

## **MARITIMES SWIFTWATCH ANNUAL REPORT FOR NOVA SCOTIA HABITAT CONSERVATION FUND 2013-2014**

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**Project Title:** NS SwiftWatch: Engaging Nova Scotians in Chimney Swift Recovery – Year 2

### **Background**

Historically Chimney Swifts nested in large hollow trees; however, as humans began harvesting trees and urbanizing the landscape Chimney Swifts began roosting and nesting in chimneys. But landscapes are changing again with many chimneys being capped, lined with metal, or demolished. Recent research has shown that Chimney Swifts are undergoing steep declines (95%) and are in danger of disappearing if action is not taken. Although their dependence on buildings during migration and breeding has left them susceptible to displacement and disturbance from chimney maintenance and renovations, it also provides a unique opportunity to engage the public in participating in research, monitoring, and stewardship of a threatened species found in their own backyards.

Chimney Swifts in Nova Scotia are largely dependent on a dwindling number of chimneys for roosting and nesting, and are vulnerable to disturbance by maintenance activities and when chimneys are demolished. Thus, protecting swift-occupied chimneys is critical to recovering swifts. Because this “habitat” is shared with humans, landowner and community participation in conservation is critical to the species’ survival. The draft Recovery Strategy lists chimney modification and demolition, as well as nest destruction, as high-priority threats. This project will assess both current and future risks to roost chimneys in Nova Scotia and the impact of the professional chimney sweeping industry.

### **Project goal**

Focusing on communities that host significant numbers of roosting and nesting Chimney Swifts, Bird Studies Canada will engage landowners, community groups, and non-government organizations in activities that will foster local stewards, fill key knowledge gaps and, ultimately, protect Chimney Swifts and their habitat in these communities.

## Project activities, objectives, and achievements

Activity	Objective and Achievements
<p>1) Develop and distribute educational pamphlet for owners/managers of swift-occupied chimneys</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> Owners/managers are aware of presence of swifts and able to plan maintenance activities in such a way to preserve swift habitat and avoid disturbance to adults/young</p>	<p>An educational pamphlet entitled “How to be a good Chimney Swift host” (Figures 1 and 2) has been developed in both English and French, and is currently being printed (400 in each language). These brochures will be distributed to Chimney Swift hosts in the coming spring and also to chimney sweeps, most of who agreed to receive more information on chimney swifts (see Activity 4 below).</p>
<p>2) Consult with SwiftWatch volunteers and develop an outreach toolkit for volunteers, including Chimney Swift fact sheets, SwiftWatch program brochures, reporting forms, etc. that they can provide to community members when approached during SwiftWatch surveys.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> Volunteers better equipped to engage local community members during surveys, increasing awareness and support for swift conservation from local community members.</p>	<p>Response rate from the volunteer survey was low, but those that did respond provided some excellent suggestions.</p> <p>Generally each volunteer encounter 3-5 members of the public each night, and common questions included: What are you doing, Why are you counting them, Why are they endangered, Aren't they smelly/noisy. Some individuals also asked questions about the difference between roosting and nesting which suggests this has not been effectively communicated to the general public and is an area to focus future outreach on.</p> <p>Most volunteers feel well prepared with the program pamphlet and fact sheet; however, other suggestions included posters showing the swifts entering the chimney, name tags, and car signs. Car signs and name tags (Figures 3 and 4) along with the new brochure on how to be a good swift host will be distributed to volunteers prior to the spring monitoring season.</p>
<p>3) Raise awareness of Chimney Swifts, their decline, threats to swifts and how community members can help address those threats through a variety of means including press releases, community events (e.g., a “swift night out” at roost sites), presentations and radio interviews.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> Increased awareness and understanding of Chimney Swifts and the threats they face.</p>	<p>A total of eight new roost and nest sites were reported in Nova Scotia in 2013 (Figure 5). This increase in the number of identified sites is likely in part due to increased outreach across the province.</p> <p>A well-attended Swift Night Out even was put on in Wolfville, as part of the Mud Creek Days celebration. Over 90 people attended a talk at Acadia University and subsequent roost count at the Robie Tufts Nature Center Chimney in the center of town.</p> <p>Presentations were also given to each of the grade six classes at Middleton Regional High School and New Glasgow Junior High School (both schools host roost chimneys) as a part of the School SwiftWatch program. Students were also asked to contribute swift artwork for future presentations and educational material. A total of sixty pieces of work were submitted and some is currently being used on an interpretive panel to be installed at the school this spring.</p>

	<p>Other community outreach included an interview with CBC Evening News (Maritimes at 11) and publication of an article in the Kings County Record (“Chimney Swifts return after decline last year” by Tamara Gravelle). Also the annual SwiftWatch Newsletter was published covering swift news from the spring and summer (<a href="http://www.bsc-eoc.org/library/MSWnews.pdf">www.bsc-eoc.org/library/MSWnews.pdf</a>)</p> <p>Maritimes SwiftWatch continues to engage volunteers with a Facebook page (117 likes) and Twitter account (235 followers). Both are updated with local new swift news and other interesting bird information. Maritimes SwiftWatch has recruited and maintained a core of 14 volunteers but many of these individuals have others assisting them on roost counts.</p> <p>Finally participation in the Bear River Stone Bear Retreat initiated a working relationship with the Kepukwitk’s SAR Program. Displaced from a decommissioned school, Chimney Swifts have returned to the Bear River area and has a presented an opportunity to work with another group on Chimney Swift outreach.</p>
<p>4) Develop and carry out questionnaire for chimney sweeps and other industry professionals, determine the nature and number of negative interactions between chimney sweeps and swifts, and use responses to build working relationship.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> Gauge cleaning industry’s level of awareness about swifts and bird conservation regulations .</p>	<p>A survey of 10 chimney sweeps in the Maritimes (5 in NS) was conducted this winter (Figure 6). The number of chimneys swept by each company varied from 25 to 2000. The majority of companies indicated that their peak season was in the fall; however, one company indicated that they encourage sweeping in June, even offering incentives. This suggests that most sweeps will not encounter active nests; however, the one company offering incentives during the breeding season is of concern. Of note most companies indicated that most of the chimneys they encounter are metal lined and that clay liners or chimneys with no liners are dying out. About 50% of those surveyed had heard of swifts, but all companies were willing to receive information on Chimney Swifts. A more detailed report on survey results is currently being prepared and will be provided to partners. This survey provides an excellent starting point to build working relationships with the chimney sweeping industry.</p>
<p>5) Coordinate roost monitoring by volunteers and project partners, following established protocol developed in 2011 in consultation with regional and national partners (roost counts done on scheduled dates set by ON, QC, NB, and NS).</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> Data collected and shared with national partners to calculate provincial as well as national trends.</p>	<p>Continued monitoring of roost sites is an important tool in assessing Chimney Swift numbers. Coordination between various groups is essential and conducting counts on the same nights ensures individuals are not double counted. Results from this year’s counts were mixed in Nova Scotia. Numbers are consistently high at Temperance Street School in New Glasgow. Whereas at the second largest roost site in Nov Scotia, Middleton, no swifts were detected on the May 26<sup>th</sup> (Table 1).</p>

	<p>Bear River, Truro, and Kentville were newly identified sites and as such roost counts on official dates were not consistent. Additional outreach activities are planned for some of these areas in 2014 to improve reporting.</p>
<p>6) Chimney assessment done at roost and nest sites to collect data on characteristics of occupied sites.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> Data collected on selection of roosting and nesting habitat by swifts helps prioritize habitat conservation in urban areas.</p>	<p>Town wide chimney assessments have been completed in Wolfville. Results from this suggest there are houses with swift friendly nesting chimney. Next steps will include expanding this work to other swift dense areas and providing informational brochures to homeowners with swift friendly chimneys in communities already targeted by chimney assessments.</p>

### About Maritimes SwiftWatch

Launched in 2011, Maritimes SwiftWatch is a partnership between Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada, Nature NB, Mersey Tobetic Research Institute, Blomidon Naturalists Society, Pictou County Naturalists Club, Kennebecasis Naturalist Society, and Nova Scotia Bird Society. Maritimes SwiftWatch provides participants with a consistent approach and tools for identifying and monitoring Chimney Swifts at roost and nest sites, and serves as a centralized database to store and share information about new and existing sites. This information is used to educate chimney owners and communities, and to encourage long-term protection of these important sites for Chimney Swifts.

Chimney Swift monitoring occurs at roost sites across New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Volunteers count numbers of swifts entering roosts at dusk during the migration and breeding periods (between May and September). For more information or to participate, please contact us!

### Project Partners

### Project Funders

This project was undertaken with the financial support of:

# Maritimes SwiftWatch

## How to be a good Chimney Swift host

**Maritimes SwiftWatch**  
Bird Studies Canada  
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Email: [marswifts@birdscanada.org](mailto:marswifts@birdscanada.org)  
Phone: 1(506)364-5196  
[www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/acswifts/](http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/acswifts/)

### Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) are tiny, fast-flying birds capable of devouring thousands of insects a day, helping control populations of mosquitoes, biting flies, and other insects. They are often mistaken for other species that frequent our backyards, including swallows and starlings.

Chimney Swifts rely heavily on chimneys for shelter and nesting. During migration, hundreds of birds will roost in communal chimneys. They then disperse to breed, with only a single pair occupying a chimney. They attach their tiny nests (~ 10 cm across and 3 cm tall) to vertical surfaces using their glue-like saliva.

Advancements in heating and venting technology are changing our chimneys, with many owners upgrading or demolishing existing stone and brick chimneys. New chimneys are narrower, lined with metal, and/or capped. These modifications make an increasing number of chimneys unsuitable for roosting and breeding swifts. However, there are many simple steps we can take to properly maintain our chimneys in ways that are beneficial for both our homes and Chimney Swifts.

Show next page (Right Arrow)

### Common misconceptions addressed

**Fire hazards?** Only one tiny nest is built per chimney. It does not block the chimney, and often detaches over the winter. It does not pose a fire hazard.

**Health risk?** Only one pair occupies a chimney. They do not present a health risk to homeowners, and do not create a substantial mess in the chimney.

**Noise?** Chimney swifts usually have four or five chicks per year, which do create some noise when begging for food. However, this period is usually less than two weeks.

#### How to check for Chimney Swifts

- Check chimney cleanout debris for evidence that you have hosted swifts in the past, such as feathers, or nest bowl or egg fragments.
- Listen for noises in your chimney. Hissing, chittering, or rattling sounds can indicate swifts nesting in your chimney.
- Look for birds flying in and out of your chimney. Partners will relieve each other during incubation, and both parents will feed the chicks.

### I think I have swifts. What should I do?

- If possible, avoid using your fireplace or furnace while they are in residence (early May through September).
- If you have a fireplace, keep the damper closed, preventing swifts from arriving in your living room. Place packing insulation (foam or rubber) beneath the damper to mute sounds until the young have learned to fly and feed on their own (usually < 2 weeks). But make sure to remove insulation and open the damper before lighting a fire!
- Consider monitoring your chimney as part of Bird Studies Canada's Maritimes SwiftWatch program!
- Remember, because Chimney Swifts are protected under federal and provincial acts it is against the law to disturb, kill, or collect adult, nestlings, nests, or eggs.

### Tips for being a good Chimney Swift host

- Clean chimneys annually, especially if burning wood – but avoid the breeding season (May to September)! Creosote accumulation can cause flue fires and prevents nests from securely adhering to walls, presenting a falling hazard for eggs and young; both are prevented by regular cleaning.
- If raccoons or squirrels entering your chimney are a concern, prevent access by adding a 60 cm band of metal flashing to the outside of your chimney, just below the top.
- Install a small 'roof' high enough above the top of the chimney (about 30 cm) to allow swifts to enter while keeping out rain.
- Swifts require a source of fine twigs for nest building; don't be too fastidious in pruning away all dead branches in your yard.
- If you are converting to a gas furnace or hot water heater, investigate alternatives to metal liners.
- If your chimney is already lined with metal, keep it capped to prevent swifts and other wildlife from entering. Metal liners are narrow and slippery, and can trap animals inside.

To learn more, visit:  
[www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/acswifts/](http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/acswifts/)

Photos courtesy of: Erin Brethauer, Jim Capaldi, Bruce DiLabio, Mark Elderkin, Russ Goulding, Ally Manthorne, Nelson Poirier, Richard Stern

Figure 1. How to be a good Chimney Swift host brochure (English).



### À propos du Suivi des martinets dans les Maritimes

Lancé en 2011, le Suivi du martinet dans les Maritimes est un partenariat entre Études d'Oiseaux Canada, Nature NB, la Blomidon Naturalists Society, le Pictou County Naturalists Club, Environnement Canada, l'Institut de recherche Mersey Tobetic, la Nova Scotia Bird Society, et la Kennebecasis Naturalist Society. Il fournit aux participants une méthode uniformisée et des outils en vue de l'identification et de la surveillance des Martinets ramoneurs dans leurs dortoirs et dans leurs lieux de nidification. De plus, il sert de base de données centralisée permettant de stocker et d'échanger les renseignements sur les dortoirs et les lieux de nidification nouveaux et existants. Ces renseignements servent à sensibiliser les propriétaires de cheminées et les collectivités et à favoriser la protection à long terme de ces lieux cruciaux pour les Martinets ramoneurs.

Le Suivi des Martinets ramoneurs est réalisé dans les dortoirs à l'échelle du Nouveau Brunswick et de la Nouvelle Écosse. Les bénévoles dénombrent les martinets pénétrant dans leurs dortoirs au crépuscule durant les périodes de migration et de reproduction de l'espèce (entre mai et septembre). Pour plus de renseignements ou pour participer au Suivi, veuillez communiquer avec nous!

### Partenaires du projet :

### Ce programme bénéficie de l'appui de :

Ce projet a été réalisé avec l'appui financier du :

## Suivi du martinet dans les Maritimes

### Comment être l'hôte parfait des Martinets ramoneurs

**Suivi du martinet dans les Maritimes**  
 Bird Studies Canada  
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 Tél.: 1(506)364-5196  
[www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/acswifts/](http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/acswifts/)

### Les Martinets ramoneurs (*Chaetura pelagica*)

comptent fortement sur les cheminées pour s'abriter le long de leur voie migratoire et durant la nidification. Pendant la migration, des centaines de martinets se reposent dans des cheminées communes. Toutefois, pour la période de reproduction, les martinets se dispersent dans des cheminées distinctes qui ne sont occupées que par un seul couple. Ils y fixent leurs minuscules nids (~ 10 cm de largeur et 3 cm de hauteur) aux parois verticales à l'aide de leur salive adhésive.

*Hirondelle bicolorée*      Martinets ramoneurs      *Étourneau européen*

Voilà les progrès technologiques en matière de chauffage et de ventilation, de nombreux propriétaires apportent des améliorations aux cheminées de briques et de pierres existantes ou les démolissent. Les nouvelles cheminées sont plus étroites, doublées d'une gaine de métal et munies d'un pare-étincelles ou d'un grillage. Ces modifications rendent un nombre croissant de cheminées inadéquates au repos et à la reproduction des Martinets ramoneurs. Il existe cependant bon nombre de mesures simples que nous pouvons prendre pour entretenir adéquatement nos cheminées qui seront avantageuses tant pour nos domiciles que pour les Martinets ramoneurs.

### Dissipons les idées fausses courantes

**Risque d'incendie?** Les Martinets ramoneurs ne construisent qu'un seul nid minuscule par cheminée. Puisque le nid ne bouche pas la cheminée et se détache souvent de la paroi durant l'hiver, il ne crée aucun risque d'incendie.

**Bruit?** Les Martinets ramoneurs ont habituellement quatre ou cinq oisillons par année. Vous entendrez effectivement certains bruits des petits lorsqu'ils mendent de la nourriture, mais cette période dure généralement moins de deux semaines.

**Risque pour la santé?** Un couple seulement niche dans une cheminée. Il ne crée aucun risque pour la santé des propriétaires et ne laisse pas de résidus importants dans la cheminée.

### Comment déterminer si des Martinets ramoneurs occupent votre cheminée

- Vérifiez les débris de ramonage pour y repérer des plumes, des nids, des fragments d'œufs ou tout autre signe que des martinets se sont installés dans votre cheminée dans le passé.
- Déterminez si des bruits proviennent de votre cheminée. Des sifflements, des jacassements ou des bruits secs et brefs peuvent indiquer que des martinets y nichent.
- Vérifiez si des oiseaux entrent dans votre cheminée et en sortent. Pendant l'incubation, les deux parents se relaient pour nourrir les oisillons.

### Je crois que des Martinets ramoneurs sont installés dans ma cheminée. Que dois-je faire?

- Dans la mesure du possible, évitez de vous servir de votre foyer ou de faire fonctionner votre chaudière pendant que les martinets s'y logent (du début de mai à septembre).
- Si vous avez un foyer, gardez le registre fermé pour empêcher les martinets de s'introduire dans votre salon. Bourrez le dessous du registre d'un matériau isolant (mousse ou caoutchouc) pour atténuer le bruit des oisillons jusqu'à qu'ils aient appris à voler et se nourrissent par eux-mêmes (ce qui prend habituellement moins de deux semaines). Assurez-vous de retirer le matériau isolant et d'ouvrir le registre avant de faire un feu!
- Envisagez de surveiller votre cheminée dans le cadre du Suivi des martinets dans les Maritimes d'Études d'Oiseaux Canada!
- N'oubliez pas que les Martinets ramoneurs (adultes, oisillons, nids et œufs) sont protégés en vertu de la réglementation fédérale et provinciale.

### Conseils pour être l'hôte parfait des Martinets ramoneurs

- Ramenez votre cheminée chaque année, particulièrement si vous y faites brûler du bois, mais évitez de le faire pendant la saison de reproduction (de mai à septembre)! Le ramonage régulier des cheminées permet d'éviter l'accumulation de créosote qui peut causer des incendies dans le conduit et empêcher les nids de bien adhérer à sa paroi, d'où le risque de chute des œufs et des oisillons.
- Si les rats laveurs ou les écureuils vous causent des ennuis, empêchez-les de d'entrer dans la cheminée en installant une bande de métal de 60 cm de hauteur à l'extérieur, à la base de celle-ci.
- Installez un petit « toit » au-dessus de l'ouverture de la cheminée en y laissant un dégagement suffisant (30 cm environ) pour permettre aux martinets d'y entrer tout en empêchant la pluie d'y pénétrer.
- Si vous remplacez votre chaudière à air chaud ou votre chauffe-eau par un appareil au gaz, examinez les possibilités de remplacement de la gaine de métal.
- Si votre cheminée est déjà munie d'une gaine de métal, obstruez l'ouverture afin d'empêcher les martinets ou d'autres espèces fauniques d'y entrer. La gaine de métal, étroite et glissante, empêche les animaux de s'échapper une fois à l'intérieur.

Pour en savoir plus, rendez-vous à : [www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/acswifts/](http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/acswifts/)

Photos par : Erin Brethauer, Jim Capaldi, Bruce DiLabio, Mark Elderton, Russ Goulding, Ally Manthorne, Nelson Poirier, Richard Stem

Figure 2. How to be a good Chimney Swift host brochure (French).



Figure 3. Bilingual car sign for SwiftWatch volunteers. Designed to take up a full piece of paper and to be folded on dotted line so either French or English can be displayed.



Figure 4. Name tags to be printed on adhesive stickers and provided to Swiftwatch volunteers.

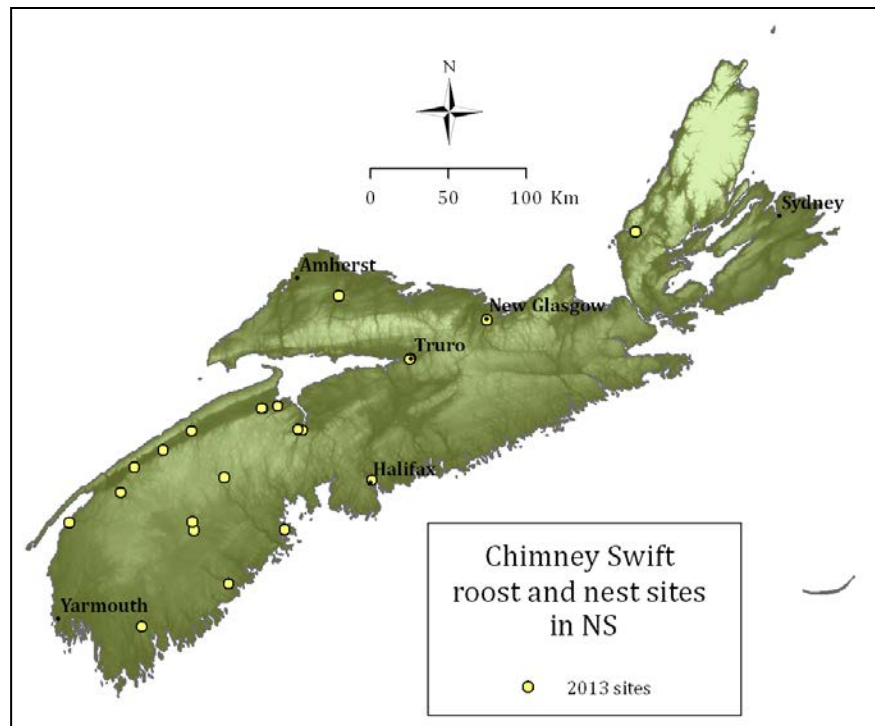


Figure 5. Map of 2013 roost and nest sites in Nova Scotia.

Table 1. Nova Scotia swift numbers on official SwiftWatch counts

Site	Building Type	22 May	26 May	30 May	3 June
St. Bernard	Church	n/a	0	93	n/a
McGowan Lake	Unused smithy	4	26	50	109
Middleton	School	n/a	0	108	238
Wolfville	Freestanding chimney (Robie Tufts Nature Centre)	20	87	25	32
Kentville*	School	reported on 24 <sup>th</sup>	0	0	n/a
Upper Falmouth	House	7	n/a	121	17
New Glasgow	School	586	530	202	126
Oxford	Freestanding chimney	20	20	2	2
Bear River *	Detached house	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Truro *	Old YMCA/Normal College building	reported 30 <sup>th</sup>		52	52
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>637</b>	<b>663</b>	<b>653</b>	<b>576</b>

“n/a” means that no count was conducted on this date

\*indicated a new site reported in 2013



### **2013-2014 Chimney Sweep Survey**

1) On average how many chimneys do you sweep per year?

2) Generally, what months do you do most of your sweeping?

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
<u>Comments:</u>											

3) How many would you estimate are in rural versus urban areas?

Rural:

Urban:

In this case we will define urban as falling within town limits and rural as falling outside town limits.

4) What is the main type of chimney you sweep?

CAPPED		METAL LINED		CLAY LINED		NO LINER	
<u>Comments:</u>							

5) Do you check the chimneys with a mirror or do a visual inspection before cleaning?

YES

NO

Comments:

6) Have you ever gone to sweep a chimney and observed a nest in it?

YES

NO

Comments:

If yes, how many per year?

7) Do you know what type of nest it was?

YES

NO

Comments:

8) Have you heard of Chimney Swifts?

YES

NO

Comments:

9) Would you be willing to receive some information about Chimney Swifts and how to deal with them in chimneys you find?

YES

NO

Email:

Phone Number:

Mailing Address:

Figure 6. Chimney Swift survey. Chimney sweeping companies were phoned and explained the purpose of the interview and then asked the questions.