



Ontario SwiftWatch

2021 Season Newsletter

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Spring 2022 updates and news:

We are hoping to monitor all known roosts this year—reach out if you or someone you know is interested!

Are you involved in local government? Contact us to learn how we can work together to protect Chimney Swifts!

The Annual Ontario SwiftWatch Report has a new look - a newsletter! This new format presents the relevant results of the data collected by all of you in an easier to read format.

Birds Canada leads Ontario SwiftWatch, a volunteer-based monitoring and stewardship program designed to bring together biologists, Citizen Scientists, landowners, and communities to conserve and monitor Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) and their habitat.

In 2021, 65 volunteers spent over 750 hours scanning the skies for swifts and swallows, conducting 990 roost and nest surveys at 142 sites. Ontario SwiftWatch staff and partners contacted many landowners hosting swifts on their properties to provide information about swift biology, stewardship, and chimney protection.

After an interesting season in 2020, it was great to have volunteers fully monitoring sites in Ontario in 2021. In 2021, Birds Canada staff were invited to multiple groups to present information on aerial insectivores, including Chimney Swifts, while providing actionable items in ways that we can all help conserve this important species.

As always, a sincere **thank you** to all the volunteers, partners, and supporters whose contributions make SwiftWatch possible! We are always looking for more SwiftWatch volunteers, so feel free to let your fellow swift lovers know that they're always welcome to reach out!

- Natasha Barlow, Ontario Projects Biologist



Chimney Swifts entering chimney

Photo: Megan Hiebert

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Project Successes

Birds Canada is fortunate to have dedicated partners who passionately monitor swifts and undertake on-the-ground contact with individuals who have an interest in protecting swifts. For a number of years, Nature London has monitored swifts at the old Hunt's flour mill at Nova Craft Canoe in London, Ontario. Through outreach from Nature London, Nova Craft Canoe's owner and employees have become supportive of monitoring efforts and are interested in promoting the well-being of the swifts using the Hunt's chimney.

Birds Canada has also engaged with interested educators, administration staff, and facility operators at schools across Ontario, to facilitate protection of chimneys at these sites and encourage inclusion of our School SwiftWatch program (<https://www.birdscanada.org/discover-birds/bird-friendly-schools/lesson-packages/>) into lesson plans. We have successfully engaged multiple schools and organizations in discussions regarding protection of chimneys, as well as other bird-friendly measures including reducing window strikes, and gardening for birds. Identification of these important nest and roost sites at schools and industrial buildings would not have been possible without all of your help!



Nature London's Winnie Wake (right) and Brendon Samuels (left) presents Nova Craft Canoe's owner, Chris Rath (middle), with a Swift-friendly Property Sign.

Photo: David Wake



Trail camera footage of a Chimney Swift nest in southern Ontario

Although not directly related to SwiftWatch, in 2021 we successfully gathered video footage of the entire breeding period from a trail camera in a barn with an active Chimney Swift nest. The footage shows nest building, egg laying, incubation, nestling feeding, fledging, and parent interactions. The footage is being compiled as part of an educational video, with the intention of being shared with schools, interested groups, and the general public. It will be available on Birds Canada's website, and our YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/BirdStudiesCanada>) - so stay tuned!

SwiftWatch Program Methods and Reminders

The program's primary objectives are to fill key knowledge gaps by identifying and monitoring priority roost and nest sites, and taking further conservation efforts to address threats to swifts, specifically the loss and disturbance of these sites. To best estimate provincial, Canadian, and North American populations, roost counts are coordinated across the species' breeding range on the same four nights each year. By doing this, roost counts can be added together to estimate a minimum population without double counting individuals across all survey locations. The added roost count total is considered a *minimum* population because some roosts are unknown or not counted. This is also why SwiftWatchers across Canada are always on the lookout for new potential Chimney Swift roosts – the more known roosts that are counted, the better our population estimate will be.

In 2022, the national roost monitoring dates for Chimney Swift roosts are **May 21 (optional), May 25, May 29, June 2, and June 6**. Volunteers and surveyors are always encouraged to do additional surveys before, after, and between these dates, but **ensuring surveys are done on these dates is key to successful national monitoring**. If you are signed up to survey a roost and are unable to survey on one of these dates, please let us know so that we can help find someone to cover the survey.

We are keen to find new roost sites around the province, so please contact us if you ever notice swifts entering a chimney and are unsure if it is a known site. We also encourage volunteers to help detect nesting sites – **if you see Chimney Swifts entering a chimney during the daytime, let us know!** Regular monitoring of nest sites is valuable to help us understand timing and success of Chimney Swift breeding, and we also want to make sure we have records of nesting locations for conservation planning purposes.

Once you have conducted your SwiftWatch surveys, it is easiest to enter your data online through our NatureCounts Swifts and Swallows website (<https://www.birdscanada.org/naturecounts/ai/main.jsp>). You can also find blank survey forms on NatureCounts or on the SwiftWatch website (<https://www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/swiftwatch/>) and can email/mail us completed forms using the contact information on the final page.

Please don't hesitate to get in contact with us if you have any questions!

Swifts By the Numbers –2021

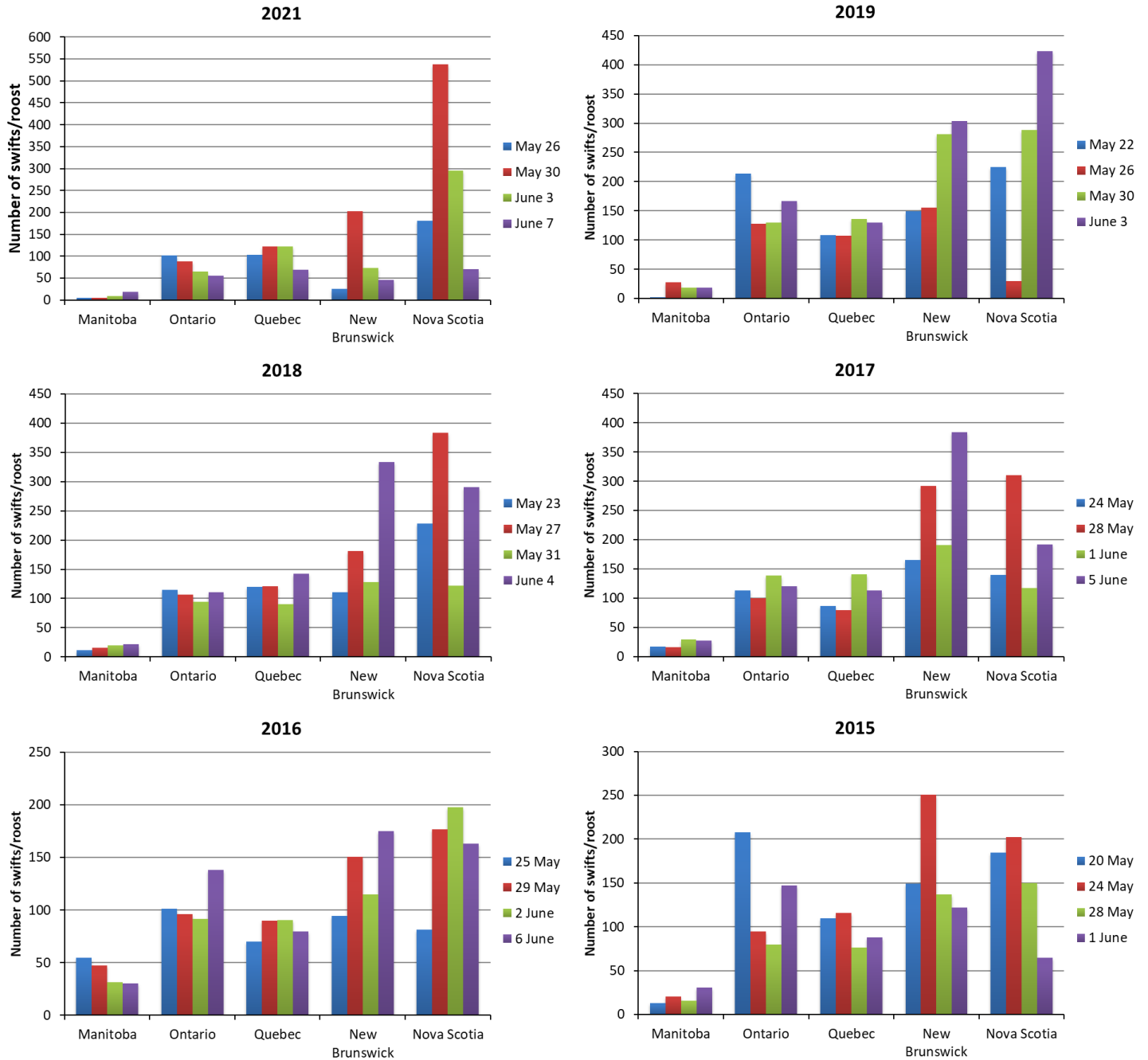
National Roost Monitoring Data

The highest number of surveyed roosts was 88 of 137 known sites in 2021 - more known sites than past years but slightly lower percentage counted due to continuing pandemic limitations (see Figure 2 for 2015-2021 results). These numbers represent both an increase in the number of previously unknown roosts identified, and in the numbers of volunteers adopting roosts to monitor - and both are positive measures of awareness and stewardship for Chimney Swifts!

In 2021, volunteers in Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia counted a combined total of 11,974 swifts on May 30 which was the highest count day for each province except Manitoba.

2021 Chimney Swift Roost Survey Results	May 26			May 30		
	No. of swifts	No. of surveyed roosts / known roosts	Mean no. of swifts/roost	No. of swifts	No. of surveyed roosts / known roosts	Mean no. of swifts/roost
Manitoba	62	11/16	6	60	12/16	5
Ontario	1523	15/46	102	1581	18/46	88
Quebec	4935	48/51	103	5762	47/51	123
New Brunswick	101	4/11	25	808	4/11	202
Nova Scotia	1452	8/13	182	3763	7/13	538
Canada	8073	86/137	94	11974	88/137	136
2021 Chimney Swift Roost Survey Results	June 3			June 7		
	No. of swifts	No. of surveyed roosts / known roosts	Mean no. of swifts/roost	No. of swifts	No. of surveyed roosts / known roosts	Mean no. of swifts/roost
Manitoba	131	14/16	9	184	10/16	18
Ontario	1107	17/46	65	892	16/46	56
Quebec	5595	46/51	122	3186	46/51	69
New Brunswick	291	4/11	73	138	3/11	46
Nova Scotia	2065	7/13	295	635	9/13	71
Canada	9189	88/137	104	5035	84/137	60

Table 1: 2021 results from all five Canadian National Roost Monitoring provinces including total number of swifts, number of surveyed roosts out of the number of known roosts, and the mean number of swifts per roost for each count date.



Data source: Birds Canada, Manitoba Chimney Swift Initiative, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service.
Data cannot be published without the agreement of the above three organizations involved in data collection.
The Chimney Swift Roost Survey was not conducted in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

<https://www.mbcchimneyswift.com/>, marswifts@birdscanada.org, ontarioswiftwatch@birdscanada.org

Data compiled by the Canadian Wildlife Service, Quebec Region, November 24, 2021

Figure 2: Summary tables of National Roost Monitoring in Canada for past six years (2015-2021).

Ontario SwiftWatch Results

Monitoring data continues to demonstrate the importance of individual sites. Birds Canada is using this important data to bring municipalities into the conservation of Chimney Swifts by encouraging them to use our database, add Chimney Swifts to municipal planning processes, and increase awareness with property owners and developers.

In 2019, 180 chimneys were surveyed while completing 1077 surveys. Table 2 below shows the total number of chimneys surveyed in 2021 as 142 while completing 990 surveys. This dip in chimneys surveyed and number of surveys completed are expected due to the continuation of rolling pandemic restrictions, and we're hopeful that 2022 proves to be a 'more normal' year for survey efforts.

City/town	Number of chimneys surveyed	Number of surveys completed
Acton	1	1
Aurora	1	16
Bancroft	1	15
Barrie	26	123
Brighton	1	4
Chalk River	1	16
Chatham	1	2
Dundas	3	4
Essex	1	10
Hamilton	3	5
Ingersoll	1	1
Kingsville	1	2
London	45	505
Minesing	1	1
Mississauga	4	14
North Bay	2	76
Oakville	4	8
Oro-Medonte	1	1
Owen Sound	1	20
Parry Sound	5	39
Pembroke	1	3
Perth	1	6
Peterborough	1	5
Rolphton	1	57
Seaforth	1	2
Simcoe	1	1
South-west Oxford	0	0
St. Catharines	3	6
Stratford	1	3
Thorold	0	0
Tillsonburg	1	1
Toronto	22	34
Trenton	1	4
Warton	1	1
Windsor	3	4
TOTAL	142	990

Table 2: Summary of 2021 Ontario SwiftWatch community monitoring.

Help for swifts: Chimney Swift Fund

The Chimney Swift Chimney Restoration Fund (the Chimney Swift Fund) is a project undertaken by Birds Canada with the financial support of the Government of Canada through the federal department of Environment and Climate Change and with support and guidance from diverse partners from Saskatchewan to Nova Scotia. The goal of the Chimney Swift Fund is to help maintain nesting and roosting sites for the Chimney Swift by providing financial support for the restoration of anthropogenic structures (i.e., chimneys, barns, etc.) known to be important for the species in Canada. The Chimney Swift Fund helps address the threat of continued habitat loss to Chimney Swifts and aids recovery efforts for this species at risk.

In the past, Chimney Swifts mainly nested and roosted in large-diameter hollow trees in old-growth forests. However, over the past 400 years there has been a drastic reduction in the numbers of suitable hollow, mature trees within the North American landscape, and the species has become largely dependent on anthropogenic structures, primarily chimneys, for nesting and roosting. While a chimney used for nesting is occupied by only one pair, several dozen to more than 1,000 individuals may roost in a single chimney at night or in cold or rainy weather during the day. Roosts are mostly used by migrating birds but can be used by non-breeding individuals throughout the summer period.

As Chimney Swifts show high fidelity to their nesting and roosting sites, a threat to their survival is the loss of suitable chimneys. Capping, lining, and screening of chimneys renders the chimneys unusable to Chimney Swifts, and the demolition of degraded chimneys removes the habitat entirely for this species. The Chimney Swift Fund will help partners and chimney owners undertake work to repair damaged chimneys and thus maintain the structures as usable Chimney Swift habitat. This will help reduce the impact of habitat loss on this species at risk.

Who can apply?

1. Any owner of a chimney or other structure in need of repair that is known to be used by Chimney Swifts for nesting or roosting in Canada.
2. A third party, such as a conservation group, may lead a restoration project for an owner, for which they will work to provide the necessary matching funds (at least 50% of the total amount) from non-federal sources.

Interested in learning more?

If you, an organization, or someone you know could benefit from this fund, please read the Application Guidelines and submit your application using the Application Form on our website (<https://www.birdscanada.org/about-us/funding-opportunities/chimney-swift-fund/>).

Applications for support for restoration projects are due by **April 21, 2022**.



Photo: Erin Brethauer



Thank You!

A sincere thank-you to the 2021 regional coordinators and key local contacts for your tireless efforts to recruit and organize volunteers and steward Chimney Swifts in your community. Without your dedication, we would not be able to collect the caliber and quantity of data on swifts and their habitat across Ontario that we have.

Ontario SwiftWatch would not be possible without the network of partner groups across the province. Thank you to the members of the Bert Miller Nature Club (Fort Erie), Canadian Nuclear Laboratories, City of Mississauga, Essex County Field Naturalists' Club, Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve, Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club, Nature Aurora, Nature Barrie, Nature London, Nipissing Naturalists Club (North Bay), Parry Sound Nature Club, Prince Edward County Field Naturalists, and Sault Naturalists and Algoma SwiftWatch (Sault Ste. Marie).

Thank you to our national partners at the Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Manitoba Chimney Swift Initiative, and Maritimes SwiftWatch for your continued collaboration on Chimney Swift monitoring and conservation in Canada.

Thank you to our friends at Swift Care Ontario for the tireless work you do to rehabilitate and release Chimney Swifts in need.

Birds Canada is the country's only national charity for bird research, Citizen Science, education, and conservation. In 2021, Ontario SwiftWatch was supported by the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, and caring individuals like you.



Contact us:

Ontario SwiftWatch
Birds Canada
115 Front Road, PO Box 160
Port Rowan, ON
N0E 1M0

ontarioswiftwatch@birdscanada.org