



Sharing your home with Chimney Swifts

All you need to know to help this Species at Risk

What is a Chimney Swift?

The Chimney Swift is a small gray-brown bird with a cigar-shaped body and crescent-shaped wings. In Canada, this legally-protected species breeds from southeast Saskatchewan to Nova Scotia. It arrives in Canada from South America around mid-April and leaves on its southbound migration by mid-October. Chimney Swifts spend most of the day flying and eating flying insects like mosquitoes - they provide valuable, natural insect control.

A Species at Risk

The Canadian Chimney Swift population has declined by nearly 90% since 1970, largely due to a reduced availability of insects and sites for nesting and roosting. The Chimney Swift is designated as Threatened in Canada and is protected under the federal *Species at Risk Act* and *Migratory Birds Convention Act*, as well as province-specific laws and regulations. The [national Recovery Strategy](#) describes its habitat and encourages all Canadians to help conserve this species. It is against the law to disturb, kill, or collect Chimney Swift adults, nestlings, eggs, or nests.



A Chimney Swift in flight
© Andrés Jiménez

Habitat

The Chimney Swift is associated primarily with urban areas, but it can also be found in rural and forested areas. About 400 years ago, Chimney Swifts nested and roosted mainly in large hollow trees, but these trees are less common and the species now depends on human-made structures, mostly chimneys, for its survival. [Chimney Swifts have unique feet that can only cling to rough, porous vertical surfaces.](#) These surfaces are also needed for nest attachment, which is done using a glue-like saliva. A single pair occupies each nesting site, but during migration, hundreds of swifts may gather in a single chimney to roost for the night or during the day in bad weather. Roosts are also used by non-breeding swifts during the summer.



A suitable chimney for Chimney Swifts
© Véronique Connolly

Is my chimney suitable for Chimney Swifts?

Chimney Swifts typically use chimneys that were built before the 1960s, made of brick, stone or concrete blocks. The opening of the chimney must be wide enough to allow the swifts to enter. An opening of at least 28.5 cm (diameter of a round chimney, diagonal of a rectangular chimney) is generally considered adequate for the species. Chimneys that have been capped, screened or fitted with a metal liner are no longer suitable for swifts.



Chimneys that are unsuitable for Chimney Swifts
© Véronique Connolly

How do I know if Chimney Swifts are using my chimney?

If your home is also home to Chimney Swifts, you are most likely to hear and see them at dusk, as they circle above your chimney just before dropping into it for the night. In early summer, you might also hear hissing, chittering or rattling sounds coming from your chimney, indicating that swifts are raising young there. In late fall, you can check your chimney cleanout and smoke shelf for signs of swift occupancy, such as soot-coloured feathers, egg shells, and small twigs used as nesting material.



*A Chimney Swift entering a chimney
© Maritimes SwiftWatch*



*A Chimney Swift on its nest
© Bruce M. Di Labio*

Should I be concerned by the presence of Chimney Swifts in my chimney?

Not at all, Chimney Swifts are great tenants: they make minimal mess, do not damage the physical structure of the chimney, do not represent a health risk to humans, and are relatively quiet. Their tiny nest (about 10 cm wide) will not block your chimney and is not a fire hazard.



*A Chimney Swift nest
© Nelson Poirier*

As a chimney owner, how can I help Chimney Swifts?

You can contribute to the conservation of this Species at Risk by following these simple recommendations:

- Avoid using, cleaning or repairing your chimney during the season when swifts are present (April 15 to October 15).
- Clean your chimney annually to prevent the accumulation of creosote and soot. Not only can these flammable deposits cause flue fires, they can prevent nests from securely attaching to the inner chimney wall, sometimes resulting in nests, eggs and young falling to the bottom of the chimney.
- Avoid blocking the opening of your chimney with a cap, a spark arrestor or a screen.
- If you are considering a conversion to a gas furnace or hot water heater, try to investigate alternatives to metal liners.
- If your chimney already has a metal liner, keep it capped to prevent swifts and other wildlife from entering. Metal liners are narrow and slippery, and can trap animals inside.
- Keep your fireplace damper closed to prevent swifts from possibly entering your home.
- Avoid over-pruning trees or large shrubs in your yard, as swifts require a source of fine twigs for nest building.
- To keep raccoons and squirrels out of your chimney, add a 60-cm band of metal flashing to the outside of the chimney, just below the top.
- If your chimney shows signs of structural deterioration, consider repairing it rather than demolishing it. The [Chimney Swift Chimney Restoration Fund](#) established by Birds Canada and partners can help cover certain costs.

**Thank you for being a great Chimney Swift host,
you are making a real difference!**

For more information, please contact:

**Chimney Swift Chimney Restoration Fund
Birds Canada
P.O. Box 160, 115 Front Road
Port Rowan, ON N0E 1M0
Toll-free: 1-888-448-BIRD (2473)
chimneyswiftfund@birdscanada.org**

**If Chimney Swifts are using your chimney,
please report this information to:**

Saskatchewan: outreach@naturesask.ca

Manitoba: mbchimneyswift@gmail.com

Ontario: ontarioswiftwatch@birdscanada.org

Québec: <https://www.quebecoiseaux.org/fr/signalement-sos-pop>

Maritimes: marswifts@birdscanada.org



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Project Partners

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