



Maritimes SwiftWatch

VOLUME 7 — 2016-2017 Season

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Mark your calendar!
The 2017 roost count dates are:

May 24

May 28

June 1

June 5

Additional counts before, between and after the above dates are encouraged!

Led by Bird Studies Canada (BSC), Maritimes SwiftWatch is a citizen-science-based monitoring and conservation program designed to bring together volunteers, landowners and communities as stewards for Chimney Swifts and their habitat.

In 2016, over 65 volunteers scoured the region for swifts, conducting 161 roost watches, confirming nesting activity at many previously known nest sites, and identifying more than 10 new nest sites. Maritimes SwiftWatch staff and partners contacted landowners hosting nesting swifts on their properties to ensure they had sufficient information to avoid disturbance and harm to roosting and nesting swifts. There were no major trends in the swift counts at different roost sites around the Maritimes, with swift numbers similar to the average for the past several years at most roosts. More detailed information about Maritimes SwiftWatch roost count results and the National Roost Monitoring results can be found on pages 6-8.



We traveled far and wide this year, staging our ever-popular Swift Night Out events in the Nova Scotia communities of Bear River, Middleton, Wolfville, New Glasgow, and Mabou!

As always, a sincere **thank you** is due to the volunteers, partners, and supporters whose contributions make SwiftWatch possible!

-Amy-Lee Kouwenberg, Maritimes SwiftWatch Coordinator

Connect with us: www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/ai





Interior of one of the artificial nest towers erected by Nature NB and partners. Photo: Lewnanny Richardson

Still Waiting for Swifts

Lewnanny Richardson

In cooperation with the New Brunswick Wildlife Trust Fund, Environment Canada and local naturalists, Nature NB has spent years erecting artificial nesting towers so Chimney Swifts can nest in peace. The 12 foot-high structures were based on plans created by Paul and Georgan Kyle at Driftwood Wildlife Association in Texas, where swifts use the towers each year.

Eight nesting towers were built in New Brunswick and are located in Paquetville, Bathurst, Tracadie, Lamèque and Cambridge-Narrows. Despite the success of these impressive structures in Texas, swifts have not yet chosen to set up house in them in New Brunswick. Experts do not understand why the fake chimney towers are not attracting swifts, but the naturalists who participated in the project still have the structures on their properties and are anxiously awaiting the swifts.

In 2012, an artificial roost was built at the home of a member of the Acadian Peninsula Naturalists Club. The brick structure has the same dimensions as the active roost in Bathurst (which is used by more than 500 swifts) and was installed alongside a garage. Although the

location and dimensions seem to be perfect, swifts have yet to use this structure. Nevertheless, the property owner remains hopeful and will keep his roost available for as long as it takes.

It is unclear why the swifts are turning up their beaks at artificial structures in New Brunswick, since swifts are definitely present in the area. Artificial structures in other Canadian provinces have also had difficulty attracting swifts, despite similar structures working well further south in the United States. Research is ongoing, particularly comparing temperatures in chimneys versus artificial structures, to determine the ideal nest/roost conditions for swifts in Canada. Also, Nature NB members continue taking notes and observing the swifts to understand what is keeping the swifts from using their artificial structures.



An artificial nesting tower awaiting chimney swifts in New Brunswick. Photo: Lewnanny Richardson



Artificial roost chimney constructed on a private garage in New Brunswick. The roost has not yet been used by swifts despite being similar in size and characteristics to a roost chimney in Bathurst that is used annually by large numbers of swifts. Photo: Lewnanny Richardson

It is clear that we still have a lot to learn about Chimney Swifts and the naturalists in NB certainly aren't giving up hope that the swifts will one day make use of their handiwork!

Searching for Swifts and Swallows in Barns: 2016 Update

A common factor among Chimney Swifts and various species of swallow is that much of their nesting habitat is on private land. Unlike many other species at risk which might be rare and difficult to find, swallows and swifts can literally be found in our own backyards – and

buildings! This means that landowners and communities can play an active role in conservation and recovery of these species.

To this end, Bird Studies Canada launched a new program in 2015 providing information about swallows and swifts to the general public. This program includes an educational website, an online portal for reporting sightings and nests, and digital and print resources to support landowners in becoming good stewards for aerial insectivores (www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/ai).

In the Maritimes, we also piloted a “Swallows and Swifts” survey which had two main goals: (1) to collect information about Chimney Swifts and Swallows on private land, especially in barns and other structures used for nesting and (2) to gauge private landowners' knowledge and attitudes toward this group of birds. Also, reports of Chimney Swifts nesting in barns in southwestern Nova Scotia made us curious to investigate how widespread this phenomenon is, and why swifts are attracted to nest in barns. In the summer of 2016, we extended our pilot survey to a larger number of landowners and properties across a wider geographic area. In total, we visited 155 sites (42 in 2015 and 113 in 2016) around NS and southern NB.

In both 2015 and 2016, our questionnaires revealed that most landowners were unaware of the conservation



Nesting Barn Swallow found during a 2016 property survey. Photo: Siobhan Darlington and Megan MacIntosh

issues relating to aerial insectivores and that the Chimney Swift is listed as a Species-At-Risk. However, the majority of respondents fostered a positive attitude toward swallows and swifts, and were enthusiastic about participating in their conservation. While over 80% of respondents reported having no concerns about swallows or swifts nesting on their properties, approximately half felt that “Chimney Swifts nesting in my chimney would be a fire hazard” (which is not the case). For those who did express concerns about swallows and swifts nesting on their property, it was almost always related to the mess associated with their feces. All landowners participating in the survey received a package with information about aerial insectivores, the challenges they face, and actions landowners can take to make their property more hospitable to these species. Given most landowners’ positive and receptive attitude, we feel that more can be done to support landowners in stewardship for swifts and swallows.

Only one Chimney Swift nest was found in 2016 and none were found in 2015. In contrast, Barn Swallows were the most prevalent aerial insectivore found during both the 2015 and 2016 seasons. We collected detailed data on the characteristics of barns and surrounding habitat, in order to better understand why some barns



Barn Swallow inside one of the buildings surveyed by the BSC field crew. Photo: Siobhan Darlington and Megan MacIntosh

are chosen by Barn Swallows and why some are not. Despite the large variety of barn types, habitat and building features, one result stood out clearly above all others: Barn Swallow nests were significantly more likely to occur in structures with at least one access point (e.g. open doors and windows, holes). Barn Swallows were also more likely to nest in large barns with metal roofing, but this seems to be because large, metal-roofed structures assessed in our study also had significantly more access holes.

If there is a take-home message from our results, it is this: landowners who wish to encourage swift and swallow nesting should keep barns open during the spring and summer! Also, we encourage landowners to continue searching for Barn Swallow and Chimney Swift nests in the peak or darkest, highest corner of their barns using a bright flashlight. Chimney Swifts are rarely heard or seen entering, so they are easy to miss! Your sightings will help us document and better understand populations of these lovely creatures.

To participate in our landowner survey, to monitor your swallow nests using Project Nestwatch (www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pnw), or to report sightings of any aerial insectivores or their nests, please visit www.birdscanada.org/birdmon/ai or contact Maritimes SwiftWatch at marswifts@birdscanada.org

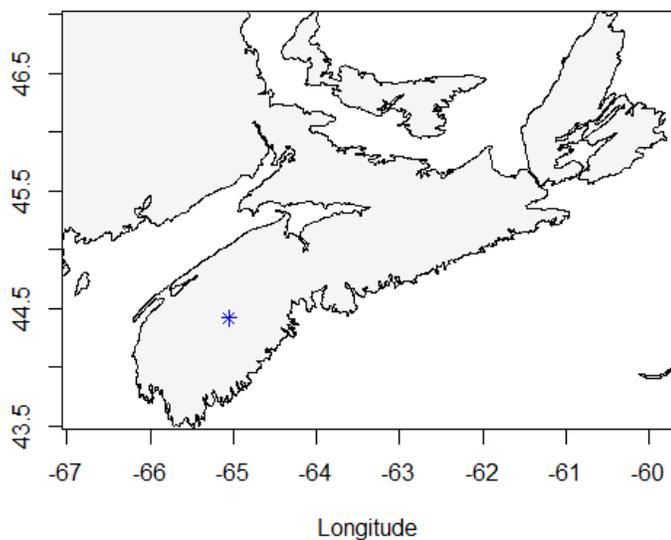


Cliff Swallow nests found during 2016 property surveys. Photo: Siobhan Darlington and Megan MacIntosh

Roost Spotlight: McGowan Lake

Brad Toms

The Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute (MTRI) recently met at the McGowan Lake Chimney Swift roost with representatives from Nova Scotia Power (NSP) and Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources (NSDNR). The building is owned by NSP who clears the vegetation (Staghorn Sumac) that sometimes grows around the chimney top (the chimney is only about 6m high). The



Location of the McGowan Lake roost site.

interior condition of the building was unknown to all partners before the visit. All of the structure appeared to be in very good condition and the interior had a very unique wooden fume hood (see photo) from when it was used as a smithy or glass blowing forge. There was no evidence of swifts nesting inside but some European Starlings had taken advantage of a broken window pane to make a nest. This small stout chimney has a brick interior and regularly hosts between 100 and 200 roosting Chimney Swifts in the breeding season.

Next year MTRI and volunteers will continue to monitor the swifts at the site and pursue investigations into the potential guano pile at the base of the chimney with

partners at UNB. Nova Scotia Power has committed to maintaining the site and building, and shifting the decommissioning of the nearby hydro turbine building and intake pipe to a time when the swifts are not present (fall).



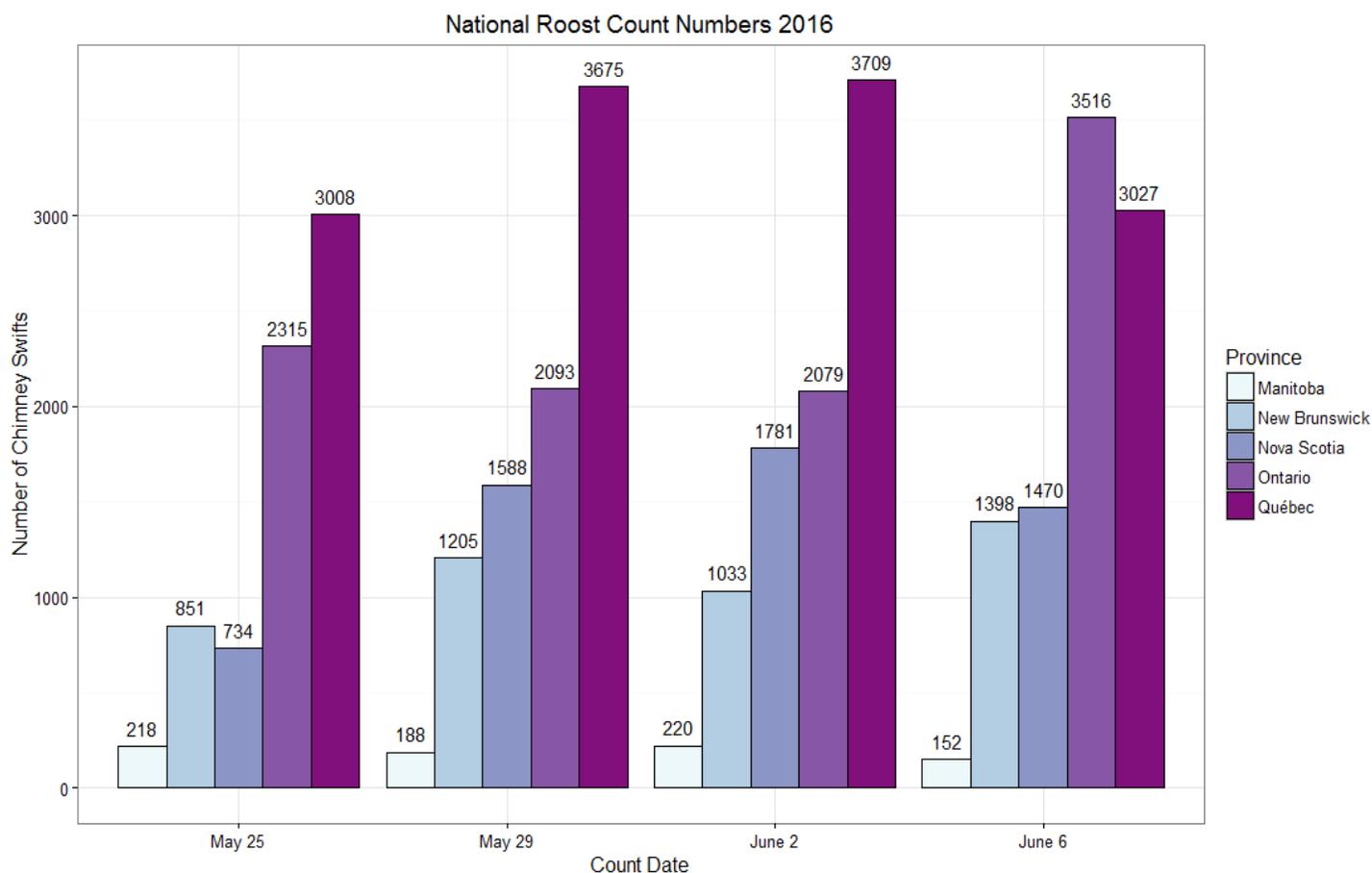
Interior of the building that houses the McGowan Lake Swift Roost Chimney. The photo shows the wooden chimney, which is lined with bricks, and the fume hood that was used by blacksmiths and glass blowers in years past. Up to 253 swifts were counted entering McGowan Lake chimney during 2016 roost counts! (Photo: Brad Toms)

Swifts By the Numbers –2016

Observers across Canada conduct counts on the same four nights, synchronizing counts to ensure that we are not double-counting swifts as they migrate through different regions. The number of surveyed roosts has increased from 70 sites in 2013 to 117 sites in 2016 as volunteers identify and adopt previously unknown roost sites for monitoring.

In 2016, dedicated volunteers in Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia surveyed 117 out of 136 known roost sites during the four National Roost Monitoring dates. The peak number of swifts counted in a single night was 9563, which was down from the peak number of 14,997 swifts in 2015. The total number of swifts counted on each 2016 count date in each province are displayed in the graph below. On a given roost count date, between 41-49 roosts were monitored in Ontario, 38-43 in Quebec, 8-9 in New Brunswick, 9 in Nova Scotia, and 5-7 in Manitoba.

It will take a few more years of data collection to determine how well the National Roost Monitoring protocol is detecting population trends, but the monitoring data is helping to demonstrate the importance of individual roost sites to the owners and managers of these structures as well as the surrounding communities, and underscore the need for protection and long-term stewardship of roost sites across Canada, which serve as vital stopover points for migrating and non-breeding swifts.



Tracking Swift Numbers in the Maritimes

In the Maritimes, 2016 swift numbers did not reach the exceptionally high numbers we had in 2015, but were comparable to or above numbers from 2011 to 2014. The roost count results for each monitored roost on each 2016 count day are displayed in the table of the following page. Numbers were slightly higher than last year at some roost sites and slightly lower at others, but there were no real trends of note. However, a dramatic event was reported at the Hampton, NB roost site this year: about 80 swifts entered the roost as normal on May 25, about 150 swifts entered and 75 exited (and did not return) on May 29, and then only 20 swifts flew around the roost (and only 3 entered) on June 2 and June 6. It is unclear where the rest of the swifts went on the nights after May 25th! Hampton SwiftWatchers will be on the lookout to see if swifts return to the roost in the spring and may need help searching for alternate roost chimneys that the swifts might be using. If you are in the Hampton area, please keep an eye out for swifts flying around or entering chimneys!

We are looking forward to another productive Maritimes SwiftWatch season and are really grateful for our hard-working volunteers. We have 20 known roost sites in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick with an average of 144 swifts per roost in 2016, which is quite remarkable considering the national average is 79 swifts per roost. Each of our roosts is very important and monitoring them each year contributes greatly to the national understanding of chimney swift numbers. Sometimes busy schedules prevent us from conducting counts on scheduled count dates. If you know in advance that you may miss a count, please let us know so we can help to arrange a 'backup' counter. On the other hand, if you have time to conduct extra watches before, between and after the four count dates (see front page for 2017 dates), feel free to do so! The more count data that exist for each site, the better!



Tracking Swift Numbers in the Maritimes — 2016 Maritimes SwiftWatch Results

Maritimes SwiftWatch Roost Counts 2016						
Prov.	Site	Building Type	25-May	29-May	2-Jun	6-Jun
NS	St. Bernard (Weymouth)	Church	111	147	151	100
NS	McGowan Lake	Unused smithy	126	214	230	253
NS	Bear River	House	113	267	216	154
NS	Middleton	School	173	363	513	289
NS	Wolfville	Freestanding chimney	45	106**	95	53
NS	Upper Falmouth	House	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NS	Truro	New town library	16	100	72	140
NS	New Glasgow	School	142	364	469	480
NS	Oxford	Freestanding chimney	0	2	2	1
NS	Mabou	Church	8	25	33	0
NB	Sainte-Anne-de-Madawaska	Church	177	n/a	343	372
NB	Sainte-Anne-de-Madawaska	School	0	n/a	0	0
NB	Bathurst	Former post office	176	522	298	438
NB	Paquetville	Church	0	1	1	n/a
NB	Plaster Rock	School	251	271	240	266
NB	Fredericton	Commercial	111	95	33	136
NB	Island View forestry nursery	House (used as office)	0	2	2	2
NB	Sussex	Apartment complex	57	239	113	181
NB	Hampton	Former post office	79	75	3	3
NB	Riverside-Albert	House	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
		TOTAL	1585	2793	2814	2868

"n/a" means no count was done on this date

**Estimated number. No count was done on May 29, but 102 swifts were counted on May 28 and 110 swifts were counted on May 30.



Maritimes SwiftWatch is a multi-partner project led by Bird Studies Canada together with:



Kepukwit's SAR Program

Pictou Co. Naturalist Club



Maritimes SwiftWatch supporters:

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Graham and Susan Smith

Our project is funded in part by the New Brunswick Wildlife Trust Fund. This Wildlife Trust Fund obtains a portion of its revenue from the purchase of conservation plates by New Brunswick residents who are interested in conservation. Seven dollars (\$7) from each conservation plate purchase goes into that fund annually. These funds are awarded to projects such as ours by the Minister of Natural Resources following review and recommendation by an independent board of 17 volunteers. Revenue from license plates is critical in furthering conservation efforts in our province so please consider purchasing conservation plates with your next car purchase to enable the NB Wildlife Trust Fund to continue to provide financial support for worthy wildlife projects.



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