

Chimney Swift: Manitoba's Flying Cigar

Become a Chimney Swift Champion!

The Canadian Chimney Swift population has decreased by about 95% in the last 40 years. While there are many possible reasons for the decline of Chimney Swifts, including insect availability and extreme weather events, one of the main factors is a dramatic reduction in the number of "swift-friendly" chimneys. Chimney Swifts are protected under federal and provincial Species at Risk legislation. This means it is an offence to kill or injure individuals or destroy the habitat on which they rely.

Since 2007, the Manitoba Chimney Swift Initiative (MCSI) has been seeking to monitor their status and preserve existing nesting and roosting sites.



Photo by: Nicole Firlotte



Photo by: Christian Artuso

Chimney Swift Conservation:

If your home, business or institution has a large-diameter (minimum 2.5 bricks by 2.5 bricks wide), unlined and uncapped, rough interior chimney it may be suitable for Chimney Swifts. Chimney Swifts are in Manitoba from mid-May until late August. Since most chimneys are not in use for heating purposes during this time, swifts and building owners can easily share the chimney. Swift nests are tiny so they pose no fire hazard.

The following is a list of things you can do, and avoid doing, to help our Chimney Swifts:

- **Clean your chimney regularly.** A clean interior wall will help the nest remain attached throughout the nesting period. Regular cleaning of an active chimney reduces the risk of creosote accumulation and a flue fire. A one-time cleaning of an inactive chimney will restore the interior surface to a swift-friendly condition. Clean between September and April when swifts are not present.

- **Repair rather than demolish.** If you are concerned about structural deterioration of your chimney, consider repairing it. Contact MCSI for information on potential funding.

Nesting chimney on the church in St. Adolphe. It was restored by MCSI in 2009 when it was slated for demolition due to structural deterioration.

Photo by R. Stewart

- **Refrain from using your fireplace/heating system chimney from mid-May to late August.** Fumes can be fatal to swift adults or young.

- **Avoid disturbance.** Keep the cleanout trap closed and avoid looking down the chimney or renovating the roof from mid-May until the end of August.



- **Manage the noise.** Nestlings greet adults bringing them food; the sounds may seem boisterous for about two weeks. Muffle noise by closing the damper tightly and packing temporary insulation inside. Remove the insulation in the fall before using the chimney again.
- **Seal off access to the chimney inside the house during the breeding season.** This will prevent swifts from entering the rest of your building but ensure the chimney can still be cleaned during the remainder of the year.
- **Limit closures.** Ensure the chimney remains available for the birds (avoid capping it or lining it with sheet metal). If your building has two chimneys which you have decided to line and cap, consider leaving one unmodified for use by swifts.
- **Prevent access to lined chimneys by capping.** Thus preventing swifts and other wildlife from entering and becoming trapped inside.
- **Avoid over-pruning trees or large shrubs on your property.** While flying by, Chimney Swifts break off the tips of dead branches for nest building.

Chimneys on a building in Otterbourne, Manitoba.
Note the trees in close proximity to the building.

Photo by R. Stewart



- **Advocate wetland protection.** Wetlands are important sources of the swift's favourite food - flying insects. Remember, Chimney Swifts consume over 1,000 mosquitoes and other flying insects per day.
- **Become citizen scientists.** MCSI needs new volunteers. Count the number of swifts entering your chimney at dusk during the nesting/roosting season, and submit results to MCSI.
- **Contact MCSI.** If you see Chimney Swifts or know where they are nesting or roosting, please contact MCSI for more specific information and advice.

Become a Chimney Swift Champion

Chimney Swifts need your help. If you have or suspect Chimney Swifts are using a chimney in your school, church, business, apartment or home or if you wish to help MCSI monitor roost and nest sites, then please consider becoming a Chimney Swift Champion. Chimney Swift Champions agree to (all or some of):

- Partner with the Manitoba Chimney Swift Initiative in conserving these special birds.
- Protect the Chimney Swifts: avoid using your chimney and unnecessary access of your roof from May to August; watch the birds from the ground and not from above or the clean-out trap.
- Maintain the chimney: do not cap, line or deconstruct; keep it clean (clean only between September and April); ensure the clean-out trap is closed.
- Consider monitoring nesting or roosting Chimney Swifts in your area or allow an MCSI monitor to view your chimney occasionally.
- Survey a group of chimneys on behalf of MCSI.
- Conserve trees on your property and advocate for wetland conservation near your home.



For more information on how to become a Chimney Swift Champion please contact:

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