

Annual Report, 2020/21, of Nature London Chimney Swift Initiative

This account covers the 12 months from November 1, 2020 to October 31, 2021, a period that enables reporting on a single (April-to-October) season of Chimney Swift presence in London.

As in recent years, Nature London's swift initiatives were carried out independently from other programs in the province, though, as time and opportunities permitted, we sometimes collaborated with other stakeholders.

For a second year, COVID-19 restrictions put a damper on some planned swift activities. Though its start was delayed until June 15, Nature London's signature Tuesday-evening monitoring program had another banner year. By September, the initial cohort of 13 chimneys monitored weekly had risen to 18, our highest number ever.

Other aspects of the Nature London Chimney Swift Initiative also flourished and preliminary steps were taken towards some new ventures:

- Exploring the possibility of funding repairs to a swift chimney owned by a local charity.
- Offering advice and/or helping confirm swift nesting activity for the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas.

A summary of Nature London's swift initiatives during the past year follows, presented in three categories: Education/Outreach, Conservation/Advocacy and Monitoring/Data Collection. Many of these activities took place under the Nature London umbrella; others were personal initiatives of members of the swift monitoring team. Thanks to all.

Education/Outreach

- Published highlights of 2020 Nature London swift initiatives in Winter 2021 *Cardinal*.
- On Nature London website, updated 6 educational articles about swifts, posted two 2020 reports.
- Via NL Facebook, posted regular updates on locations and swift numbers at big fall roosts.
- Supported Bird Friendly City initiative, e.g., by creating flyer and promoting Chimney Swift as a candidate official bird for London, and by providing profile of swifts in London for BFL website.
- Contacted owners of 12 London swift chimneys and shared info on swift usage and best practices.
- Posted one new video of swifts entering a London chimney on NL's YouTube Channel.
- During monitoring sessions, educated passersby, mostly through conversation.
- Nature London rep interviewed by CTV London re swifts, aired June 18.
- Supplied info on swifts to Western grad student considering doing research on swift diet.
- Provided advice to people in Sarnia and Wallaceburg on how to find swift chimneys to monitor.
- Exchanged info/ideas with swift stakeholders in Sault Ste Marie and Manitoba.
- Delivered PowerPoint on swifts for Ontario SwiftWatch Zoom event for London audience: A Swift Night In, June 9 (total attendance 17).
- Glenn Berry and Brendon Samuels promoted swifts via articles, photos, videos, etc. on personal Twitter accounts, YouTube channels and/or e-publications.

Conservation/Advocacy

In response to requests compiled info re

- Artificial swift tower designs that work in Canada.
- Strategies to encourage preservation of swift chimneys and alternatives to capping.
- Keeping nuisance wildlife out of chimneys while allowing swifts to use chimney but not gain access to interior of house.
- Potential health hazards of swift guano (none known).
- Swift use of Dept of National Defence chimneys in London.

Discussed with Goodwill Industries possibility of Nature London funding restoration work on a chimney owned by Goodwill and used by swifts (discussions still ongoing).

- Presented Goodwill with a “Swift-friendly Chimney” sign (courtesy of Ontario SwiftWatch).
 - Sign posted on chimney to alert tradespeople not to work on chimney during swift season.
- Contacted Thames Valley District School Board and Ryerson School several times.
- Urged that winter-season chimney repointing work underway at Ryerson be completed and scaffolding and sheathing removed prior to return of swifts in late April / early May.
 - Job completed well after swifts returned – 2021 nesting effort was unsuccessful.
- Facilitated releases of young swifts (at Kingsway Academy) for out-of-town wildlife rehab centres.
- 3 swifts from Destined to Fly in Harrowsmith, ON (Sep 3).
 - 8 swifts, 1 nighthawk, 1 barn and 4 cliff swallows from Le Nichoir in Hudson, QC (Sep 8).

Monitoring / Data Collection

Weekly Tuesday-evening monitoring in London – our flagship monitoring program.

- Tried to create meaningful and enjoyable experiences for volunteer monitors.
- Updated monitoring guidelines and support documents, including a revised COVID-19 protocol.
- Engaged 45 volunteer monitors (core of 39), rotated weekly to different assigned chimneys.
- Welcomed 3 new monitors: 2 received Zoom orientation by S Symmes; 1 mentored via emails.
- Carried out organized monitoring at 13 (later 18) chimneys for 16 weeks, Jun 15 to Sep 28.
- Collected sightings of Common Nighthawks.
- Sent weekly updates to monitors: schedule of assignments, table and analysis of recent results.
- Conducted additional monitoring early in season and on non-Tuesdays at 18 sites.
- Monitored at 34 other chimneys (mostly 1 visit each).
- Identified 3 new active roosts: 370 Huron (Kingsway), 700 Richmond (ICORR) and 388 Dundas.
- Collected 375 data entries from 52 chimneys (shared via spreadsheet with Ontario SwiftWatch).
- Prepared end-of season monitoring report for 2021 (33 pages).
- Highlights of monitoring results in 2021:
 - Nesting success very low (1 or 2 of 13 monitored chimneys may have fledged young).
 - Ten roosts of ≥ 20 swifts were active at some time during season.
 - Combined tally for 13 chimneys peaked at 856 on Aug 24, lowest peak in four years.
 - Largest single-night count at one roost was 609 at Labatt’s on Sep 7.
 - Last chimney to be occupied for season was ICORR on Sep 28 (2 swifts).
 - Combined tally peaked earlier and lower, and roosts emptied sooner than 2018 and 2020.

Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas

- In response to requests, provided advice and tips on how to document nesting activity for swifts.
- Provided confirmed evidence of breeding swifts for the 4 London atlas squares.
- Scouted potential swift chimneys in small towns in Middlesex, Oxford and Perth counties.

Compiling Nature London swift data in a single spreadsheet

- Began entering swift data from early 2000s: completed period 2003 to mid-2008 (>1000 entries).

Thanks to

- All the dedicated volunteers who make our monitoring program so successful.
- Sandy Symmes, whose amazing organizational skills underpin the monitoring program.
- Ric Symmes, who handles all interactions with Wufoo.
- Dave Wake, creator of tables, graphs, spreadsheets, and trouble-shooter of computer gremlins.
- Wufoo, which has given Nature London a reduced rate on our online data-entry system.
- Glenn Berry for developing innovative ways to count swifts using video.
- Nature London, our sponsor and funder.

Winifred Wake

Chimney Swift Liaison for Nature London, November 7, 2021