

Threatened species likes the town

Chimney-watching a passion in St Adolphe

by Grant Burr

IF you spot a group standing in St Adolphe staring at chimneys don't worry, they aren't strange birds, they're watching the birds.

St Adolphe is, in fact, home to a special flock, now since departed from its nesting area along the Red River. For years chimney swifts have made the community their home for several weeks before heading south for the winter.

This month chimney swift enthusiasts gathered to take in an evening of bird-watching on the grounds of the local Catholic church, which features one of the town's brick chimneys, an essential element of the birds' attraction to the community.

The birds, listed as threatened species in Canada, arrive in mid-May for the breeding season, often building their nests in chimneys.

St Adolphe has five chimneys available, two atop Le Club Amical, the church and a private home on Main Street. Since the Brodeur Brothers car dealership closed over a year ago the birds have now also begun to occupy the chimney of that vacant building.

The dark, rough surfaced structures are ideal for the birds. While it's an urban bird, little is known about it.

Chimney swift monitoring began in 2007 and the group has begun to establish a baseline for the population in Manitoba, which has been on the decline. Still, birds have been spotted in other Southeast communities as well, including Ste Anne, La Broquerie and Vita.

Additional monitoring is allowing them to get a "better handle on what the population really is," according to Manitoba Chimney Swift Initiative coordinator Frank Machovec.



GRANT BURR • THE CARILLON

Frank Machovec joins St Adolphe area residents Auguste Legasse, Leon Verhaeghe and Barb Stewart chat on a night of bird-watching earlier this month in St Adolphe.

This year has been a particularly challenging year. With fewer eggs and high mortality rate, the nesting process has been difficult. St Adolphe-area resident Barb Stewart says the hot weather has been partly to blame, as it has resulted in fewer insects for the birds to support their young.

Efforts to boost the population have been aided by provincial and federal government funding. Artificial towers have been erected in the past, including one in St Adolphe, but have not been as successful as authentic chimneys. The St Adolphe structure has been shunned.

But there's hope a new chimney will soon be added to the community's stable of nesting sites. The chimney at the St Adolphe personal care home had been capped previously. But with plans in the works to demolish the facility (a new personal care home is to be built in Niverville), there has been a commitment by the new care home owners to retain some of the old building's brick work to create a new nesting site for the birds.

More information on the Manitoba Chimney Swift Initiative can be found at www.naturemanitoba.ca/CHSW.html.