

# Chimney Swift

*Chaetura pelagica*

**STATUS**

Threatened 

Endangered 

39



© ADRIAN SACKS (BOTH)

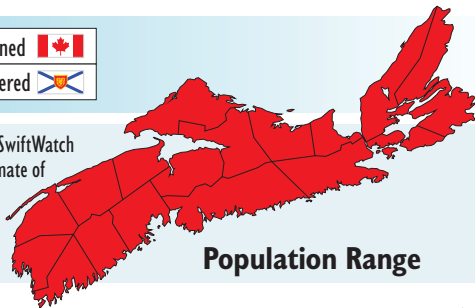
## Species Description

The Chimney Swift is a small bird (12-14 cm) with dark brown plumage, and a pale throat. It has a long, thin body, with long, narrow, pointed wings that project beyond the short spiny tail when folded. It has a quick jerky flight and a chittering call. All ages and sexes are similar in appearance.



© PAUL & GEORGE KYLE

Observations by Maritime SwiftWatch volunteers provide an estimate of at least 1500 swifts in NB and NS. Winters in the Amazon River drainage basin in South America.



**Population Range**

## Habitat

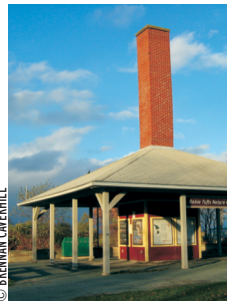
Before Europeans arrived in North America, Chimney Swifts used giant hollow trees for nesting sites. They still use this habitat today but also use chimneys and other human-built habitat in urban and rural areas. Being aerial foragers, they typically concentrate in places where insects are abundant, such as near lakes and wetlands.



© ERIN BRETHAUER









© BRUCE DI LARIO



© BRENNAN COVERILL

Swift roost in Wolfville

Chimney Swifts can be seen from late April through September foraging high in the sky during the day and at roosting sites at dusk and dawn.

May	May-June	May-July	June-Aug	July-Aug	Aug-Sept
					
Return to Nova Scotia	Congregate at known roosts	Pairs look for nest site	Lay eggs and raise young	Return to roost sites	Migrate south

From May to September AVOID 1) using fireplace, 2) sweeping chimneys, 3) chimney repairs

## Similar Species

For further info on living with swifts view "The Chimney Swift: Coming to a Chimney Near You" factsheet: [www.sararegistry.gc.ca/involved/education/default\\_e.cfm](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/involved/education/default_e.cfm)

Swallows in Nova Scotia have lighter underparts, and smoother flight patterns than the Chimney Swift.

### Cliff Swallow:

Similar size (13 cm); white forehead; reddish throat; light rump and belly.



### Bank Swallow (pg. 29):

Similar size (12 cm); brown back, white belly; narrow brown band on breast.



### Barn Swallow (pg. 51):

Similar size (15-18 cm); blue upperparts; reddish brown face; buff belly; deeply forked tail.



## Interesting Points

- Pairs are monogamous, and mate for life.
- The Canadian population has declined by more than 95% since the 1970s.
- One bird can eat over 1000 insects per day.
- They have difficulty taking off from the ground as their feet have evolved to cling to vertical surfaces.

## Threats to Survival

- Reduction in habitat for roosting and nesting in forests (old, big trees) and urban landscapes (removal or capping of brick chimneys).
- Reduction in prey insect populations.
- Severe weather events, including hurricanes during migration.

## How You Can Help

Join Maritimes SwiftWatch and monitor a roost or nest site near you. Foresters: leave big dead and dying trees standing. Homeowners: keep your chimney open rather than capping or lining it. Avoid sweeping your chimney and lighting fires from May to September to prevent harm to nesting or roosting swifts. Nests are small, do not pose a nuisance or a danger to homeowners, and can be removed after September. Use non-toxic alternatives to pesticides.

### Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

**Contact:** Environment Canada (506) 364-5044 or [www.ec.gc.ca](http://www.ec.gc.ca)

**Info, Sighting Reports and Stewardship:** Maritimes SwiftWatch (506) 364-5196, [mariswifts@birdscanada.org](mailto:mariswifts@birdscanada.org)  
[www.bsc-eoc.org/volunteer/acswifts](http://www.bsc-eoc.org/volunteer/acswifts)