

# NATURE MANITOBA NEWS

Volume 2  
Issue 4  
July / Aug. 2010

*A newsletter for people passionate about nature*

## The Plight of the Chimney Swift

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As awareness of the plight of the chimney swift spreads, more and more organizations are joining the effort to study them, and hopefully slow their decline. These groups now include Bird Studies Canada in Ontario, the Canadian Wildlife Service in Quebec and Nova Scotia, and Partners in Flight in the United States, as well as several universities. Questions such as what factors are contributing to the chimney swift's decline, where the decline is primarily taking place, and how conservation strategies need to be modified across the chimney swift range, still abound. Amidst the plethora of recent interest, the Manitoba Chimney Swift Initiative (MCSI) is still in a unique position to contribute, due in part to our location in the extreme northwest corner of the chimney swift's range.

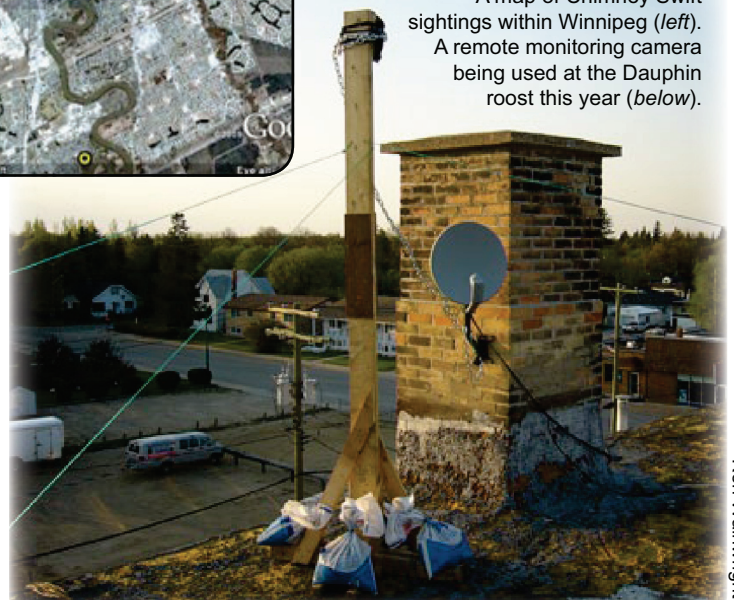
Historical data, along with our monitoring data, have shown that as the chimney swift population declines, it is shrinking southward and eastward towards its core. Though never common in Eastern Saskatchewan, small numbers of chimney swifts nested there historically. In recent years, however, sightings have become sporadic and declining, and none have been reported since 2006. Nonetheless, hope still lingers that small populations exist in Saskatchewan. Indeed, in 2009, a small group of chimney swifts was spotted only four kilometres east of the Saskatchewan border near Highway 77. Four kilometres is nothing "as the swift flies"! Likewise, Brandon was once home to many chimney



swifts, but according to the Brandon Naturalists Society, none have been spotted there in five years. Portage la Prairie is now the western bastion of chimney swift nesting in Manitoba, and numbers have declined there, too. Sightings west of Portage la Prairie are not uncommon, but we have not been able to document any recent breeding evidence.

*(continued on page 11...)*

A map of Chimney Swift sightings within Winnipeg (left). A remote monitoring camera being used at the Dauphin roost this year (below).



Ken Wainwright

## HIGHLIGHTS

**Aquatic Invasive Species ( p.4 )**

**Contributions needed! ( p.5 )**

**The Future of Birds Hill Park? ( p.10 )**

## Jack Dubois & Kim Monson (...continued from page 3)

Kim and Jack's involvements are by no means limited to Nature Manitoba. The list is actually quite long and impressive, especially when you consider that they are not yet retired! Jack was a main figure in starting up the Manitoba Eco-Network, and served as president for 10 years. Kim helped start up the Manitoba chapter of CPAWS (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society), and later served as its chair for a year. They've both been active in the Caving Club (the Manitoba Speleological Society), and have both served as presidents. Jack is currently president of the local chapter of The Wildlife Society. They also used to be regular co-instructors for the "Whales and Wildflowers" Elderhostel Program at the Churchill Northern Studies Centre. Its hard to imagine how they managed all of their commitments, but

according to them, "You get more out of it than you give, so much in friendships and experiences."

Since 2001, Jack has switched jobs to work for the government as Director of the Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch. Jack hopes that his position as an 'insider' will help alleviate some of the conflicts that often arise between advocacy groups and the government. Although Jack's position affords him less vacation time, Jack and Kim have still have been finding time to take some of their grandchildren, totaling 10 between them now, on some wilderness trips as they become old enough.

Boredom will not likely be an issue for them when they retire, as they have certainly found their passion, and they look forward to having more time to spend exploring and sharing what they've learned.



## The Plight of the Chimney Swift

(...continued from page 1)

On the northern edge of their range, two chimney swifts were spotted as far as The Pas in 2006. However, the most northerly known chimney used for roosting or nesting in North America is in Dauphin. In July of 2000, approximately 126 birds were observed diving into the chimney to roost for the night. The last several years of monitoring have resulted in significantly lower numbers. Of course, the birds may have chosen another site to roost. We can't assume cause and effect, but it doesn't look good. This year, we have installed a remote monitoring camera at the Dauphin roost with the intention of collecting more thorough data than would be possible with a volunteer observer.

Chimney swift numbers are likely declining in Winnipeg and the rest of southwestern Manitoba as well, but in comparison, these populations appear relatively robust. Although it is impossible to estimate the actual

chimney swift population for Manitoba, the MCSI is attempting to estimate changes in population levels using an index obtained by comparing the numbers of occupied chimneys from year to year. We are also using our monitoring program to collect breeding success data. This may help determine why Manitoba's chimney swift populations are declining, and in particular, whether the decline is taking place on the breeding grounds as opposed to during migration or on the wintering grounds. Thanks to all our dedicated volunteers, our discoveries here in Manitoba are contributing to the "big picture" that is being pieced together by our colleagues across Eastern North America.

For more information, please visit our website by going to [www.naturemanitoba.ca](http://www.naturemanitoba.ca) and looking in the 'Birding' section. You can also contact Laurel McDonald by emailing [MB-chimneyswift@gmail.com](mailto:MB-chimneyswift@gmail.com) to volunteer or submit chimney swift sightings.



Lynn Colicutt

In addition to flowers and wildlife, many gardens on the tour feature "The Nook" - a small, cozy, out-of-the-way space tucked into a corner of the yard. This is Julia Schoen's shady woodland nook seen on the tour in 2009. The garden tour gives visitors a chance to explore every delightful nook and cranny in the showcased gardens.

## OUR NATURAL GARDEN TOUR

### Nature Manitoba Fundraiser 2010

Winnipeg had a wonderful time at Nature Manitoba's Tenth Anniversary Garden Tour last July. Now it's time, once again, to start thinking about a new group of gardens this summer!

Our new tour will take place in St. Vital. Victoria Crescent's lovely woodland spaces and several riverside properties along beautiful Kingston Row are just two of the areas being showcased.

Our community garden for 2010 actually consists of many gardens - both flower and vegetable. St. Amant, on River Road, will welcome you in to view the colourful Buhler gardens on their grounds, as well as the vegetable allotment gardens at the back which it leases out to members of the South Winnipeg Garden Club.

Over the years, the needs of our organization have grown to the point that, after a decade, we have felt the need to raise the price of our tour ticket to \$15. Still a bargain for all-day entertainment!

Tickets are available at the Nature Manitoba office and various garden centres across the city.

The 2010 Garden Tour is on Saturday, July 24<sup>th</sup>. Come out to support Nature Manitoba and have a great time doing it!

**Julia Schoen**