swifts return in the spring.
  - Δ Cleaning removes soot and creosote (from burning wood or coal) that could result in chimney fires.
  - Δ Swift nests are less likely to become detached and fall down when glued to clean bricks.
- If the chimney is lined with metal, cap it to prevent birds and other wildlife from becoming trapped inside.
- If you install a spark arrester or a wire screen to catch sparks or prevent access by nuisance wildlife during the winter, ensure it is removed before swifts return in the spring (reinstall in the fall).
- If your insurance company recommends lining the chimney with metal or installing wire screening over the top, ask to discuss other options.
- If you are converting an existing heating system or hot water heater to gas, instead of lining the chimney with metal, consider venting the exhaust elsewhere.
  - Δ If the chimney contains two separate flues, only one is needed for venting.
  - Δ The second flue can remain unlined and open topped for continued use by swifts.
- If you are doing roof or chimney repairs, have them done in a season when swifts are not present.
- If you are no longer using your chimney and it is in poor shape (upper parts usually deteriorate first), before deciding to demolish the entire chimney, consider removing the upper part and constructing a new rim around the top, while leaving the shaft open.
  - Δ Swifts are usually happy to continue using a chimney whose height has been lowered a bit.
- If you are concerned that raccoons or squirrels may climb up and enter your chimney, wrap a 60-cm band of metal flashing around the upper part of the chimney and secure it in place. Be sure no sharp edges are exposed.
- If you are concerned that squirrels and other mammals may access your chimney from above, keep overhanging foliage from nearby trees trimmed back beyond jumping distance.
- If you think heavy rainfall might cause water running down inside the chimney to dislodge a swift nest, construct a small roof supported by four, thin, 30-cm-tall legs; secure in place above the chimney opening.
- When pruning trees, leave some dead branches in place for a few years, until all fine twigs have fallen off.
  - Δ Swifts break tiny dead twigs from the tips of branches for use in nest construction.



Enjoy watching swifts chasing and chattering overhead. The bird in the lower left is moulting and has lost some feathers, giving its wings a jagged look. The bird in the upper right has smooth wing edges, indicating it is an adult that has completed moult or a recently fledged young of the year.



This young swift is more than 2 weeks old, the stage at which youngsters are most likely to make food-begging calls.

- If you find young swifts and nest debris at the bottom of your fireplace, seek advice from a professional wildlife rehabilitator.
- Food-begging calls by youngsters in the chimney last about two weeks.
  - Δ Keep the damper firmly closed to mute the sound and prevent swifts accidentally entering your room.
  - Δ And/or, firmly wedge insulation (e.g., foam rubber but not fiberglass) above the fireplace damper.
  - Δ Be sure to remove it after the young have fledged.
- Avoid having excessively noisy parties in the fireplace room when an active nest is in the chimney; otherwise insert insulation (see above).
- Keep food garbage and yard waste in secure containers to avoid

attracting raccoons, which could prey on swifts in chimneys or commandeer chimneys for their own use.

- Remember that swifts create minimal mess in a chimney, they do not negatively impact the physical structure of the chimney, they do not spread disease, and they pose no fire, safety or health hazards.
- Once swifts have used your chimney, they are likely to return. They may take a year or two, so don't be too hasty in making alterations that might make the chimney inaccessible.
- Enjoy swifts! Watch their amazing aerial acrobatics and listen to their happy twittering as they swoop about capturing insects and making headlong dives into the chimney.
- Educate others! Invite friends and neighbours to watch and learn about your swifts.
- Take pride in the important contribution your chimney is making to swift conservation.
  - Δ Contact Birds Canada at [ontarioswiftwatch@birdscanada.org](mailto:ontarioswiftwatch@birdscanada.org) and request a sign or certificate (shown at right) to display in your window or foyer, letting everyone know that this is a swift-friendly property.
- Make sure any companies servicing your furnace or chimney are aware that swifts are using the shaft. Avoid having work done (especially cleaning or repairs to the chimney) during the nesting season.
- If swifts are nesting or roosting in your house or other building, please send details to those who study and conserve swifts.
  - Δ In London, contact [chimneyswift@naturelondon.com](mailto:chimneyswift@naturelondon.com).
  - Δ Elsewhere in Ontario, enter data at <https://www.birdscanada.org/naturecounts/ai/aicasual.jsp>.



### Additional Suggestions for Owners of Old Wooden Barns in Which Swifts Nest

- See Appendix A (page 8) for advice in determining use of old wooden barns by swifts.
- As pertinent, follow suggestions on page 3 and above for chimneys occupied by swifts.
- Ensure there is an opening through which swifts can enter at all times. A gap in the wall, a missing board or a small open (or broken) window in the gable or elsewhere can provide access (can be closed in winter). A door will do.
- Avoid storing things in or near the barn that might attract raccoons or rats, which could climb barn walls and prey on swift nests.

Swifts nest and roost only in structures that provide rough vertical surfaces to which they can cling by their claws and to which they can glue their nests. Brick, wood, stone, concrete blocks, and stacked tiles with a bead of mortar in between are all acceptable.


## Additional Information for Owners of Chimneys on Commercial, Industrial or Institutional Buildings

- See Appendix A (page 8) for advice in determining whether swifts are using your chimney.
- As pertinent, follow suggestions for owners of chimneys given on pages 3 and 4.
- Chimneys on big buildings tend to have large-diameter openings.
  - Δ A single pair of swifts may nest in a large chimney or in a small chimney, such as is typically found in older homes.
- Large-diameter chimneys may also be used by hundreds of swifts for communal overnight roosting.
  - Δ Communal roosts may be occupied during spring or fall migration, as well as during the breeding season (mainly by non-breeders).
- More than a dozen large London chimneys are known to be regularly used by swifts for communal roosting.
  - Δ Swifts may switch roosts from season to season and not necessarily occupy the same roost chimneys each year.
- Numbers at roosts tend to be largest in spring and fall migration.
- In London there are usually not more than seven or eight roost chimneys being used by swifts at one time.
- If a chimney is being used only for overnight roosting (i.e., no active nest inside), there will usually be no comings and goings of swifts during daytime hours.
- If a chimney is used for nesting only (i.e., not roosting), swifts can be observed making entries and exits (often silent and quick) at intervals during the day and evening, as they tend their nests.
- If a chimney is being used by a nesting pair at the same time as by birds roosting for the night, there will be discreet entries and exits during the daytime, plus at dusk the presence of a highly visible and audible flock of circling, twittering swifts.
- Even if an owner is not aware of their presence, swifts may well have been using his chimney since it was constructed 60, 100 or 150 years ago.



Non-breeding swifts gather in a swirling , twittering flock before descending into a chimney to roost communally for the night.

### Swift-friendly Chimney



**This chimney provides important habitat for a Threatened species, the Chimney Swift**

Chimney Swifts are small, fast-flying birds that spend their days catching flying insects. Swifts nest and rest overnight inside chimneys. Swifts never build more than one tiny nest (10 cm x 10 cm) inside a given chimney. Swifts do not pose any known health or safety risks and do not damage chimneys.



**HOW TO KEEP YOUR CHIMNEY SWIFT-FRIENDLY**

- Conduct chimney work outside of the Chimney Swift breeding period (late April to October).
- Close the damper on your chimney during their breeding period.
- Avoid capping or installing a metal liner. When possible, consider venting through a different flue when switching heating sources, such as installing an exterior metal chimney. And do not remove the cap if there is a metal liner inside.
- Keep swifts safe by consulting with federal and provincial authorities before altering the chimney structure. Canadian Wildlife Service: ec.faune.ontario.ec@canada.ca, 613-990-8355

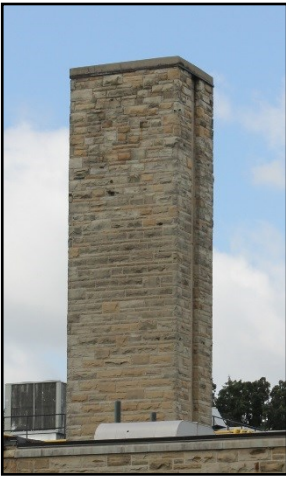
ontario.ca/page/alter-chimney-habitat-chimney-swift  
canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry.html

**Thank you for helping to conserve Chimney Swifts!**

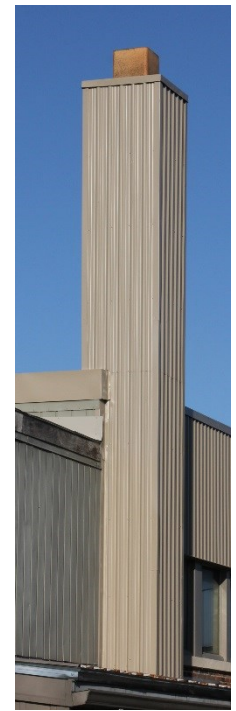
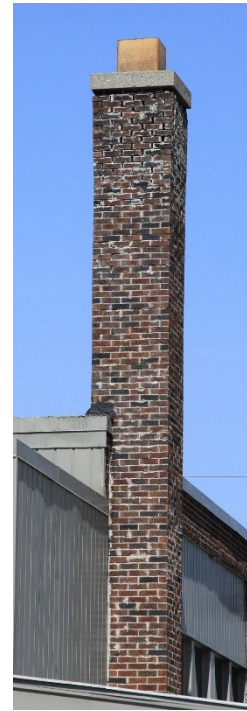
FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CHIMNEY SWIFTS, CONTACT  
ontarioswiftwatch@birdscanada.org | 519-586-3531

- Larger chimneys on larger buildings rarely have fireplaces, so owners of such chimneys are unlikely to ever hear the sounds of swift nestlings.
- Owners or managers of large buildings may have little or no contact with people who service their furnaces and chimneys. It is therefore useful to post a sign (shown at left) beside the chimney cleanout to alert tradespeople to the possibility of swifts using the chimney and indicating appropriate precautions to take.
  - Δ To obtain a “Swift-friendly Chimney” sign, contact [OntarioSwiftWatch@birdscanada.org](mailto:OntarioSwiftWatch@birdscanada.org).
- Take pride in the presence of swifts in your chimney and help educate others about the species. Post a “Swift-friendly Property” sign in the window or lobby of your business or institution (see page 4).
  - Δ To obtain such a sign, contact [OntarioSwiftWatch@birdscanada.org](mailto:OntarioSwiftWatch@birdscanada.org).
- The Bird Friendly London team of local environmental groups and others has been successful in having London certified as a “Bird Friendly City” (a program of Nature Canada). By accommodating swifts in your chimney, you can take pride in making an important contribution to this initiative.



Near right (2010): The bricks and mortar of the chimney at this commercial property at the edge of London in Hyde Park were deteriorating. Far right (2015): as part of rehabilitation work, the exterior of the chimney was clad in steel siding. Swifts continue to nest in the chimney.



Above: the stone chimney at Elborn College, Western University. Left (2015): showing some deterioration in the upper stonework. The chimney was no longer needed for venting the heating system, so, in 2016, the upper part of the chimney was removed and a new rim put in place around the top edge. Above right (2020): the chimney at its new, lower height. Swifts have continued to use the shaft for both nesting and communal roosting. In many cases, the cost of removing only the upper part of a chimney may be less than for removing the entire chimney.

- If you are no longer using your chimney (but swifts are) and the chimney is beginning to deteriorate, there are alternatives to taking it down. In most cases, the brick or stonework nearest the top is the part of the chimney that is in poor shape.
  - Δ You may choose to have this section of the chimney repaired or rebuilt.
  - Δ Another possibility is to remove the rows of deteriorating bricks and construct a new rim around the now-lower top edge. Swifts will readily return to the chimney at its new somewhat lower height.
  - Δ Make sure any work is done in a season when swifts are absent.
- Approaches to addressing chimney issues include repointing, addition of exterior cladding, and rebuilding the rim; consult expert bricklayers or stonemasons for advice.
- When landscaping around your property, consider the needs of swifts, which eat only flying insects.
  - Δ Before wafting skyward as adults, many insects pass through a caterpillar stage during which they munch on plants – leaves, buds, stems, or shoots.
  - Δ Plant native trees, shrubs and wildflowers, which support far more species of insects than do non-native plants. (Native plants also nourish insects that feed many other species of native birds.)
- Make your building safer for swifts (and other birds) by taking steps to reduce or eliminate window kills.
  - Δ Avoid the use of reflective window glass or shiny cladding on outer walls.
  - Δ Or install window treatments (e.g., rows of dots 5 cm apart, on the outside) that alert birds to the presence of a barrier through which they cannot fly.



This chimney is in relatively good shape, except for the rim and the top few rows of bricks.



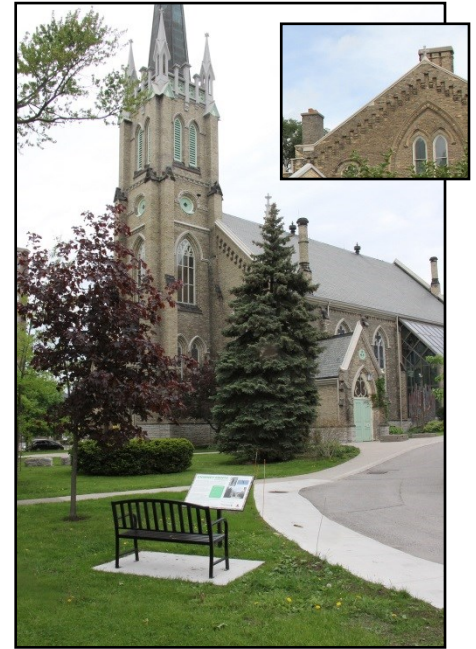
Native flowers, shrubs and trees grow in this lush London garden.



In May 2019, this Chimney Swift died after crashing into this window. Swifts usually forage above buildings but, if insects are flying low, swifts may move lower too. If birds see trees and foliage reflected in window glass, they assume they are flying into open space. (2 photos by Brendon Samuels)

**Some owners of large institutional, commercial or industrial chimneys that host swifts use these charming and enigmatic little birds as a means to engage with the community.** Here are some examples:

- For a number of years before it was demolished, the opportunity to watch acrobatic swifts twitter, circle and dive into the Kingsmill's chimney (overlooking Carling Street) drew patrons to the outdoor patio at the Marienbad Restaurant across the street.
- A school or community facility may host nesting or roosting swifts in its chimney. If so, the resident swifts could serve as the focus for lessons on species at risk or for a celebration of swifts. A speaker from the Nature London Chimney Swift Initiative is available to deliver a free PowerPoint presentation. Contact [chimneyswift@naturelondon.com](mailto:chimneyswift@naturelondon.com).
- First-St. Andrew's United Church, (photo at right) at the corner of Queens and Waterloo in London, has five chimneys that are used by swifts, mostly by nesting pairs, but one chimney sometimes also serves as a communal swift roost.
  - Δ To engage the community, encourage public use of its park-like grounds and educate people about swifts, the church installed a viewing bench and an interpretive sign, located at a spot from which four of the five chimneys can be seen at once.



### **Draft Chimney Swift Recovery Strategy**

On March 17, 2022, Environment and Climate Change Canada posted for public consultation, the draft **Recovery Strategy for the Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*) in Canada** ([Recovery Strategy for the Chimney Swift \(\*Chaetura pelagica\*\) in Canada - Public consultation search - Species at risk registry](#)). Owners of chimneys used by swifts and the general public are invited to submit comments on the proposed strategy by June 15, 2022. Send comments to [ec.planificationduretablissement-recoveryplanning.ec@canada.ca](mailto:ec.planificationduretablissement-recoveryplanning.ec@canada.ca).

### **Chimney Swift Chimney Restoration Fund**

Birds Canada, with funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada, has launched the Chimney Swift Chimney Restoration Fund. The program can provide 50/50 financial assistance for repairs to chimneys used by swifts. The 2022 application deadline is April 21, 2022. To learn more about the Fund, including eligibility and how to apply, visit <https://www.birdscanada.org/about-us/funding-opportunities/chimney-swift-fund/>.

### **Whether or Not You Have a Chimney That Hosts Swifts, You Can Help Produce Food for Swifts to Eat**

- In addition to safe housing, Chimney Swifts must have adequate food (flying insects) in order to survive.
- Insects originating at ground level may fly or waft upward where they are eaten by swifts.
- Between heavy pesticide use and ongoing loss of natural habitat, the swift's food supply is under attack.
- Many native insects are declining, and shortage of suitable insects is likely contributing to swift declines.
- Many insects go through a caterpillar stage during which they eat plants (leaves, twigs, buds or stems).
- To help produce food for swifts, **plant native species of trees, shrubs, wildflowers and grasses**, as native plants provide food for far more insect species than are supported by non-native plants and trees.
- If you own a rural property, encourage fencerows, un-mowed ditches and natural areas as insect nurseries.
- Convert your lawn (essentially a desert when it comes to insect production) to a native plant garden.
- If you live in an apartment, a balcony pot of native plants helps feed insects that help feed swifts.
- Discontinue using pesticides (including herbicides, which kill plants on which many insects rely for food).
- **Advocate for the preservation of natural habitats** such as woodlands, wetlands and native meadows where swift food (insects) is produced, and support organizations that protect such places.

### **How Else to Help Swifts**

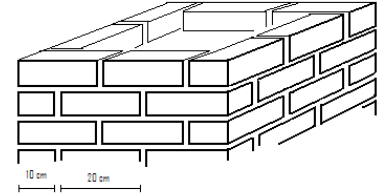
Even if you don't host swifts in your chimney and aren't a gardener, you can help scientists learn more about swifts and their conservation needs. Sign up to volunteer as a **Chimney Swift monitor**. In London contact [chimneyswift@naturelondon.com](mailto:chimneyswift@naturelondon.com). Elsewhere in Ontario, contact [OntarioSwiftWatch@birdscanada.org](mailto:OntarioSwiftWatch@birdscanada.org).

## Appendix A

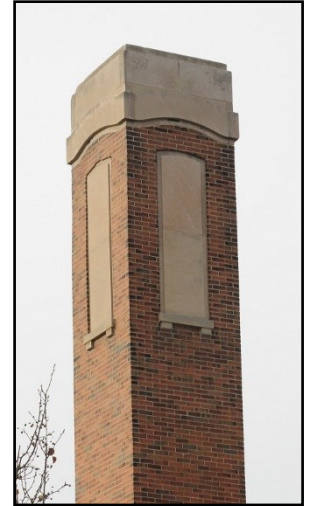
### How to Determine Whether Swifts Are Using a Chimney

#### Check to see that the chimney is suitable.

- Swifts usually choose brick, stone or mortar chimneys, built  $\leq 1960$ s.
- Chimney has a horizontal course of bricks of  $\geq 2\frac{1}{2}$  by  $\geq 2\frac{1}{2}$  bricks.
- The top of the chimney must be open (i.e., not covered by mesh, wire screening, concrete slab, metal cap, top-knot, etc.). Confirm open status via Google Earth or <https://maps.london.ca/CityMap/>.
- A tile may protrude above the rim. If there are  $\geq 2$  flues, swifts occupy only one.
- Most chimneys that appear suitable for swifts will not be occupied by swifts.
- Swifts sometimes choose unconventional chimneys that don't follow the "rules."
- They can enter a small opening down a narrow shaft, if it widens out lower down.



Right: 3 examples of chimneys used by swifts. Left and centre right: 3 flues/chimneys not used by swifts due to presence of spark arrester, metal topknots, flat slab and proximity to second flue.



#### Check for occupancy by swifts.

- Swifts may be present in Ontario any time from late April to early October.
- Hearing or seeing swifts overhead is a good hint they may be nesting in a particular area (but this is no guarantee, as swifts may forage several km from the home chimney).
  - Nesting swifts can be very discreet around their chimney, and patience and effort may be needed to confirm which chimney they are using.
- Swifts may occupy suitable chimneys for different reasons and for different lengths of time.
  - short period in spring when prospecting for a nest site
  - spring or fall migration for overnight communal roosting
  - summer roost of non-breeding swifts
  - swifts are prone to switching roosts from week to week, season to season and year to year
  - if used as a spring roost, the chimney may or may not serve as a fall roost that year, and vice versa
  - active nest during breeding season
  - chimney may be abandoned early if nest attempt fails
  - after fledging, swifts sometimes move around visiting and entering different chimneys.
- **Because swifts can be hard to detect and don't necessarily use a chimney every season or every year, to conclude that swifts never use a particular, suitable-looking chimney may require multiple visits at intervals from spring to fall over a number of years.**





### To detect swift use of a chimney:

The usual protocol involves observing in good weather for 1 hr starting 30 mins before official sunset (check local newspaper for daily sunset times or go to [https://weather.gc.ca/city/pages/on-137\\_metric\\_e.html](https://weather.gc.ca/city/pages/on-137_metric_e.html)).

- If possible, have chimney silhouetted against northwest sky (not other buildings or foliage, no night/security lighting nearby); watch carefully for entries and/or exits.
  - If a large roost, may be advance circling and twittering in area.
  - If one pair, may be a few quick, direct, silent entries and/or exits.
  - Note: bats may fly lower, always end up outside chimney.

### To confirm nesting activity, check for daytime use of chimney:

- Follow above guidelines (chimney against sky); avoid looking at sun.
- Spend 1 to 2 hrs watching for entries or exits.
- There may or may not be swift activity overhead.
- Entries and exits are likely to be fast, direct and silent, easy to miss.

### To detect previous swift occupancy:

Info can sometimes be obtained in the off season.

- Via the chimney cleanout, examine materials on the floor of the shaft, e.g., feathers, egg shell fragments, twigs from nests, dried carcasses and skeletal remains. But such debris may be from species such as the European Starling.
- For a fireplace chimney, check for debris on the smoke shelf and the floor of the fireplace.
- Lack of evidence during an off-season check is not sufficient to conclude that swifts have not occupied the chimney.

### To detect swift nests in old wooden barns or sheds (rare in SW Ontario):

- Swifts foraging and twittering in the general area may be a clue to swift presence.
- Shine a flashlight up into relatively high, dimly lit areas inside barn, e.g., near roof, upper walls, gable peaks, top side of beams, vertical wooden features.
  - Try to avoid shining light directly into birds' eyes.
  - Watch for active swift nests, or, in the off season, remnants of tiny twig nests or dried saliva on the wood surface indicating where nests were attached.
- During nesting season, look for swifts discreetly coming and going from the barn (via a door, window opening or gap in the wall or roof).
- Older youngsters may make begging calls or be seen clinging to the wooden wall somewhat away from the nest.
- Note: Barn Swallow nests are made of mud and are much bulkier.

### To detect swifts nesting inside hollow trees (very rare in SW Ontario):

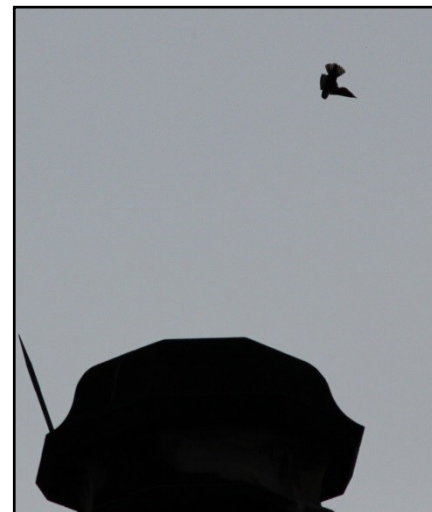
- Check for large-diameter old trees, mainly in old-growth woodlands.
- Swifts flying overhead in the area may be a hint that swifts might be nesting nearby.

### To learn more about Chimney Swifts in London, visit

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

To arrange for a free PowerPoint presentation on Chimney Swifts in London or to ask questions about local swifts, contact [chimneyswift@naturelondon.com](mailto:chimneyswift@naturelondon.com).

**Acknowledgements:** Thanks to Garth Casbourn and Diane Kristensen for sketches and to Brendon Samuels, David Wake and Winifred Wake for photos.



A single swift approaching (above), then entering (below) a nest chimney.



Swifts entering a communal roost for the night.



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