

End-of-Season Report for Nature London Chimney Swift Monitoring Program, 2023

November 25, 2023

By Winifred Wake



1.0 Executive Summary

In 2023, Nature London's flagship Chimney Swift monitoring program was overseen by a team consisting of Glenn and Susan Berry, Sandy and Ric Symmes, and Dave and Winnie Wake. The London program maintains cordial relations with other swift programs but operates independently, using its own monitoring protocol and online data entry portal. At the end of the season, all data were shared via spreadsheet with the provincial database at Ontario SwiftWatch (Birds Canada). In 2023, London swift data from 2003 to 2023 were provided to researchers at Western University.

In 2023, organized monitoring at 18 chimneys was carried out on 20 evenings (May 9 to September 12). Spring start-up was delayed one week due to inclement weather. In September, monitoring was terminated early after swifts left the city three weeks earlier than in 2022. More than 65 people helped with the London monitoring program in 2023.

In August of 2023, Environment and Climate Change Canada released its first recovery strategy for the Chimney Swift, a Threatened species in this country since 2009. Based on past work by London volunteers, the strategy designated 54 London swift chimneys as "critical habitat" for the species. Owners were assigned responsibility for maintaining their chimneys as swift habitat. In 2023 Nature London continued its ongoing program of updating knowledge of chimneys used by local swifts; monitoring visits were made to 75 London swift chimneys over and above the 18.

In support of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, searches for nesting Chimney Swifts were made in several small towns in the region; five active nest chimneys were found. At the end of the summer, Nature London was pleased to facilitate the release of 13 hand-reared Chimney Swifts from southern Quebec and eastern Ontario.

1.1 Selected Highlights of the 2023 Nature London Swift Monitoring Program (May 4 to September 12)

- First swifts of year seen Ap 25 (eBird) at Komoka pits (2022=Ap 24; 2021=Ap 27; 2020=Ap 29; 2019=Ap 30).
- During fall migration in 2023, the combined tally for 13 chimneys monitored since 2018 peaked at 675 (Au 8).
 - In 2022, peak=806 (Au 23); 2021=856 (Au 24); 2020=1166 (Se 1); 2019=899 (Au 21); 2018=1802 (Au 29).
- Of 18 chimneys monitored weekly My 9 to Se 12, 10 held a roost of ≥ 20 swifts on at least 1 night.
- Largest single-night count at one roost on a designated monitoring night: My 9–Jn 14=248, Smith Fruit (Jn 12); Jn 15–Jl 31=219, Smith Fruit (Jl 11); Au 1–Se 30=374, Labatt's (Au 22). Largest count, all dates=374, Labatt's (Au 22).
- Last night a London chimney occupied=Se 12/23; vs Oc 5/22; Se 28/21; Se 27/20; Oc 2/19; Oc 9/18; Se 27/17.
- Releases of hand-reared young swifts:
 - Au 27, Huron College, 11 newly banded swifts (2 also fitted with Motus tags) from Le Nichoir, Hudson, QC.
 - Se 2, Mt Brydges, 2 swifts from Destined To Fly, Harrowsmith, ON.
- Tuesday-evening and associated monitoring, including 4 national spring blitz evenings (total of 20), at 18 chimneys produced 347 online data submissions.
- An extra 154 monitoring reports were submitted: 57 extra visits to 18 chimneys, 81 visits to 75 other London chimneys, and 16 visits to 5 out-of-town sites, for a total of 501 data submissions involving 98 different chimneys.
- Two new swift chimneys were found in London and 4 out of town.
- Of 18 monitored chimneys, 8 produced no young; the other 10 hatched young. Though outcomes are inconclusive, several may have fledged some young.

Nature London and its swift program are 100% volunteer entities. Thank you to all who contributed to the success of the 2023 London swift monitoring program. Special appreciation goes to the team of six that provided week-by-week leadership, management and oversight to engage and support monitors.

Sincere thanks go out to the wonderful crew of dedicated volunteers who turned up night after night through nice weather, but also rainstorms, polluted haze, and hungry mosquitoes, to ensure all sites were covered. An extra nod is due to those who filled in at the last minute or who enlisted friends to help.

Of the more than 65 people who participated, about 50 functioned as the core group. Monitors collected valuable data to add to the scientific understanding of swifts and to help inform wise conservation decisions for the species. They also served as swift ambassadors to passersby. We are tremendously grateful for their ongoing interest and loyal support, which enabled 2023 to be such a successful year for Nature London's swift monitoring program.

We sincerely thank Nature London for financial and other assistance.



Swifts descending to roost at Labatt's, Aug 31, 2023. (photo by David Wake)

2.0 Introduction: The First Completely Post-COVID Year of Monitoring

Nature London's 2023 monitoring program was organized by a committee consisting of Glenn and Susan Berry, Sandy and Ric Symmes, and Dave and Winnie Wake. Weekly monitoring was planned to take place from May to September at the same 18 chimneys as in 2022.

In February, monitors from the previous year were contacted to determine availability for 2023. Our crew is a dedicated lot, and most monitors indicated their willingness to participate again. The relaxation of COVID restrictions, however, allowed monitors to resume other activities and undertake more travel. Thus, many were available to help on fewer nights and not every scheduled monitoring slot could be filled.

To address the shortfall of volunteers, in late winter and early spring, a successful recruitment campaign was mounted at Nature London meetings, through *The Cardinal*, e-newsletter, personal contact, and at public outreach events. More than a dozen new monitors and assistants came aboard. This enabled monitoring to proceed at all of the 18 chimneys. For safety reasons and to ensure one set of eyes remained on the chimney rim at all times during a session, monitors were sent out in pairs. Ideally 30 people were on duty each monitoring night. (At three sites, where two chimneys were close together, only one person was assigned to a chimney.) In a gratifying demonstration of teamwork, any gaps that arose in the roster of assignments were filled by monitors bringing along a friend or by members of the organizing committee doing an extra shift the day before or the day after a scheduled count night.

In April, volunteers received a 13-page information document. This contained updated monitoring guidelines, directions to chimney locations, tips for determining optimal observation spots for each chimney, a table of sunset times, a printable form for recording field data, and instructions on how to enter data via the online Wufoo portal. Also included, in case COVID reared its ugly head again (it didn't), were suggestions relating to best practices for preventing the spread of COVID during monitoring sessions. Additional advice was provided to help minimize risk in areas where un-housed people and those experiencing addiction or mental illness tended to congregate. All volunteers involved in the Nature London swift monitoring program, whether members of the club or not, assumed full responsibility for their personal safety during monitoring sessions and while travelling to and from chimneys.

Each week, Glenn developed schedules, distributed monitoring assignments, sent out memory joggers and graciously accommodated many last-minute requests for changes. After monitors submitted data via the Wufoo portal, Dave created summary tables and charts. Winnie provided assessment and commentary to interpret the weekly results and put them in context. Sandy, Susan and Ric helped with myriad behind-the-scenes tasks.

Monitoring was planned to commence on May 2, but was delayed a week by very cold, wet weather. From May through July, for their first few sessions, new monitors were capably mentored by experienced monitors. In late May and early June, the weekly schedule was replaced by four nights of monitoring at four-day intervals. These coincided with the national roost monitoring program of the Canadian Wildlife Service. Simultaneous counts on designated dates at chimneys across swift range in Canada allow population trends for the species to be calculated.

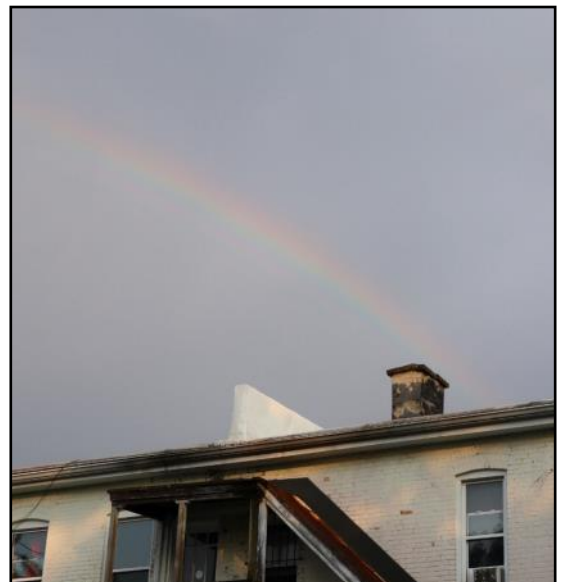
In late June, there was a slight glitch in data collection, when smoke from northern wildfires briefly necessitated the cancellation of monitoring. In September, monitoring was terminated about three weeks earlier than in 2022, due to the unusually early departure of swifts from London. In 2023, 20 reports were sent out for organized monitoring evenings, five fewer than in 2022. During the 2023 weekly program, 347 monitoring visits were made, compared to 411 in 2022. The 2023 data set covers May 4 to September 12 (vs May 3 to October 7 in 2022). In both years, additional visits were sometimes made to the 18 chimneys on other-than-scheduled dates.

Nature London's monitoring protocol is primarily intended to capture information on numbers of swifts (often non-breeders) spending nights in local chimneys. Especially during the early part of each one-hour session, monitors also note the times of entries and exits at the chimney, which provides information on any nesting activity inside.

Although not a part of Nature London's organized swift monitoring program, some club members kept an eye on a roost chimney in Mount Brydges, checked for swift nesting activity elsewhere in the region to aid the Breeding Bird Atlas project, and paid visits to London swift chimneys that are not part of the weekly program.

In total, in 2023, Nature London tallied 501 documented visits to known swift chimneys. At the end of the 2023 season, all data were shared, via spreadsheet, with the provincial database maintained by Ontario SwiftWatch (Birds Canada). This year data were also forwarded to researchers at Western University. In an exciting new undertaking, in the winter of 2023, all London swift data (mostly collected between 2003 and 2022) were made available via spreadsheet to Western researchers (approx. 5400 documented visits to known swift chimneys).

Despite the limitations of weather and early departing swifts, Nature London once again ran a highly successful monitoring program in 2023. Congratulations and thanks to all participants!



A rainbow arcs over an east London chimney where swifts were feeding young on Jul 11, 2023. (photo by David Wake)

2.1 Goals for Nature London Swift Monitoring in 2023

- Recruit additional volunteers to maintain existing monitoring program.
- Create a rotating schedule that pairs monitors, accommodates their availability, and enables them to experience a variety of different chimneys around the city.
- From May until swifts depart in the fall, conduct Tuesday-evening counts of swifts spending nights in 18 targeted chimneys.
- Participate in national program to monitor swifts during spring migration.
- At monitored chimneys, document presence of communal roosts of non-breeders, as well as indications of nesting activity.
- Send weekly summaries of results to keep volunteers engaged and informed.
- Visit unmonitored London swift chimneys to document current swift usage.
- Create safe and enjoyable monitoring experiences for volunteers.
- Facilitate releases of hand-reared swifts by wildlife rehabilitators who specialize in this species.
- Share data with municipal officials, researchers at Western and provincial database at Ontario SwiftWatch.



Swifts over First-St. Andrew's church, May 29, 2023. (photo by David Wake)

2.2 Terminology (terms are somewhat arbitrarily defined)

- **Roost:** A communal gathering (≥ 10 to ≥ 1000) of mostly non-breeding Chimney Swifts that spend the night (occasionally the day) together inside a single chimney.
- **Spring Roost** (late Apr to Jun 14), approximately coinciding with season of spring migration (large roosts).
- **Summer Roost** (Jun 15 to Jul 31), approximately coinciding with core of nesting season (smaller roosts).
- **Fall Roost** (Aug 1 to early Oct), approximately coinciding with fall migration (largest roosts).
- **Nest Chimney:** A chimney used only for nesting or that harbours only a few swifts. During the nesting season, only one pair or family unit lives in a chimney at a time. A communal roost sometimes occupies a chimney at night at the same time an active nest is present. Nesting birds tend to be quiet and secretive when approaching their home chimney. They may enter and exit at intervals during the day or several times during an evening monitoring session, especially the early part. A quick entry followed within a few minutes by an exit may indicate the exchange of incubating partners or a delivery of food to youngsters. The birds that make up a roost of non-breeders often circle and twitter before entry, and tend to enter later and more conspicuously (though not always) than nesting birds using the same chimney.

Table 1. The 18 London chimneys monitored weekly in 2023. For all sites, formal monitoring began on May 9 and continued until September 12. Letter codes in left column refer to map in Figure 1.

Map Ref	Monitoring Sites in 2023	
	Name	Location
A	South Collegiate Institute	371 Tecumseh Ave
B	King's College (Wemple)	266 Epworth Ave
C	Labatt's Garage/Warehouse	183 Simcoe St (viewed from Grey St)
D	Smith Fruit	22 Maitland St
E	Phoenix Building	300 Wellington St
F	Old North Public School (formerly Ryerson)	940 Waterloo St
G	First-St. Andrew's Church - SE Chimney	350 Queen's Ave
	- NE Chimney	350 Queen's Ave
	- N Chimney	350 Queen's Ave
	- S Chimney	350 Queen's Ave
H	Elborn College	1201 Western Rd
I	Hunt/Flanagan Building (Nova Craft Canoe)	471 Nightingale Ave (formerly 551 Nightingale)
J	Huron University College	1349 Western Rd
K	Kingsway Academy - North Chimney	370 Huron St
	- South Chimney	370 Huron St
L	- Old Office building	388 Dundas St
	- Old House/apartments	423 Colborne St
M	ICORR Properties	700 Richmond St

3.0 2023 Evening Monitoring Protocol at 18 Chimneys

For full details, see "Guidelines for Nature London Weekly Swift Monitoring 2023" (W Wake, April 8, 2023). This document (including supporting materials) was emailed to participants prior to the start of the season. A summary of the protocol and other pertinent information are presented here.

Thirteen chimneys have been monitored weekly since 2018. Five chimneys were added in 2022, for a total of 18. All are located in older, well-established parts of the city. Structures include a church, a heritage home (now businesses/apartments), schools, other educational institutions, warehouses, and industrial, commercial and office buildings. All date from the 1960s or earlier; the two oldest chimneys were constructed in 1869.

Initially, chimneys were selected for regular monitoring based on a history of use as a communal roost. In a few cases, nearby non-roost chimneys that could be monitored at the same time were included. The 18 monitored chimneys are listed in **Table 1** and shown on the map in **Figure 1**.

Though no chimney ever hosts a roost in all three seasons (spring, summer and fall) every single year, some chimneys tend to harbour roosting birds for more nights per year and in greater numbers than others do. Some chimneys may host a roost for as little as part of one season every several years. Because it cannot be anticipated in advance which chimneys will serve as roosts during which seasons and years, all 18 are retained on the monitoring list.

Even in years when not occupied by a roost, the 18 chimneys usually have small numbers of swifts occupying them during the nesting season. Monitoring in years when few swifts are using these chimneys makes it easier to document nesting activity.

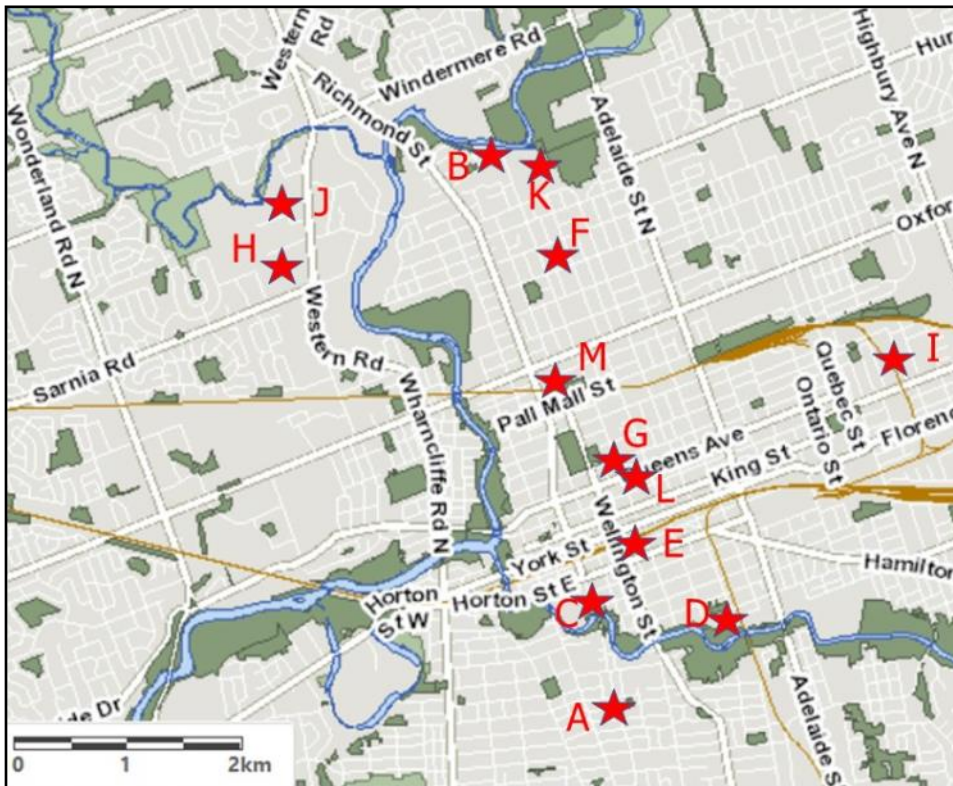


Figure 1. Locations of 18 chimneys where monitoring was regularly carried out in 2023. See Table 1.

Monitoring started at least 30 minutes before sunset (earlier in inclement weather) and continued until 30 minutes after sunset. The object was to report the number of swifts inside the chimney for the night; this required that exits be subtracted sequentially as they occurred. While seated in a lawn chair or a car, most volunteers counted visually (one often used video). If possible, the chimney was silhouetted against the northwest sky, away from security and other lights, and with two sides of the chimney visible. Participants were encouraged to start early to increase opportunities for seeing nesting-related behaviours, such as nest building, partner exchanges during incubation, and food deliveries to nestlings.

Monitors doing visual counts counted/estimated to the best of their ability and/or averaged counts made independently by different observers. When very large numbers of swifts were entering the chimney simultaneously, it usually helped to

count by 5s, 10s, 25s, etc. Video recordings that could be replayed later at a slower rate greatly increased the accuracy at such times.

The 2023 field form was similar to the one used in 2022. Numbers and times of all entering and exiting swifts were recorded, with estimates made when many swifts were entering at once. Advice was offered for selecting an optimal viewing location, how to calculate number of swifts inside for the night, and on other aspects of monitoring. Monitors were encouraged to make note of predators, unusual swift behaviours, and maximum number of swifts seen at once (especially if no roosting flock materialized). Barn Swallows, Common Nighthawks and bats were documented.

Information related to COVID-19 and other safety concerns was provided. Where feasible, the two members of a monitoring team came from the same household. Monitors rotated to different locations each night. Solo monitors also rotated among partners. Monitors encountered people experiencing homelessness mainly at First-St. Andrew's (FSA), Labatt's, Smith Fruit, and Phoenix. No problems were reported in 2023.

Data were submitted ASAP after each count via the Nature London online portal (same as in 2022).

Each week monitors received an email from Winnie that included two documents: 1) a table of numbers and observations submitted for the 18 chimneys during the most recent count, 2) a written report summarizing and discussing these results (including a cumulative table of counts at each chimney since May 9). In the latter part of each week, Glenn sent out the schedule of monitoring assignments for the coming Tuesday. On Sundays he emailed a memory jogger to everyone who had an upcoming assignment.

In late May and early June, Tuesday-evening monitoring was suspended and replaced by monitoring on May 24, May 28, June 1 and June 5. These designated dates were selected by the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS, a division of the federal department of Environment and Climate Change Canada [ECCC]) to obtain a snapshot of numbers of swifts across the country as they migrated north. Data are used to calculate population trends.

The protocol used by the Nature London swift monitoring program includes all fields required by Ontario SwiftWatch and the national roost monitoring program of CWS. This enables us to seamlessly share our data with these organizations.

In addition, the London program documents weekly spring-to-fall numbers of swifts using the same set of chimneys over multiple years. Nature London also collects data on swift nesting activity, potential predators, other at-risk aerial insectivores, etc. The London swift data set is a rich source of information for researchers.



Monitors waiting for swifts to arrive at Smith Fruit, Sep 17, 2022. (photo by David Wake)

4.0 Monitoring Spring Migration at 18 Targeted Chimneys (late April to June 14)

See **Table 2** for the results of scheduled “weekly” monitoring at 18 London chimneys in 2023.

Most years, multiple reports of Chimney Swifts in Middlesex County begin appearing on eBird the last week of April. In 2023, that week and the first few days of May were very cold and wet; daytime highs rarely surpassed 10 °C. The first county records were of one swift at Komoka pits on April 25, and three at the Strathroy lagoons on April 30. London’s first swift was reported on May 1 at Gibbons Park. All three locations are near water bodies, where emerging aquatic insects provide food. The return of swifts and insect hatches were both likely delayed by the poor weather.

Since 2019, Nature London has started monitoring the first week of May (formerly third week of May). In 2022 the number of chimneys monitored rose from 13 to 18. Due to COVID, no spring monitoring was done in 2020 or 2021.

Experience in past years shows that, early in the season, evening counts at roosts tend to be very low if temperatures are below ~10 °C. Some swifts may have deferred migration, and those already in London may have stayed inside chimneys all day or retired early. Regardless, few are entering chimneys when monitors are carrying out counts.

May 2 was the date set for the start of our 2023 swift monitoring program. When May 1 (high of 8 °C) and May 2 (high of 4 °C) were particularly cold and wet, it was decided to delay monitoring for one week. Swift reports on eBird picked up by May 7. On May 9, a beautiful day, swifts were observed at all 18 chimneys; 16 had swifts stay for the night, for a combined tally of 385, including 5 communal roosts. See **Figure 2**. At some locations, swifts appeared to be checking chimneys for nesting purposes. By May 16, 545 swifts were occupying 15 chimneys, including 6 roosts.

Counts of swifts using London roosts during spring migration tend to be highest during the last two weeks of May and the first week of June. In some years, however, there are deviations from this pattern. The primary peak may occur earlier (e.g., 2019) or later. Sometimes there is an early peak and a later peak. In 2019 and 2023, for 13 chimneys there were two peaks, whereas in 2022 there was just one peak. The second peak in 2023 was notably late. This may suggest that significant numbers of swifts were later than usual heading through London on their way north.

Table 2. Number of swifts spending the night in 18 chimneys during organized counts on 20 dates, May 9 to September 12, 2023.

Date	371 Tecumseh, South Collegiate																			266 Epworth Ave, Kings College																			183 Simcoe, Labatt Garage																			22 Maitland, Smith Fruit																			300 Wellington, Phoenix Bldg																			940 Waterloo, Old North PS																			350 Queens, First St Andrews, SE																			350 Queens, First St Andrews, NE																			350 Queens, First St Andrews, N																			1201 Western Rd, Andrews, S																			471 Nightingale Ave, Hunt																			1349 Western Rd, Huron C																			370 Huron, Kingsway, North																			388 Dundas St																			423 Colborne St																			700 Richmond, ICORR																			Total																		
9-May	5	60	5	34	95	2	0	1	4	3	5	102	59	3	2	0 ¹	2 ¹	3	385																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
16-May	13	91	2	61	130	0 ²	1	1	5	4	5	104	120	0	3	0 ³	2 ³	3	545																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
24-May	6	54	2	143	73	0	1	1	3	2	4	124	167	3	2	1	2	3	591																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
28-May	4	83	2	138	96	2	2	6	2	1	4	93	64	2	2	2	2	4	509																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
1-Jun	5	77	4	100	52	2	3	0	4	5	7	71	54	3	2	2	2	1	394																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
5-Jun	2	60	3	137	66	2	2	5	7	8	10	74	45	4	4	2	2	0	433																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
12-Jun	0	61	1	248	93	2	2	2	0	2	4	44	101	2	2	0 ⁴	0 ⁴	1	565																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
20-Jun	2	61	2	112	64	2	1	0	3	5 ⁵	8	51	33	2	2	2	1	2	353																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
27-Jun	4 ⁷	65 ⁹	3 ⁷	185 ⁷	-	-	1 ⁷	2 ⁷	3 ⁷	3 ⁷	7	25 ⁸	42 ⁷	-	-	0 ⁶	2 ⁶	-	NA																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
4-Jul	9	85	2	143	18	2	2	2	2	3	7	12	41	2	1	2	2	2	337																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
11-Jul	6	81	2	219	4	2	1	1	2	3	9	76	57	2	2	1 ¹⁰	2 ¹⁰	3	473																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
18-Jul	13	86	5	210	4	4	0	1	3	3	9	87	69	3	4	3	2	1	507																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
25-Jul	10	75	10	211	5	4	1	1	2	3	12	84	93	0	2	0	1	0	514																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
1-Aug	16	69	21	90	2	9	0	0	121	0	9	133	128	5	6	0	3	2	614																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
8-Aug	59	52	101	30	0	7	0	0	110	3	25	95	193	4	3	4	2	1	689																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
15-Aug	52	7	235	7	0	0	0	0	37	1	0	49	115	2	4	0	1	0	510																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
22-Aug	3	1	374	1	0	27	0	0	0	0	15	53	141	1	5	0	4	1	626																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
29-Aug	0	0	343	2	0	9	0	0	0	0	2	12	55	0	3	0	0	0	426																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
5-Sep	0	0	184	13	-	7	-	-	0	0	0	57	14	0	3	0	0	0	278																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																
12-Sep	0	0	0	1	-	0	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																

Notes: 1 = Count done May 8. 2 = Count done May 17. 3 = Count done May 15. 4 = Count done June 13. 5 = Count done June 21. 6 = Count done June 25. 7 = Count done June 28. 8 = Count done June 29. 9 = Count done June 30. 10 = Count done July 9. Hyphen (-) indicates no count done. NA indicates too few counts carried out to warrant calculation of a total.

Three counts at the 13 originally monitored chimneys during the first half of May gave these results: 2019: 284 to 735 swifts; 2022: 209 to 480. In 2023, the two early May counts (18 chimneys) tallied 385 and 545; none of the five extra chimneys in the set of 18 held more than 3 swifts each.

As mentioned in Section 3.0, monitoring dates in late May and early June were adjusted to match those specified by the national roost monitoring program of the Canadian Wildlife Service (administered by Ontario SwiftWatch).

During Nature London's seven monitoring sessions in the period of spring migration (May 9, 16, 24 and 28, June 1, 5 and 12), the same five roosts were occupied each night (King's, Smith Fruit, Phoenix, Hunt's and Huron). The combined tally for the 18 chimneys was highest on May 24 (591), the first of the national count dates. On June 12, Smith Fruit hosted the largest number of swifts in one roost on a single night (248); this chimney also held the largest roost on three additional evenings. All 18 chimneys held swifts on at least four of the seven dates.

Three chimneys, South, Labatt's and First-St. Andrew's-North, which sometimes host significant spring roosts, did not do so in 2023. In 2019, seven chimneys hosted roosts and in 2022 five did. In 2023, the total number of swifts overnighting in each of the five roosts during seven nights of spring monitoring was Smith Fruit 861, Phoenix 669, Hunt's 612, Huron 610, and King's 426. None of the remaining 13 chimneys held more than 13 swifts on a single night.

In sharp contrast, in 2022, Phoenix was by far the largest roost every night during spring migration (total of 1693 swifts over eight nights). In 2022, four other chimneys held moderate-sized roosts throughout most of the spring migration period, and two chimneys held significant roosts one night each.

It is of interest to compare the combined tallies during spring migration count nights for the years 2019, 2022 and 2023. Because data from only 13 chimneys are available for 2019, data from the same 13 chimneys are used for 2022 and 2023. See **Figure 2**. With the exception of one night in 2022, data from the extra five chimneys monitored in the spring of 2022 and 2023 would have made a negligible contribution to the combined tallies those years.

The highest combined tally in 2023 was recorded later than in 2019 but earlier than in 2022. The 2023 peak tally was lower than in either of the other two years. In 2019 and 2022, numbers were dropping off sharply at the end of spring migration at about the same time as 2023 counts were noting a late pulse of swifts passing through London.

Numbers of swifts counted during spring migration may be influenced by many factors. Temperature and precipitation on count days are likely pertinent. May and early June weather may affect when swifts decide to travel and when they stay put. In 2023, numbers of biting insects (considered an indicator of the abundance of swift food) remained low and spottily distributed around London until June and sometimes into July.

Because swifts are known to switch among local roost chimneys from season to season and year to year, we can never be sure that significant numbers of swifts are not occupying unmonitored chimneys. We do not know how long individual swifts remain in town and to what extent they move around among chimneys. A wave of swifts that passes through the city between monitoring nights may not be detected. There is also the consideration of count accuracy, especially when large numbers of swifts are pouring into a chimney at once.

Despite all the variables, we believe counts using the same protocol at the same 13 (18) chimneys each year provide an indication of when and how many swifts are migrating north through London.

Spring monitoring also provides information on when nesting swifts arrive and take up occupancy. In 2023, all but two chimneys that went on to host nesting activity held at least one swift on the first count night of May 9. Four of the five spring roosts continued to serve as roosts through the nesting season and into early August.

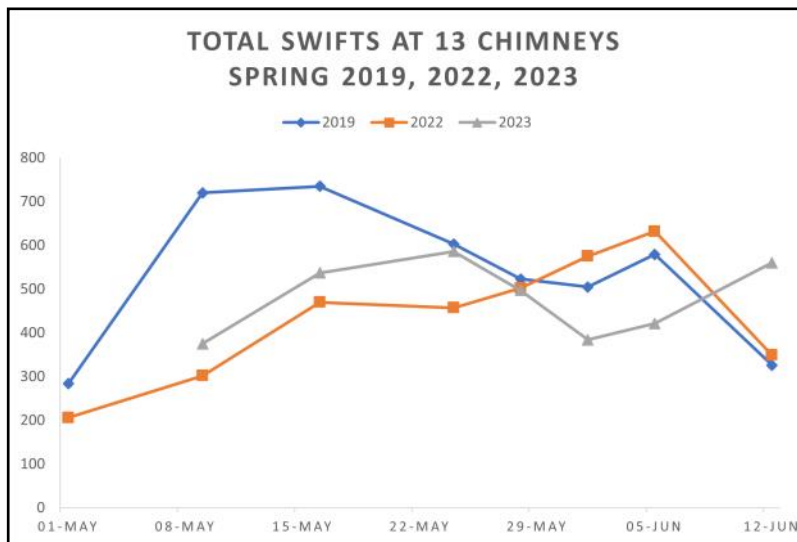


Figure 2. The combined nightly tally at 13 chimneys during spring migration in 2019, 2022 and 2023. (Due to COVID restrictions, no spring migration monitoring was carried out in 2020 and 2021.)



The chimney at Centennial Apts, though it has occasionally held large roosts in the past, is not monitored regularly. In 2023, it was checked twice (Jun 4=2 swifts, Jul 29=6 swifts). Might it have hosted a roost on dates when it was not checked?

5.0 Monitoring 18 Targeted Chimneys during the Nesting Season (June 15 to July 31)

Overnight communal roosts are sometimes present in a chimney where nesting activity is underway. These two aspects of chimney use are discussed separately below. For the purposes of this document, the core nesting season is somewhat arbitrarily defined as extending from June 15 to July 31. Nesting activity, however, may commence as early as early May and continue until the last swift youngsters have fledged, which may be in the latter part of August. In the discussion of nesting activity that follows, the entire May-to-August period of nesting activity is considered.

5.1 Communal Roosts of (Mostly) Non-breeders during the Nesting Season

After spring migration tapers off about mid-June, in the next few weeks combined tallies usually drop, as the last migrants head north and the last swifts wishing to nest locally move out of roosts to nest (one pair per chimney, plus sometimes one or two helpers). After the combined tally bottoms out in late June or early July, roost numbers start to increase again, as nest failures cause some swifts to abandon nest chimneys and join communal roosts. By late July or early August, recently fledged young and fall migrants further bolster numbers using roosts.

See **Table 2** (page 5) for six weekly counts and for combined tallies at 18 chimneys from mid-June to late July. Combined tallies for the 18 chimneys (including the subset of 13) during this period are fairly similar to those of 2022 but higher than numbers found in 2019 and 2021. **Figure 3** shows the final wave of 2023 migrants leaving town around mid-June, the lowest combined tally of the nesting season (328 on July 4, following a week of tumultuous weather that included some off-the-scale bad air quality readings), and the gradually increasing numbers as July progresses.

Four of the five chimneys that held roosts during spring migration (Kings, Smith Fruit, Hunt's and Huron) harboured roosts until late July. At the fifth spring roost (Phoenix), numbers were falling off by early July.

The core nesting season (mid-June to late July) falls between the end of spring migration and the start of fall migration. In 2023, during this period, weekly combined counts at monitored chimneys grew from about 350 to about 500. Since there is only one swift nest in a chimney at a time, the vast majority of swifts comprising the weekly totals are believed to be non-breeders. Nesting birds and helpers are thought to make up about 10% of swifts counted.

Questions arise as to who the bulk of the 350-to-500 swifts are and why so many swifts are not nesting. First, it should be pointed out that raising a family of swifts is an exceedingly energy-demanding nine-or-ten-week-long undertaking. Among other factors, it requires a sustained high level of parental fitness, favourable weather, and availability of sufficient quantities of nutritious food at key periods throughout the nesting cycle.

The 350 swifts initially present may have decided not to attempt a nest in 2023 or tried and had already given up. Some may have been one-year-olds (some swifts first nest at age two) or, due to poor overwintering and migration conditions, arrived with reduced fitness. Some may have arrived in robust health, then encountered adverse conditions that reduced their fitness. If there was insufficient time and quality food available to rebuild fitness, they may have decided to forego breeding in 2023. A small exodus from roosts in early July may have been non-breeding swifts moving out to become helpers at nests, just as young were hatching



Swifts coming in to roost at FSA-N, Aug 13, 2023. (photo by David Wake)

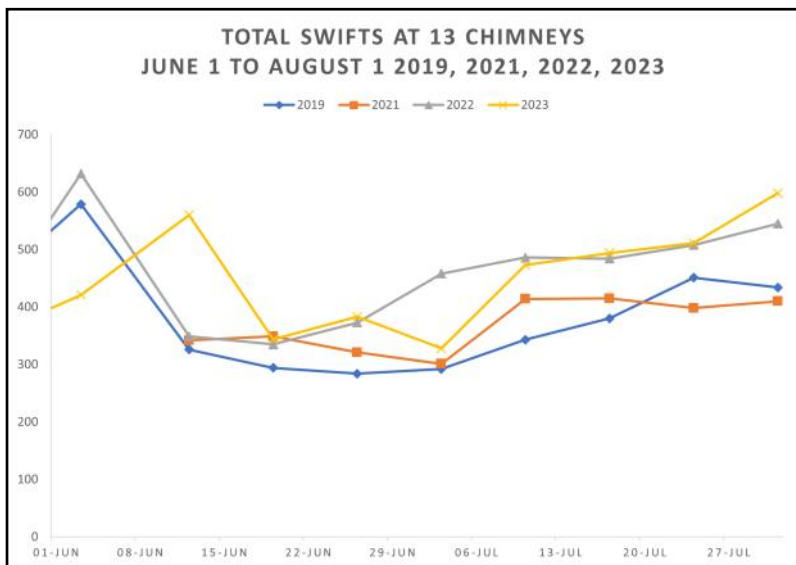


Figure 3. Combined nightly tallies for the 13 chimneys from June 1 to August 1, including the core summer nesting period (June 15 to July 31) in 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023.

Food supply has been proposed as a major factor in determining swift nesting activity and success. As the season progresses, insufficient food for parents plus growing young may lead to nest failure. Heavy rain may wash nests down chimneys. After nest loss, adults may remain in home chimneys for some weeks or quickly move to join communal roosts. During May and June of 2023, in many areas around London, mosquito numbers (an indicator of abundance of airborne insects) were spotty and increased only later.

Changing numbers at roosts during the nesting season may reflect movements by non-breeding swifts among monitored chimneys and possibly also among other roost chimneys that are not known to us.

A member of a breeding pair or a helper may sometimes overnight in a roost instead of in the chimney where the nest is located.

Many mysteries remain regarding the hundreds of non-breeding swifts that occupy London roost chimneys during the nesting season.

5.2 Nesting Activity at the 18 Targeted Chimneys (May to August)

The Nature London swift monitoring protocol involves intently watching a chimney for one hour each Tuesday night (but every four days during four evenings in late May and early June), beginning 30 minutes or more before sunset. The number of swifts inside the chimney for the night is recorded. This protocol is well suited to documenting numbers of swifts using overnight communal roosts from May to September. Most such birds are believed to be non-breeders but, even at a roost chimney, two or three of the birds may be associated with a nesting attempt.

The Nature London protocol asks that numbers and times of entries and exits (ins and outs) be recorded in sequence. A careful review of such information, especially the frequency of ins and outs and the amount of time between them, can provide insight into the stage of nesting activity inside the chimney. When a roost is present at the same time as an active nest, it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between entries by roosting swifts and entries by swifts engaged in nesting.

In such situations, it is often easier to pick out behaviour indicative of nesting activity during the 30 minutes before sunset, rather than later, when the roosting birds tend to be heading in for the night.

Actually, assessments of nesting activity at swift chimneys are best made during a daytime monitoring session of at least one hour (two hours is better). Nevertheless, some level of understanding of nesting activity can be obtained from the Nature London evening monitoring protocol. In 2023, occasional daytime visits were made to chimneys to supplement information from evening monitoring sessions.

On the first night of scheduled monitoring in 2023 (May 9), 16 of 18 chimneys held swifts. The 16, including five that hosted roosts, were likely occupied by swifts intending to nest in these chimneys or by swifts prospecting for a nest site. Since swifts arrive back in the city over a number of weeks, not all commence nesting at the same time. If the weather or food availability are poor or they need time to bulk up their fitness after an arduous trip, they may delay the initiation of nesting. In London, incubation is generally thought to begin around the end of May or the early part of June. Since parent swifts are very secretive during incubation, it can be difficult to detect their fast, silent, infrequent entries and exits.

After the earliest nests begin hatching in late June, during the next four weeks, swifts come and go from their chimneys with ever-increasing frequency as rapidly growing youngsters need more and more food. During this period, it should be easier to detect indicators of nesting. In actual fact, the rate of entries and exits can vary greatly and not necessarily be picked up during an evening monitoring session. This may relate to food availability. Swifts are opportunistic foragers. If they happen upon a high density of airborne insects they may be able to make very frequent food deliveries. On the other hand, if insects are sparsely distributed in the air column on a particular day, the number of food deliveries will be lower. Also, if food is proving to be insufficient to support the young, food deliveries may taper off as the nest fails.

All in all, it can be challenging to interpret what is happening inside a nest chimney, based only on the information provided during one hour of evening monitoring per week. Some general observations can, however, be made.

During May, June and July, at chimneys where nesting was believed to be underway, occasionally no swifts were recorded inside for the night, though swifts would be present again the following week. Especially for a couple of weeks around mid-July, the frequency of overnight absenteeism was much lower in 2023 than in 2022.

Even during the four weeks when young were being fed (late June to early August, depending on the individual chimney), indications of food deliveries during evening monitoring sessions were often inconsistent and at lower-than-expected frequencies. This was also often the case for the few daytime monitoring sessions carried out.

At the end of the season, the entire set of weekly reports for the 18 monitored chimneys was carefully scrutinized. The goal was to identify week-to-week cumulative trends as they related to nesting activity. For each chimney, an attempt was made to interpret nesting activity to produce a best guess as to the outcome of the nest at season's end. Results of this exercise are presented in **Table 3**.



Monitors seek to interpret what is happening inside a nest chimney by documenting patterns of entries and exits. These photos show what is actually going on far down inside. Top: Looking down at 5 swift eggs in a shallow twig-and-saliva nest glued to one wall. Middle: 1-to-3-day-old young are blind, naked and the size of jelly beans. Bottom: At 2 weeks, eyes are open, young have frosty faces and the nest is getting crowded. (all photos by John Emms, Kensal Park School, Jun 25, Jul 13 & 25, 2007)

Here is a synopsis. All 18 chimneys showed evidence of swifts likely getting set up for nesting, though in some cases the evidence was scant and quickly petered out. At some chimneys it may have been that one or two swifts were occupying the chimney over many weeks or months but not actually nesting.

At season's start and continuing into July, five communal roosts were active. Of these, King's, Phoenix, Hunt's and Huron showed brief, mostly early season, intermittent indications that a nest attempt might be underway, but this did not last long. Of roost chimneys, only Smith Fruit was reasonably likely to have fledged any young.

Table 3. Summary of possible nesting activity and outcomes at 18 monitored chimneys, May to August, 2023.

Chimney	Comments
South Collegiate	During May and June a few inconsistent indicators of possible nest prospecting or even possible nest building. Almost always a few swifts spent the night; some early entries but these were inconsistent. In early July small roost developed to add to confusion. No firm indications of any serious nesting attempt.
King's College, Wemple Building	Roost of 50 to 90 swifts from early May to mid-August. Possible indications of nesting activity briefly in early June. Very occasional early entries throughout core nesting season but no evidence of actual nesting.
Labatt's Garage/Warehouse	No spring roost. Pair present early May through July. Possibly feeding young late June to mid-July. Thereafter roost developed, making nest tending and/or fledging difficult to detect.
Smith Fruit	Roost of 30 to 250 active from early May to early August. Pair present from early May on; may have been feeding young from late June to late July, but difficult to distinguish visits associated with nesting as multiple roosting swifts often entered chimney quite early for the night. Possibly a successful nesting attempt.
Phoenix Building	Roost of 20 to 130 swifts present from early May to early July. Intermittent indications of nesting activity during May and June but none thereafter.
Old North School (formerly Ryerson)	Pair present from early May through July. Intermittent evidence of nest building and tending in late May and June, but no serious evidence the effort reached the stage of young being fed.
First-St. Andrew's-SE	Pair in residence by mid-May. Nest-building behaviour observed in early June. In late June swifts making daytime visits to chimney. Activity inconsistent through July but on July 24 daytime feeding visits of non-brooded young observed. On July 25, single bird entered for the night. Thereafter no swifts detected during daytime or evening monitoring. Nest outcome unclear; slight possibility young fledged and departed.
First-St. Andrew's-NE	At least one swift occupying chimney by early May. By late May and through June pair seemed to be present. Nest tending continued through July. Likely feeding visits were observed on July 18, 20, 24 (daytime) and 25. Thereafter no swifts seen during daytime or evening visits. Nest may have failed; slight possibility young fledged and departed.
First-St. Andrew's-N	Pair present by mid-May. During June small numbers of swifts intermittently spent nights in chimney. During July intermittent feeding and daytime activity observed up to July 24. Only activity on July 25 was 2 swifts entering late for the night. On next visit (August 1) a large roost occupied the chimney. Outcome of nest unclear.
First-St. Andrew's-S	Pair in residence by early May. Daytime use of chimney observed in early June, nest-building in late June. Most July records of birds entering for the night. July 24 daytime seemed to be feeding young. Three entered late for night on July 25; then no further activity noted. Outcome of nesting attempt unclear.
Elborn College	Swifts in residence by early May; during May, June and July, 4 to 12 swifts spent night in chimney, often entering and exiting multiple times. Still was possible to detect nest building behaviour by pair and regular feeding visits during July. August 3 at least 6 paired in/out observed in 50 minutes more than 1 hr before sunset. On August 8, small roost of 25 present and no exits seen. Nest likely fledged successfully.
Hunt's warehouse	Due to six-storey height of building and short height of chimney, very difficult to detect swifts approaching or leaving from far side of chimney. From early May to early September a roost (usually 25 to 130 swifts) was present each night. Very occasionally a few swifts entered earlier than usual but scant evidence to suggest a nesting attempt in this chimney this year.
Huron College	Roost of 30 to 300 swifts each night from early May to late August. May to July occasional early entries by 1 to 3 swifts or by larger groups, but no real evidence of any nesting attempt.
Kingsway-N	By early May a few swifts overnighting, possibly a pair by early June. May through July usually 2 or 3 birds inside each night. Scant, intermittent evidence of nest-tending, though 3 paired in/out on July 25 may have been food deliveries. Extra birds on August 1 may have been fledged young. Possibility of at least some success.
Kingsway-S	Pair present through May, probably incubating in June. Adults occupying chimney during July but food deliveries seen only on 2 of 4 observation nights (July 4 and 25). Possible that 6 swifts going in and out on August 1 may have been recent fledglings.
388 Dundas St	Pair usually in chimney overnight from late May to mid-July, but no indication that any nesting activity was underway.
423 Colborne St	Pair in residence by early May, likely incubating during June. Good evidence of feeding visits during July into August. Last use of chimney was by 4 birds on August 22, quite possibly including fledged young.
ICORR	Pair present through May, possibly incubating in June. Continued to spend nights in chimney during July, but no sign of feeding activity.

Two chimneys that sometimes hold spring roosts, South Collegiate and Labatt's, did not do so in 2023. South showed some brief hints of possible nesting, but these did not persist. Labatt's hosted a nest in which young were being fed for at least a couple of weeks. It is unclear if feeding might have persisted long enough for any young to fledge.

The chimney at Old North held a pair of swifts that may have constructed a nest but the effort did not seem to last long enough for hatching to have become evident.

First-St. Andrew's-SE and -NE chimneys held active nests during July, with evidence of young being fed in the daytime on July 24. After July 25, no activity was detected at either chimney. Such an abrupt end to nesting activity is surprising and curious in that it occurred at essentially the same time at both chimneys. It is possible young fledged and both families vacated their chimneys before the next monitoring night on August 1.

First-St. Andrew's-N had intermittent nesting indicators throughout the season, with daytime activity observed on July 24 and two swifts entering for the night on July 25. By the next visit, August 1, a large roost had developed and no behaviour was observed to indicate nesting birds might still be present.

First-St. Andrew's-S had intermittent activity through the season; daytime entries were observed on July 24 and three birds entered for the night on July 25. On August 1, 2 and 4, no swifts entered for the night.

It seems odd that the four FSA chimneys ended nesting activity so abruptly and so close in time to each other. In some years, Merlin start hanging around FSA about this time of year, but no such reports were received in 2023. It is possible that some young fledged from one of more of the FSA chimneys, and quickly moved to join the big roost at FSA-N that was in place by August 1. If so, the expected presence of lingering swifts around the other three chimneys might have been largely replaced by swifts milling around the communal roost, where such birds were indistinguishable.

Elborn College, with its nightly assemblage of 8 to 12 swifts from mid-June to late July, is always hard to interpret. Yet feeding visits were observed during the core nesting season, culminating in a very high rate of deliveries on August 3. On the next visit, five days later, a small roost of 25 swifts was in place, making it impossible to detect any nesting activity that might be ongoing. It appears likely that young fledged from this nest.

At Kingsway-N, there seemed to be a pair present from May through July, but little evidence of an active nest. Then, on July 25, food deliveries were seen, and extra birds were present on August 1, suggesting some possibility of fledging. At Kingsway-S, evidence was greater for nesting activity, including food deliveries seen on August 1. There is a slight possibility a sudden increase to six swifts in for the night on August 1 might have been recent fledglings.

Of all the 18 monitored chimneys, 388 Dundas was the one that had the least use by swifts. Of 15 monitoring dates from May 9 to August 8, this chimney held swifts on only nine nights. Though a pair seemed to be spending nights in the chimney intermittently, there was no evidence of nest building.

At 423 Colborne, a pair was in residence throughout the season, with good evidence of feeding during July and into August. An increase to four swifts on August 22 may have been recently fledged young.

At ICORR a pair was present and may even have been incubating for a spell. Though the birds continued to overnight in the chimney there was no evidence of food deliveries.

To summarize, the chimneys having the highest likelihood of fledged young were Elborn, 423 Colborne and Smith Fruit. There is some likelihood that some of the FSA chimneys, Labatt's or Kingsway-N or -S might have fledged some young. It is believed the following eight chimneys did not produce any young in 2023: South, King's, Phoenix, Old North, Hunt's, Huron, 388 Dundas and ICORR.

With very few exceptions, nesting activity at most chimneys seemed to have ceased to be evident by the end of July or the first few days of August. In other recent years, more nest sites continued to be active later into August.

Similar to the situation in 2022, detecting nesting activity was generally found to be challenging in 2023. The once-a-week, one-hour monitoring session simply did not provide enough time to obtain a good picture of what was happening with individual pairs at nest chimneys.

Where present, communal roosts added to the difficulties of detecting and interpreting behaviour of any resident nesting birds. Sporadic inclement weather included haze from air pollution due to northern wildfires, which caused the cancellation of monitoring the last week of June. Occasional heavy rain in the early evening also seemed to sometimes influence swift behaviour. Events such as these created gaps in data at crucial times or reduced the quality and quantity of data obtained. Even under the best conditions, a few chimneys, including ICORR, Hunt's and Huron, are problematic for data collection because a monitor must observe from far away or not facing in the optimal direction for best lighting.

Fewer daytime monitoring visits were made in 2023 than in 2022. When done at key times in the nesting cycle, these provide important insights into nesting activity that cannot be learned from evening monitoring alone.

Our current protocol works well for detecting nesting activity, but is inadequate for drawing firm conclusions regarding success or failure of individual nests. In 2023 as many as ten monitored chimneys may have fledged some young. Much can go wrong, however, in the four weeks between hatching and fledging, especially as fledging date nears. It is necessary to actually see newly flying young to be sure they made it safely out of the nest chimney.



Its throat pressed against the inner chimney wall and looking up, a swift incubates eggs on its twig-and-saliva nest. Kensal Park School, Jun 29, 2007 (photo by John Emms)

6.0 Monitoring for Nesting or Roosting Activity at Additional Chimneys

During 2023, 97 visits were made to monitor known swift chimneys other than the 18 that Nature London targets for frequent monitoring. In total, 80 other chimneys were monitored, 75 in London and 5 out of town. Of the 80 chimneys, 72 received one visit each, seven received two visits and one received 11 visits. All data were later shared with the provincial Chimney Swift database managed by Ontario SwiftWatch and with researchers at Western.

6.1 Chimneys in London

Since 2003, Nature London has been maintaining a list of London chimneys used by swifts. There are undoubtedly many more that have yet to come to our attention. The cumulative Nature London list consists of about 185 chimneys, although only about 120 are still extant. Each year, including 2023, a few more known swift chimneys are lost to demolition or capping. It has been about 15 years since Nature London made any serious effort to find more chimneys used by swifts. Yet, most years, without trying, we stumble on a few more occupied chimneys that are new to us. In the bigger picture of swift conservation, this illustrates the importance of checking chimneys that appear suitable for swift use before capping, demolition, or other alterations take place, even if there is no official record of swift occupancy.

The primary focus of the Nature London monitoring program is weekly monitoring at 18 chimneys; these have been intensively tracked for several years or more. A minor focus is to carry out occasional monitoring at the remaining 100 or so chimneys on the master list. Over many years, the goal has been to check each of these at least once every few years, though the effort was somewhat disrupted by COVID. Recently there has been an added impetus for learning more about current swift use of chimneys other than the 18. The recovery strategy for the Chimney Swift was released in August of 2023 by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). This document includes the locations of 54 London chimneys designated as critical habitat, based on swift occupancy in 2017 or earlier.

In 2023, in addition to the 18 chimneys, the Nature London program carried out monitoring at 75 other known swift chimneys in London. Most of this monitoring took place between mid-June and late July, to coincide with the core nesting period. In past years, visits to such extra sites were made in the evening and followed the usual Nature London monitoring protocol. In 2023, fewer than half were monitored at the regular evening monitoring time (from 30 minutes before sunset to 30 minutes after sunset). The remaining chimneys were monitored in the daytime, most often during the afternoon or early evening, but sometimes in the morning. Most sessions lasted an hour or more, but sometimes a scarcity of time or other constraints dictated a shorter period.

The use of daytime monitoring was implemented for several reasons. First and foremost, it allowed many more chimneys to be checked than evening monitoring alone could accommodate. Also important were safety concerns. Some addresses on Nature London's list of known swift chimneys are in areas where it is unsafe to spend an hour at dusk. At some of these locations, daytime monitoring was deemed to be a lower-risk alternative. Sometimes, if swifts were found to be actively using a chimney soon after the start of a daytime session, the visit might be cut short to further reduce risk. Some locations targeted for daytime monitoring were briefly visited several times to assess the immediate situation before it was determined to be safe enough to stay for a monitoring session. At some chimneys, it was not considered safe to carry out even daytime monitoring. Two people were almost always present during daytime monitoring. One focussed on the chimney while the other stayed alert for possible safety issues.

While daytime monitoring sessions (mostly of one-hour duration) greatly expanded the number of extra chimneys that could be visited, when used alone, this approach may have some drawbacks regarding the quality of the data produced. Swifts may make less frequent visits to chimneys during the hottest and most humid parts of the day (usually from late-morning to mid- or late afternoon). If food is scarce, or at certain stages of the nesting cycle, a couple of hours may lapse between daytime entries by nesting swifts to their home chimney. Daytime visits also do not detect presence of overnight roosts, nor use by swifts whose nest has failed but who continue to spend nights in the chimney. Due to factors of this sort, some chimneys at which no activity was detected during daytime monitoring sessions may have actually harboured swifts.

Some chimneys were checked more than once. Of the 75 extra London chimneys visited, 42 were found to be active (i.e., have swifts), including two new-to-us chimneys that were serendipitously discovered; 33 chimneys were inactive. During 51 visits made before mid-July (mostly later than mid-June), 30 chimneys were being used by swifts and 21 were not. During the last half of July, 24 chimneys were visited (mostly in the daytime); 13 were being used by swifts and 11 were not.

This may suggest that the chances of detecting an occupied chimney in the daytime may decline slightly in the latter half of July. A possible reason for finding a lower percentage of active swift chimneys in late July is the increasing likelihood of chimneys being abandoned as the season progresses. This may occur after nest failure or after the fledging of young. It is also possible that chimneys found to be unoccupied, whether checked in June or in July, were not occupied at all by swifts in 2023. If such chimneys continue to be open-topped and suitable for swifts, they might be reoccupied in another year.



Dante Lenardon Hall at King's College showed indications of nesting activity when visited on Jul 7, 2023. Swifts enter the chimney via the right-most flue. (photo by Winifred Wake)

In 2023, only one London chimney was checked on spec; it was visited twice and, though swifts were around (sometimes dipping at it), it was inactive both times.

Many locations on the master Nature London list of known swift chimneys were not checked in 2023. Time availability for monitoring visits was a significant limiting factor. In addition, chimneys not visited tended to be those that presented challenges for monitoring. Considerations included safety issues, lack of access due to trespassing or privacy concerns, and adjacent developments and/or maturing foliage blocking the view of a chimney.

It is possible that time of day of monitoring sessions influences likelihood of detecting swift activity. **Table 4** shows results for 80 known swift chimneys, according to time of day of monitoring visits: 75 chimneys were in London and 5 were out of town.

Though some chimneys were visited more than once, only one visit is reported (being the one most likely to detect nesting activity). When visited, swifts were observed entering and/or exiting 59% of the 80 chimneys. Given the relatively small sample size and many variables not taken into account, it seems wise not to conclude that any particular time of day is better than another for detecting swift occupancy. Several chimneys that had reliably hosted swifts in past years were visited on very hot afternoons, during which no swift activity was detected. In other cases, swifts were detected using chimneys on very hot afternoons.

Especially under hot and humid conditions, the standard one-hour daytime protocol may not have been as effective at detecting occupancy as a cooler time of day would be. In future, for optimal daytime monitoring results, more consideration may be desirable re duration and weather conditions to increase likelihood of finding occupied chimneys.

6.2. Out-of-town Chimneys

The Nature London swift monitoring program has traditionally focussed its efforts exclusively on chimneys located within the city. In the past year or two, that has changed slightly to address two specific situations.

Finding release sites for hand-reared Chimney Swifts. Over the years London has become a go-to place for some wildlife rehabilitators (often located out of town) who specialize in optimizing the post-release success of hand-reared swifts. The Nature London fall monitoring program has prided itself on being able to identify suitable late-season release sites when none could be found elsewhere in the province.

In recent years, however, as swift season wanes, it has gradually become more difficult to find appropriate sites within London. Swifts seem to be vacating local roosts earlier as the years go by. Swift rehabbers follow a protocol that requires release sites to be near a chimney that harboured a roost of at least 75 swifts the night before. The location must also be safe for swifts, away from hazards that might cause problems for young swifts still developing their flight skills.

In the fall of 2022, we learned of a large roost chimney in Mount Brydges, 20 minutes west of London. This was an ideal release site. After monitoring the chimney in September of 2022, in 2023 we visited it 11 times from May 23 to September 2. From 103 birds on May 27, numbers fell to 23 on July 28, then rose to 347 on August 26. Knowledge of good late-August numbers at the Mount Brydges roost provided a back-up plan for release events. This could be implemented in case no suitable London sites still held good numbers of roosting swifts by the time a site was needed for a late-summer release. As it turned out, Mount Brydges was needed as a release site in 2023 (see page 33).

In 2023, efforts were made to locate a roost chimney in Strathroy, also as an alternative release site. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful in locating a roost in Strathroy.

Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project. From 2021 to 2025, volunteers with the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas are scouring the province trying to document breeding evidence for as many species of birds as possible, within defined 10 km-by-10-km squares. Following the first two seasons of atlas field work, it was noticed there was a general paucity of confirmations of Chimney Swift nesting within our region of southwestern Ontario.

Volunteers with the Nature London swift program had already confirmed swift nesting in the four London squares in 2021 and in Ingersoll and Brucefield in 2022 (plus swift presence in Zurich the same year). In 2023, it was decided to attempt to locate swift nesting activity in additional small towns elsewhere in the region.

In total, five active out-of-town nest chimneys were identified: Petrolia (1), Ailsa Craig (1), Mount Brydges (1), and Strathroy (2). Parkhill was also visited; though swift presence was detected, no nesting sites were located. Data have been forwarded to the Breeding Bird Atlas.

Table 4. Detection of swift activity at 80 chimneys monitored at different times of the day, June and July, 2023.

Time of Day of Monitoring at 80 Additional Chimneys in 2023					
Number	Morning (< 12 noon)	Afternoon (noon to 6 pm)	Early Evening (>6 pm, >1 hr before sunset)	Evening (1 hr, start 30 mins before sunset)	Total
Active Chimneys	4	9	19	15	47
Inactive Chimneys	1	7	9	16	33
Total	5	16	28	31	80



FSA-N, Aug 13, 2023.
(photo by David Wake)

7.0 Monitoring Fall Migration (August 1 to September)

As indicated earlier, fall migration is “officially” considered to begin the first of August and continue until the last swifts leave for the season. Similar to other years, however, in 2023 swifts began gathering in pre-migratory roosting flocks during July. The summer nesting season was waning in late July, with a number of nest chimneys rather abruptly winding up operations then, or within the first few days of August. Very few nests remained active as late as August 10. Counts are contained in **Table 2** on page 5. On many nights during the fall migration period, especially at chimneys that had held only a nest in 2023, numbers of swifts did not warrant status as a communal roost. Nevertheless, to simplify discussion, the term roost is applied to all occupied chimneys, whether harbouring large or small numbers.

From a low of 337 swifts in 18 chimneys on July 4, the combined tally climbed steadily through the month to reach 514 on July 25. For much of July, most of the roosting activity was concentrated at four chimneys: King’s, Smith Fruit, Hunt’s and Huron. (With the addition of Phoenix, these were the same chimneys that had held roosts during spring migration and the early part of the nesting season.) Initially, most swifts occupying these roosts in July were probably non-breeders. As the month progressed, numbers gradually grew. The extra birds likely represented failed breeders, successful breeders and their offspring, and swifts arriving from other chimneys around the city as well as from out of town. As July rolled over into August, roosts of varying sizes were developing in several additional chimneys, mainly South, Labatt’s, and FSA-N.

On August 1, the combined tally jumped by 100 birds, from 514 on July 25 to 614 a week later. Perhaps it was no accident that this period coincided with the unusually early, rapid and relatively simultaneous abandoning of a number of London nest chimneys. Migration was underway in earnest.

On August 8, the count rose again, to 689. It was assumed the combined tally would continue to grow over the next number of weeks as more migrants arrived in the city (in truth, there is no way to know where the birds counted each night spent the previous night). As it has done in past years, the combined tally was expected to peak sometime between mid-to-late August and early to mid-September.

Instead, to our surprise, the tally of 689 on August 8, *was* the peak. This number dropped sharply to 510 on the August 15 count, then rallied somewhat to reach 626 on August 22. On August 29, the count fell to 426, then to 278 on September 5, followed by a final plummet to a single swift on September 12. In all the years we have been monitoring fall migration in London, such an early departure of swifts is unprecedented.

In hindsight, the pattern of chimney use on August 15 may have offered an early hint of what was to come. That evening’s count showed significant drops at all roosts except Labatt’s, where numbers more than doubled. In subsequent weeks, swifts continued their trend of amalgamating at Labatt’s while, at other chimneys, numbers dwindled at varying rates.

In past years, swifts have increasingly congregated at a single chimney as fall migration wanes. Other years, however, consolidation of numbers at one chimney has generally not become evident until somewhat later in the season.

Figure 4 shows weekly changes in numbers of swifts occupying monitored chimneys during fall migration. For our purposes, the data plotted are considered to be a reasonable representation of the pattern of fall migration in London during the six years from 2018 to 2023. Data for only 13 chimneys are included in the graph because data for the extra five chimneys monitored in 2022 and 2023 were not available in earlier years. * (page 14)

Referring to **Figure 4**, in comparison to other years, in 2023, at the beginning of the “official” fall migration period (August 1), the combined tally of London roost counts was the highest of any year. This followed above-average numbers of swifts at roosts during much of July (see **Figure 3**, page 7). In 2023, the peak combined tally for 13 chimneys during fall migration was the lowest among the six years and by far the earliest. In 2023, roosts also declined and emptied earlier than in any other year.

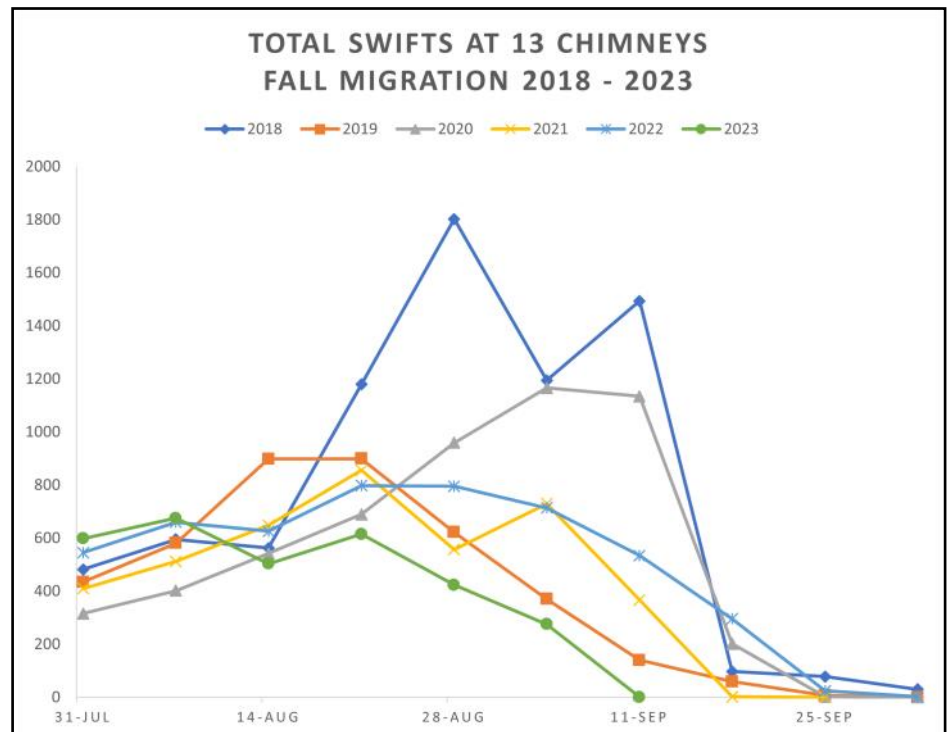


Figure 4. Combined weekly tallies for 13 chimneys from the end of July to the end of fall migration for the six years 2018 to 2023.

Table 2 (page 5) reveals details of the pattern by which individual chimneys hosted swifts during the period of fall migration. Here is a brief synopsis for the chimneys that held more than a handful of swifts at some time during the fall migration season.

South Collegiate did not host a roost during spring or summer, but held a small roost from late July to mid-August. King's held a roost from spring through summer, which petered out in early August. Labatt's was the only chimney that held no roost during the spring and summer, then developed one in early August; Labatt's maintained high numbers until emptying suddenly between September 5 and 12. Smith Fruit hosted a significant roost through spring and summer, largely emptying in early to mid-August. Old North was home to a small roost on a single night in late August. FSA-N held a roost for a few weeks in early August. Elborn harboured a small roost for a few weeks at the end of July and early August. Hunt's and Huron both held good-sized roosts from spring right through to early September. After mid-August, up to the first week of September, just three chimneys held good-sized roosts: Labatt's, Hunt's and Huron. Labatt's was the most significant, hosting the largest count of the fall migration period – 374 on August 22 – and maintaining a high count until migration petered out.

With just one swift counted during the monitoring of the 13 (18) chimneys on September 12, it was decided to discontinue monitoring for the season. In doing so, it was recognized there is always the possibility that numbers of swifts were occupying roosts elsewhere in the city and were not being counted by our organized program. Although the program has been tracking numbers at the same 18 chimneys for several years, it has made little effort in recent years to identify any new, or rarely used, roost chimneys that might have been hosting additional roosts in the fall of 2023.

Table 5 presents 2023 results for fall migration in the context of recent years. It can be seen that numbers peaked and roosts emptied much earlier in 2023 than in the other six years depicted. Though not shown here, an examination of data collected from 2003 to 2011 shows that all dates of last occupancy of a roost occurred in October. Not until 2012 did a last date of occupancy first occur in September.

Neither in 2023 nor in previous years has there been any indication of a trend towards earlier spring arrival.

To check on how widespread the apparently early departure of swifts in 2023 might be, we asked monitors to share all observations of swifts in London and area in the days and weeks following September 12. Just one report came in. About half an hour before sunset on September 12, two swifts were seen together flying above the green at Wortley Village. This was the same evening that a single swift was reported in the Smith Fruit chimney about 1.8 km to the east.

A search of eBird records for London and Middlesex County revealed no 2023 reports of swifts in the city or county later than September 9 (4 at Westminster Ponds and 1 at Fanshawe).

The lack of later observations of swifts in the city (e.g., near customary roost sites) or at traditional fall foraging sites in the city or county (e.g., ponds, lagoons, river corridors and other wetlands) supports the information collected by our roost monitoring program. (London roost counts are very rarely reported on eBird.) In 2022, eBird reports of swifts from in and near London continued until September 18, 9 days later than in 2023. The last swift observed at a London roost in 2022 was on October 5.

eBird searches elsewhere in southwestern Ontario in the fall of 2023 showed a smattering of swift records in late September and well into October. These were mostly small numbers seen at locations near Windsor or close to the Lake Erie shoreline, especially the western section. Of note were 91 swifts tallied during 8 hours by the Holiday Beach Migration Observatory on October 7. The last Ontario report of the season was 1 swift on October 19 at Holiday Beach. In 2022, the last swift reported in the Windsor – Lake Erie shoreline corridor was on October 24, 5 days later than in 2023.



A moulting swift with missing primary feathers, Mount Brydges, Sep 2, 2023. (photo by David Wake)

Table 5. Peak dates and numbers at occupied roosts and last date occupied during fall migration, London, Ontario, 2017 to 2023.

Year	Date, peak numbers	Chimneys counted	Combined total	Last date occupied
2017	Sep 6	5	697	Oct 10
2018	Aug 29	13	1802	Oct 9
2019	Aug 14&21	13	~900	Oct 2
2020	Sep 1	13	1166	Sep 27
2021	~Sep 7	18	1055	Sep 28
2022	Aug 30	18	905	Oct 5
2023	Aug 8	18	689	Sep 12

* In 2022 and 2023, only one of the extra five chimneys monitored these years held a roost during fall migration. This was at 388 Dundas in 2022, when a roost was present from late August to mid-September (peaking at 202). In 2021, three of the five chimneys hosted significant fall roosts, though data for these sites were not systematically collected that year. Had data for these roosts been included, numbers on the graph for 2021 and 2022 would have been much higher. This raises the question of just exactly what the numbers on the graph in **Figure 4** are telling us. We can say they depict changing yearly numbers and patterns at the same 13 chimneys, most of which have a history of being used as a roost in some years during fall migration. Taken as a group, all these chimneys together may be considered as a representative sample of London chimneys during fall migration. Unfortunately, swifts do not always use the same chimneys as fall roosts every year. Other London chimneys not known to us might also have been used as fall roosts in 2023 or in other years.

Accuracy of counts/estimates can be influenced by factors such as weather, lighting, flock size, counting techniques of individual monitors, and number of swifts entering a chimney in a compressed time period. Variability is assumed to be fairly consistent over time.

Within the context of other available data sources and of limitations on the precision of data collection, the following conclusions have been drawn. In the fall of 2023, monitoring at the 18 targeted chimneys provided a representative picture of what was actually happening regarding numbers of swifts migrating through London. Swifts indeed appear to have departed London and Middlesex much earlier than in other years.



The question: Did swifts in other Canadian jurisdictions besides London migrate south earlier in 2023?

I was curious about whether swifts in other parts of Canada were also heading south unusually early in 2023. To try to find out, I contacted swift colleagues in Manitoba, Quebec and the Maritimes and posed the question to them. It turned out that none of these jurisdictions does regular fall roost monitoring in the way Nature London does, so they don't have data that can readily be compared to ours. Also, these locales are farther north than London, and their swifts would be expected to head south earlier. Still, there were learnings to be had.

Everyone was generous in sharing their insights. Though the picture is not entirely clear, evidence of various sorts seems to suggest that some swifts in some areas headed south earlier in 2023 than in other years. As time permits, some respondents hope to look a little more deeply into their data sets in regard to timing of fall swift migration in their provinces. Some suggested that, in future, they might encourage volunteers to do more monitoring of fall roosts.

Here is a quick summary of some of the comments and observations received from other parts of Canada, especially as related to end-of-season swift departures.

Maritimes SwiftWatch (Birds Canada), Sackville, NB. Between wildfires and seemingly endless rain, 2023 was a difficult season for swifts and monitoring. Though the emphasis in NB and NS is on monitoring spring migration and nesting activity, a few volunteers monitor later in the season. Here are their latest records for 2023.

- A brick artificial roost tower in NS had 45 swifts when last surveyed on Aug 7 (a few hundred in late July).
- A roost chimney in NS that occasionally gets over 1000 swifts had 185 on Aug 10 but was down to 1 on Aug 17.
- In a nest chimney in NB, the nestlings fledged on Aug 13, after which no swifts were heard or seen.

Thank you, Rielle Hoeg

Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Quebec City

- Quebec roost monitoring is mainly done in the spring; for roosts, usual fall departure date is Aug 7 to 12.
 - In 2023, for a Quebec City roost: spring peak of 253 (May 18); fall peak of 143 (Jul 29); last occupied Aug 7.
- Motus nanotag study of departure dates from nest and roost sites (4 sites, different regions, 140 swifts since 2018).
 - Swifts migrate south via the Lake Champlain corridor and along the Atlantic coastal plain, not through Ontario.
 - In 2023, it seems some nano-tagged birds migrated earlier than usual (~end of Jul, start of Aug).

Merci Camille Begin-Marchand et Sara Boukherroub, aussi Junior Tremblay et Greg Mitchell

Manitoba Chimney Swift Initiative (Nature Manitoba); Manitoba Natural Resources and Northern Development

- Last MB eBird date in 2022 was Sep 1; in 2023 was Aug 26.
- MB swifts rarely form communal roosts (none in 2023), so roost departure data sparse.
- 2023 weather likely affected food supply – heat, forest fire smoke, cold and rain at crucial time for feeding young.
- Nest-productivity study (15 years): in 2023, 2 of 5 chimneys fledged young (at usual time of late Jul / early Aug).
 - Then birds from all 5 sites left town immediately instead of lingering a week or so, as they do most years.
 - Over 15 years, appears to be trend towards earlier departure by swifts from both successful and failed nests; this is attributed to a reduction in late summer food supply.

Thank you Barb and Rob Stewart, and Tim Poole, also Marissa Berard

In summary, here are some general thoughts and musings. Compared to communal roosts, departure times from nest sites may be very different. In London, though complicated by movement of local swifts among roosts before leaving town, last roost site departures tend to be much later in the season than do nest site departures. It may be that, in some more northerly jurisdictions, swifts are less likely to gather in communal roosts before migrating. Motus data in Quebec and nest site data in Manitoba suggest earlier departures in 2023 (this year, London had very early final roost departures plus some early and abrupt departures from nest sites). Data from eBird seems to largely consist of casual observations of swifts and may not do well at representing end-of-season departures from nest or roost sites. There is much scope for follow-up to determine if there might be a long-term trend towards earlier fall departure dates for swifts in Canada as a whole. If this proves to be the case, the next step would be to confirm the cause(s).

Nature London's program is the only one in Canada to annually collect significant amounts of data on communal roosts during fall migration. Such data may have a role to play in future analysis of the possibility of changing trends in the timing of fall migration for Canadian swifts. See also **Figure 5** (page 16), **Figure 6** (page 17) and **Table 5** (page 14).

8.0 Comparing the Entire 2023 Combined Tally Monitoring Results with Previous Years

In the following discussion, refer to **Figure 5**. In mid-July of 2018, Nature London began weekly monitoring of swifts entering 13 chimneys for the night. This sample includes a number of chimneys traditionally used by swifts for communal roosting, though not every season or even every year. In the years after 2018, monitoring commenced in early May and continued until all swifts had departed in the fall. Due to COVID restrictions, monitoring did not start until

mid-July in 2020 and until mid-June in 2021. Starting in 2022, 18 chimneys were monitored (including three additional ones that had been identified as sometimes serving as roost sites). To facilitate comparisons, data from only the original 13 are included in **Figure 5**.

Figure 5 shows the general pattern of changing numbers of swifts occupying chimneys from spring to fall. From the arrival of the first swifts in early May, numbers increase to coincide with the peak of spring migration, then drop off in early to mid-June, as northward passage wanes or swifts disperse to nest in local chimneys.

Swifts overnighting in the 13 chimneys from mid-June to late July consist primarily of non-breeders, with numbers gradually increasing as failed nesters join the communal

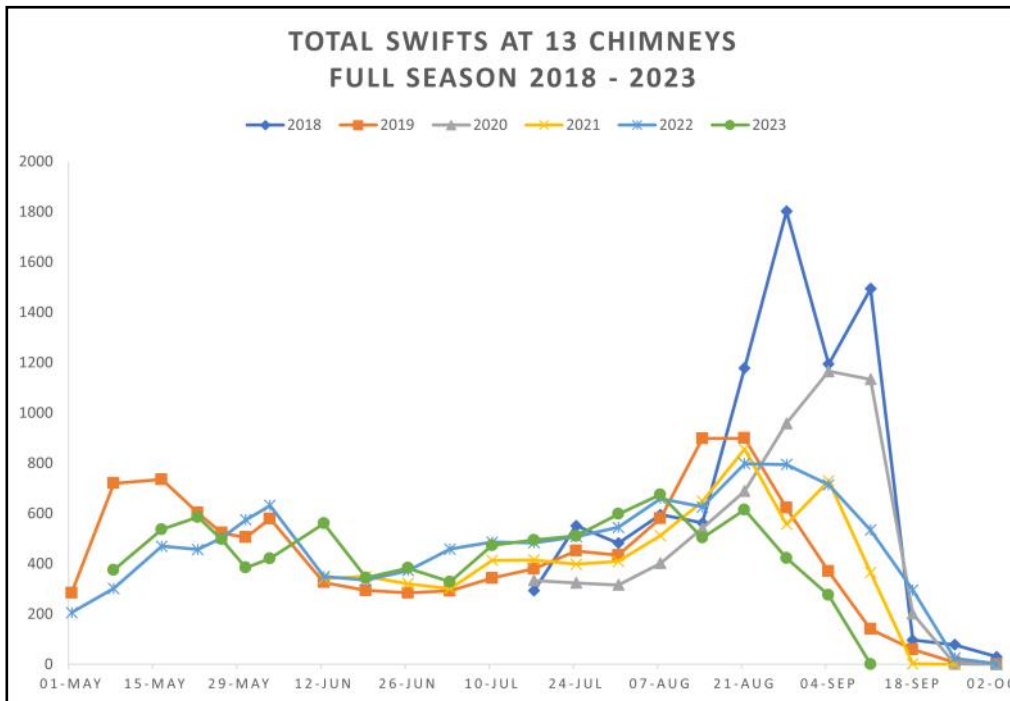


Figure 5. Combined nightly tallies for 13 London chimneys during weekly monitoring early May to early October (where available), 2018 to 2023.

roosts. From early August and into September, roost numbers swell, reflecting the arrival of local birds and the influx into the city of southward-bound swifts. Numbers wane as migration tapers off. Typically, roost numbers are larger in the fall than in the spring, representing the addition of recently fledged young to the population.

There are usually fewer roosts occupied in spring migration than during fall migration. In the spring of 2023, there were five active roosts; in the fall there were eight though, during the fall, all eight were active at the same time only during a relatively short time period in early August.

Similar to 2022, Phoenix served as a roost in May and June 2023. In 2023, Phoenix emptied out in early July, a month earlier than in 2022. Also similar to 2022, Labatt's was empty from May through July, then became the most significant roost in the city in August. It emptied in early September 2023, almost a month earlier than in 2022.

A close look at **Figure 5** reveals differences in the timing of the spring and fall peaks among different years. Some years the bulk of swifts pass through London earlier than in other years. Variation in both the size and timing of peak numbers tends to be greater during fall migration.

Compared to recent years, numbers of swifts in 2023 seemed to be heading north in slightly lower numbers and slightly later (though it is impossible to know how long individual swifts spend in local roosts). Weather may be a significant factor in influencing when swifts arrive, how long they stay in London and when they head north.

A look at 2023 data from mid-June to late July (the core breeding period) shows numbers to be slightly higher than in previous years during this period, suggesting there were more non-breeding swifts present in London in 2023. The August and September data for 2023 show an earlier and lower peak and a quicker departure than in any other year.

It has been suggested that, in years when swifts have poor nesting success, fall migration tends to peak earlier and at lower numbers than in years when nesting success has been good, in which case numbers peak later and at higher levels.

Compared to other years, the 2023 line on the graph is somewhat flattened for the 13 chimneys. The fall peak of 675 tallied only 95 more swifts than the spring peak of 580. The spring peak of 580 was only about 160 swifts more than the average number of 421 swifts occupying monitored chimneys between mid-June and the end of July (assuming a count of 383 for June 27). In summary: the spring peak contained relatively low numbers and its second wave was unusually late. The summering cohort of mostly non-breeders consisted of relatively high numbers, especially in the latter half of July. The fall peak was recorded very early, at an unusually low number. Thereafter numbers fell off rapidly and all chimneys were empty about a month later. This might suggest fewer swifts came north in the spring of 2023, more of them chose not to breed, and those that did breed had relatively poor success and headed south early.

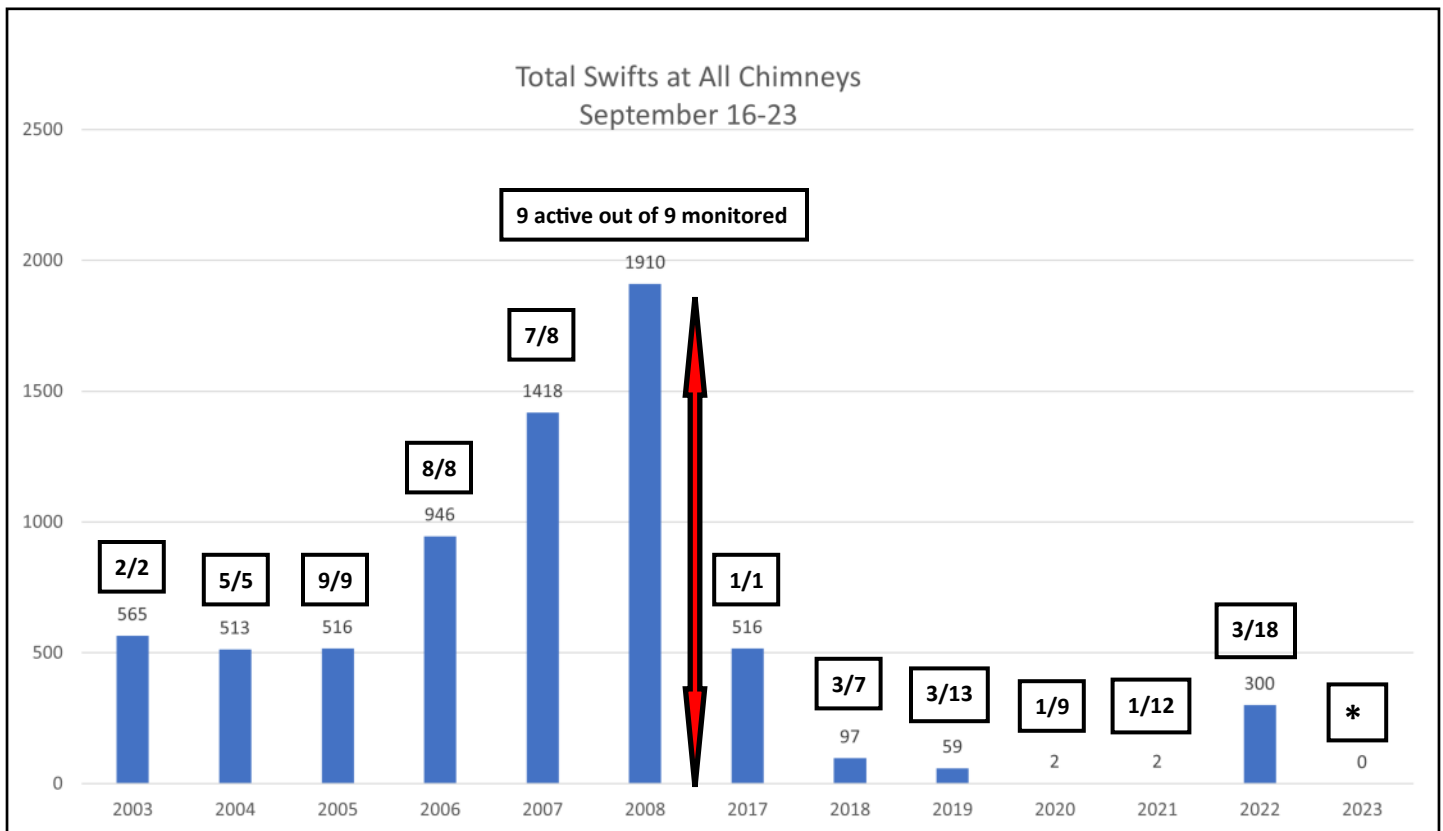


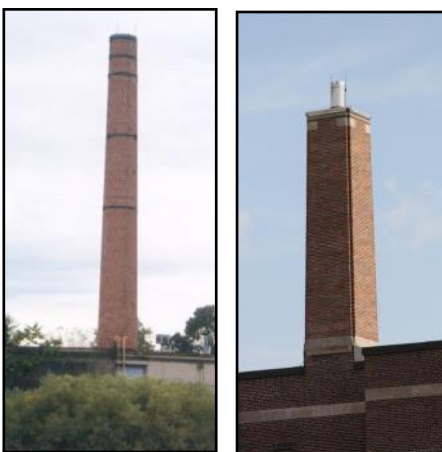
Figure 6. Total number of swifts tallied during monitoring visits to London swift roosts 2003 to 2008 and 2017 to 2023. Numbers in boxes above each bar indicate number of chimneys that held swifts out of number monitored. Small numbers above bars indicate total for all sites that held swifts. The double-headed arrow marks the 8-year gap between 2008 and 2017. * No monitoring was conducted during the third week of September 2023, because all 18 chimneys were already empty for the season.

8.1 Comparing Data from Fall Monitoring 15 to 20 Years Ago with More Recent Data

Between 2003 and 2008, fall swift migration was intensively monitored in London, especially during the third week of September. During the next number of years, fall monitoring was somewhat less consistently carried out. After 2017, the level of September monitoring increased markedly.

Figure 6 shows counts for six years during the early period (2003 to 2008) and counts for the most recent seven years (2017 to 2023), with an eight-year gap between.

Note that in 2017, only one roost that still held swifts could be found the third week of September. In subsequent years it was also determined that, though a number of additional chimneys had been occupied by swifts earlier, few chimneys still held swifts that week. Those that did generally held small numbers. It is possible that additional roosts were active in some or all of the years since 2017. Because not all roost chimneys are occupied every year, it can be easy to miss finding such occasionally occupied roosts when they are actually active.



At one time Nature London monitored swift roosts at these chimneys. Left: Emco Delta in 2004 (demolished 2013) and Thames Valley District School Board headquarters in 2015 (capped in 2006). (photos by Winifred Wake)

Although it is evident there can be significant fluctuations in numbers from year to year, it appears swifts passing through London may be abandoning roosts and heading south earlier in recent years than they did 15 or 20 years ago. The year 2023 stands out as a particularly early year for fall swift departure. See **Table 5** (page 14).

In 2023, beginning in late July, declining success in finding monitored chimneys to be occupied by swifts may have been an indicator that nests were failing and frequency of entries was dropping, which subsequently led to early migration.

Level of effort and methods of collecting data were not entirely consistent between the earlier and later periods depicted in **Figure 6**. Some of the difference in results might also be explained by factors such as differing weather conditions among years. As the years go by, there does, however, appear to be a trend towards fewer occupied roosts, lower numbers of swifts using roosts, and earlier departures of swifts from London. Though swift chimneys continue to be lost every year (and no new ones are being built), at present, the number of available chimneys does not seem to be limiting swift numbers in London.

9.0 Summaries of Swift Activity at Each of the 18 Chimneys in 2023 and Comparisons with Previous Years

This section discusses the 18 monitored chimneys individually. For those hosting roosts in multiple years, graphs are included to facilitate comparisons. Note that software limitations have created graphs that are not precise representations of actual numbers.

Results of organized monitoring in 2023 are presented as combined tallies of nightly counts (**Table 2**, page 5). Combined tallies were then discussed by season: spring migration (pp 5-6), summer nesting (pp 7-10, including table of possible nesting activity) and fall migration (pp 13-15). In 2023, organized monitoring ran from May 9 to September 12, mostly on Tuesday nights but also including counts at four-day intervals in late May and early June. These allowed participation in the national roost monitoring survey. Poor weather in early May delayed the start of spring monitoring by a week, and the unusually early departure of swifts from London resulted in a truncated fall monitoring season. In late June, due to heavy wildfire smoke, a health unit directive caused the cancellation of one monitoring session. When feasible, if monitoring couldn't be carried out on a scheduled night, a chimney was covered the evening before or after.

In 2023, the organized monitoring program at 18 chimneys ran during 20 scheduled (or substitute) evenings and produced 347 data submissions. At other times, an additional 57 documented visits were made to 14 of the 18 chimneys. This brought the total to 404 monitoring sessions at the 18 chimneys in 2023. All data were entered online via Nature London's Wufoo portal. Reasons for extra visits included mentoring sessions for new volunteers, daytime checks to confirm status of nesting activity, and determining best release sites for swifts raised by wildlife rehabilitation centres.

9.1 South Collegiate, 371 Tecumseh Ave

Between May 9 and September 12, 21 monitoring visits were made, 20 regular and 1 supplementary (August 20=6). For results of regular monitoring, see **Table 2**, page 5. Seven monitoring visits were carried out during spring migration (early May to mid-June). Counts ranged from 0 (June 12) to 6, except for a count of 13 on May 16. Most evenings 4 to 6 swifts spent the night in the chimney. It is not known who these birds might have been, over and above a resident pair.

Six monitoring sessions took place from mid-June to late July. In June, overnight counts were 2 or 4 swifts. In July, numbers ranged from 6 to 13. Eight monitoring visits were made from August through to mid-September. Numbers began picking up in early August, peaking at 59 (August 8), holding steady at 52 on August 15, then dropping sharply. The last night swifts were detected using the chimney was August 29.

During May, June and July, swifts travelling in pairs and courtship behaviours were often seen but there were sparse and intermittent indications of possible nesting activity. These petered out and it appears there was no active nest, at least not one that lasted long enough to hatch young.

To summarize: in 2023, South Collegiate generally harboured a handful of swifts from spring migration through the summer nesting season. Numbers in-



South Collegiate, Apr 3, 2022. This location, the raised parking deck at the rear of the school, is the usual location for monitoring. (photo by David Wake)

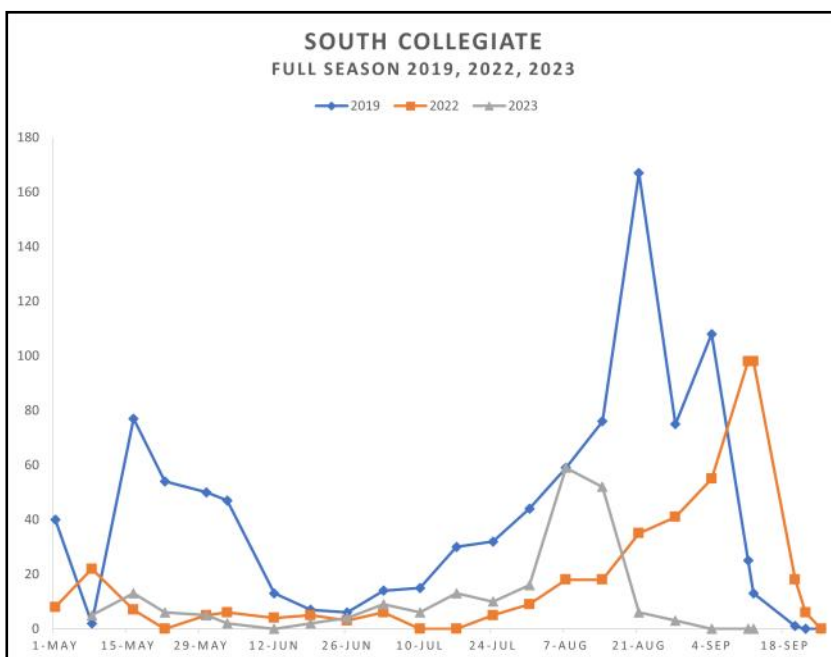


Figure 7. Numbers of swifts roosting in the chimney at South Collegiate from early May to late September, 2019, 2022 and 2023.

creased slightly during July to peak at a modest, short-duration roost in early to mid-August before declining quickly. No swifts occupied the chimney during September monitoring sessions.

Figure 7 presents data for counts from May to September for the 3 recent years for which there are complete data sets. The graph shows a high degree of variability among seasons and years.

In 2019, there were good-sized, relatively long-duration roosts in both spring and fall, with numbers dipping briefly in late June. In 2022, the pattern showed a very small and short-lived spring roost, followed by a long stretch of low counts through much of June and July. Numbers then rose gradually to form a modest, relatively late roost in mid-September.

By comparison, in 2023 South had a considerably reduced rate of swift occupancy, marked by low numbers through spring and summer and a small but early fall peak. In 2023, the South chimney emptied much earlier than in 2019 and 2022.

Throughout the season it was not uncommon to see a higher number of swifts in the area during the monitoring session than entered for the night.

There was one report of a Merlin; on August 20 a single bird flew over the chimney, fairly high above it. A bat was observed on August 29. On June 28, a large swarm of insects (possible swift food?) was observed above the school for an extended period. Dragonflies were present on September 5. Common birds typical of the neighbourhood were sometimes reported.

9.2 King's University College, Wemple Building, 266 Epworth Ave

The 23 monitoring sessions at King's took place between May 9 and September 12; these included 3 supplementary counts (July 1=53, July 5=2 counts of 82 and 89). Data for regular monitoring sessions are given in **Table 2** on page 5. Seven monitoring visits were during spring migration, nine during the summer nesting season and seven during fall migration.

Though never reaching 100, the King's roost held consistent numbers every night from May 9 to August 8. During the spring, numbers ranged from 61 to 91; during summer from 53 to 89. After August 8 (52 swifts), the count fell dramatically and the chimney was empty by August 29.

Similar to past years, there were occasional hints of possible nesting activity from spring through the nesting season, but nothing ever came of them.

See **Figure 8** for comparisons with other years. Unlike 2017 (blue line), when the roost was characterized by good-sized spikes in numbers in both spring and fall, and unlike 2022 (green line), which had a fall surge in numbers, in 2023, the King's chimney exhibited no flamboyance. Fluctuating around 70 swifts for many weeks, the 2023 King's profile (purple line) was most similar to the 2019 pattern of chimney occupancy (red line). Numbers, however, tended to be slightly higher in 2023 than in 2019.

Located close to a narrow strip of woodland that slopes steeply down to the Thames River, King's is always an excellent location for seeing and hearing additional species of birds and other wildlife. A sampling follows.

Barn Swallows, which nest under the awnings on the windows of the Wemple building, were reported almost every monitoring evening from May 24 to August 8. Most people mentioned "lots"; the maximum number given was "more than 20" on July 4.



King's College Wemple building, Apr 3, 2022. The removal of shrubs and the row of mature spruces between the parking lot and the lawn has provided monitors with a better view of the chimney in recent years. (photo by David Wake)

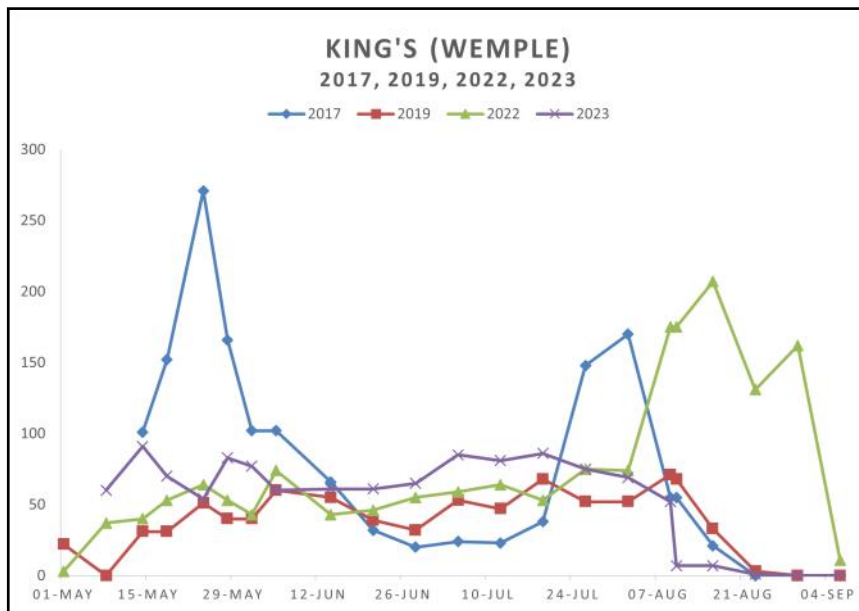


Figure 8. Numbers of swifts roosting in the chimney of the King's College Wemple building from May to September, 2017, 2019, 2022 and 2023.

A Common Nighthawk was heard on May 24, and at least one individual was seen on August 29. These dates correspond to spring and fall migration for this species.

The only bat reported was on August 29. Other mammals included a skunk on May 16, a rabbit on June 12 and a coyote walking along the edge of the parking lot on July 1.

Mosquitoes and no-see-ums were bothersome in early July.

Three possible Merlin were reported on August 22. Red-tailed Hawk sightings were submitted on May 28 and August 1.

Numerous bird species observed during August included Gray Catbird, Carolina Wren, Northern Oriole, Cedar Waxwing, flocks of Common Grackle, and Double-crested Cormorant (11).

The ubiquitous Canada Geese roamed the lawns and parking lot most monitoring evenings, leaving their droppings behind.

9.3 Labatt's Garage/Warehouse, 183 Simcoe St (across from 195 Grey St)

In 2023, Labatt's received 28 monitoring visits, including 8 supplementary ones (May 4=6, Aug 24=343, Aug 25=308, Aug 31=262, Sep 1=264, Sep 3=350, Sep 4=100, Sep 11=0). The first visit was on May 4 and the last on September 12. For data from regular count nights, see **Table 2** (page 5). From early May until the middle of July, the chimney held from 1 to 6 swifts per night, the usual number being 2. On many evenings it was common to see small numbers of swifts socializing in the area. Additional swifts sometimes passed overhead but did not end up inside the chimney. Two notable examples of this occurred on May 9, when groups of 15, 20 and 24 swifts flew over, though just 5 birds entered the chimney for the night; and on July 20, when 20 flew over but went elsewhere.

Monitors reported that swifts seen overhead often arrived from and departed towards the direction of the river, which was just across the street behind a row of houses backed by a narrow wooded corridor. When swifts were seen heading in an inland direction, it was frequently north-east, where the Phoenix roost was located a couple of blocks away.

A pair of swifts seemed to be resident by early May. Some activity indicative of nest tending was observed. It is possible young were being fed from late June to mid-July. After that, as a roost developed, no further paired ins-then-outs were detected to confirm feeding visits. There was no firm evidence to indicate that fledging occurred, but it is possible.

In late July, numbers began to increase as the roost started to build. During 8 visits from August 15 (235) to September 3 (350), numbers fluctuated from about 250 to 375. The highest tally was 374 on August 22. On September 4 the tally was 100 and on September 5 it was 184, indicating substantial variation from night to night as the roost was emptying. After September 5, swift numbers must have dropped quickly because the chimney was empty on September 11 and 12. During fall migration, when large numbers were overwintering at Labatt's, swifts often arrived and entered in waves. Before consolidating and dropping in, each group usually came and went from the area several times and made repeated swirling passes directly over the chimney. In late August, observers reported swifts often arrived from great heights. Initially detected as tiny black specks seen through binoculars, they became increasingly visible and audible as they gradually descended.

On a number of evenings through the season, monitors reported clouds of swirling steam from a warehouse vent. At times this partially obscured the view of the chimney as swifts were entering. It is not thought this substantially affected counts.

Figure 9 covers three years of data collected at Labatt's. In 2022 (red line) and 2023 (green line), until late July or early August, few swifts were overwintering in the chimney. In 2022, a pair was resident but no viable nesting attempt resulted. In 2023, the nesting effort produced hatched young and possibly fledged young as well.

In both years, a roost began to form about the first of August. In 2023, the peak (374) was reached sooner (Aug 22) and dropped off quickly in early September. In 2022 numbers peaked (302, Sep 6) and remained high for longer and the chimney emptied for the season about a month later than in 2023. In previous years when Labatt's hosted fall roosts, peak counts tended to be higher than in 2022 and 2023: for example 2021=609, 2020=720, 2018=1397, 2017=689.

Data from 2019 (blue line) are included to show Labatt's does not host a roost every fall; instead, some years it harbours a big roost in the spring. The only recent year in which the chimney was known to have held both spring and fall roosts was 2017.

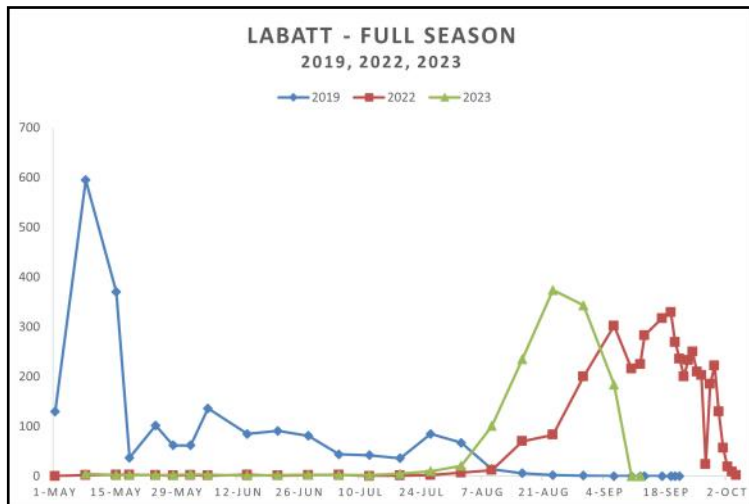


Figure 9. Numbers of swifts roosting in the chimney at Labatt's warehouse from May to October, 2019, 2022 and 2023.



At Labatt's, observations are usually made from the safety of a car. Apr 3, 2022. (photo by David Wake)

Although people with complex issues often walked along Grey St in the evening, most monitors observed from the safety of a car, and no problems were reported. Here is a quote from May 24: "One pedestrian with a half bottle of wine and a bundle of flowers managed to zig-zag the length of the street successfully. His success at his destination was unknown."

Merlin were observed on 4 dates: June 20, August 29 (possible), August 31 (see page 35), and September 4.

A Red-tailed Hawk was seen on May 16, and likely on June 5.

The only bat was reported on May 24.

Among other sightings were Great Blue Heron (June 20), Canada Goose (August 15) and American Crow (September 11 and 12). Dragonflies, cicadas and crickets were reported on September 3.

9.4 Smith Fruit, 22 Maitland St

In 2023, the Smith Fruit chimney was monitored 22 times between May 9 and September 12, including 2 supplementary visits (Jul 10=170, Sep 8=0). Results for regular evening counts are given in **Table 2** (page 5).

A small roost was present the first monitoring night of the season (May 9=34). Numbers increased to 143 on May 24, then dropped somewhat before reaching a higher peak on June 12 (248). This was by far the highest count at a single chimney during spring migration.

During the prime nesting season from mid-June to late July, swifts continued to maintain their roost in the Smith Fruit chimney. Numbers fluctuated from 112 to 219. Counts dropped rapidly in early August. From the middle of the month onward, only 1 to 7 swifts spent the night in the chimney, with the exception of September 5 (=13) and September 8 (=0). Remarkably, a single bird spent the night there on September 12, the only swift detected at any monitored chimney that night. The September 12 record of 1 swift at Smith Fruit represented not only the last monitored chimney occupied in 2023, but also the latest report of a swift in London or Middlesex County in 2023 (except for 2 seen elsewhere in London that evening). In 2022, Smith Fruit was last known to be occupied on September 13, when it held 144 swifts.



Smith Fruit, Apr 3, 2022, as viewed from the little parkette at the foot of the street. Monitors usually watch the chimney from the small parking lot or lawn adjacent to the building. (photo by David Wake)

In the past 20 years, Smith Fruit has been known for its consistency in holding a roost during at least some portion of August and September every year. In contrast, it has a limited history of hosting a roost in the spring. An exception came in 2019 when a modest roost was briefly present in late May. The 2023 spring roost is notable not only for its size and duration, but also for its continuation through the nesting season. Unlike most years, Smith Fruit did not hold a long-term roost of any consequence in August and September 2023.

Figure 3 illustrates 3 recent years of data from Smith Fruit. The years 2019 (blue line) and 2022 (orange line) show the most typical pattern of occupancy for this chimney. Numbers are relatively low during spring and summer, rising to become a significant roost in August and September, before undergoing a sharp decline as the season wanes. The pattern exhibited in 2023 (grey line) is less typical, in which the roost holds relatively high numbers during spring and summer but empties in early August.

Most of our large chimneys that often host big roosts during the spring and summer period have a very poor record of nesting success. In most cases, early attempts peter out and rarely does the effort last to the hatching stage. Smith Fruit is an exception. It usually hosts a nest, which generally lasts well into the feeding stage or later. This was the case in 2023. The presence of a significant roost complicated the detection of nesting-related behaviours.

Monitors often mentioned the abundance of “almost-entries” at this location. Much dipping and many last-moment drops on the far side of the chimney, plus numerous entries and exits, often by multiple birds at a time and well before sunset, made counting challenging at Smith Fruit. All this activity around the chimney increased the difficulty of distinguishing entries and exits and other behaviours associated with the nest inside. Still, it is thought young were likely being fed from late June to late July and it is quite possible some young may have fledged.

Throughout the entire season, it was often impossible to hear swifts, due to the din created by a multitude of House Sparrows chirping from their hiding places in the ivy covering the side of the building. On June 5 a nighthawk was heard in a nearby area (Wellington St bridge near Grand Ave). On August 29, a possible Merlin was reported and, on August 8, an Osprey flew over.

As darkness fell, there was often an increased presence of low-flying robins around Smith Fruit. On July 18, one (perhaps a youngster learning to fly) crashed into a monitor’s head.

On June 28, insects were observed bouncing around above the chimney entrance.

The presence of a nearby homeless encampment generated considerable foot traffic past Smith Fruit. This usually caused no problems for monitors. But, on June 28, to reach the chimney, monitors had to successfully sweet talk their way past a barricade of 6 police cars set up to deal with an incident at the camp.

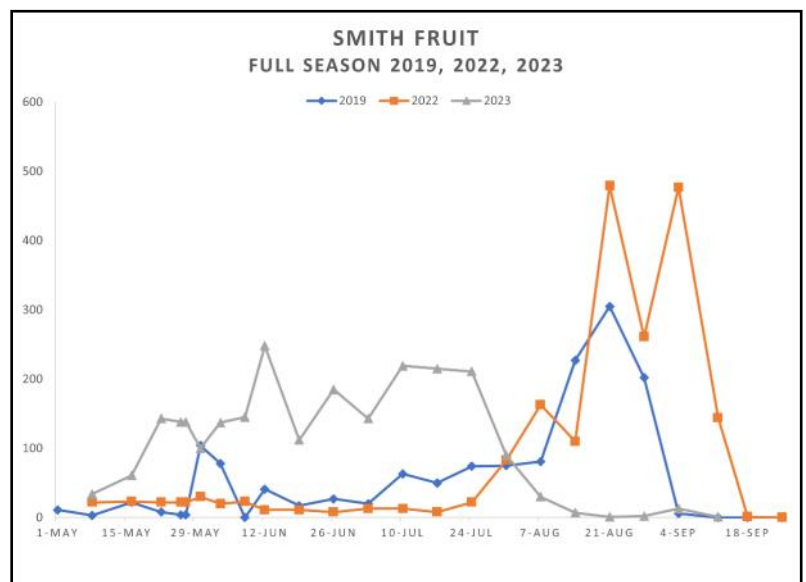


Figure 10. Numbers of swifts roosting at Smith Fruit from May to late September, 2019, 2022 and 2023.

9.5 Phoenix Building, 300 Wellington St

Eighteen monitoring visits were made to Phoenix in 2023: 17 regular (see **Table 2**, page 5) and 1 supplementary (May 6=75). The chimney was monitored from May 6 to August 29.

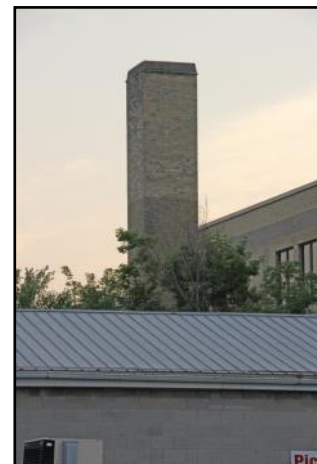
During 8 visits to document spring migration, counts ranged from a low of 52 on June 1 to a peak of 130 on May 16. From mid-June onwards, a downward slide commenced, reaching 18 on July 4. For the remainder of July, just 4 or 5 swifts spent nights inside the chimney. On August 1 the tally was 2; thereafter, for the rest of the season, the chimney was empty. Similar to 2022, in 2023, Phoenix was the first of the 18 monitored chimneys to be abandoned for the year. In 2022, compared to 2023, the May, June and July roost at Phoenix held much larger numbers and maintained them through July, about a month longer than in 2023.

During May and June, inconsistent activity was detected that might suggest a resident pair and possible nesting activity. No nest-related behaviours were seen in July. Though Phoenix was believed to have fledged some young in 2019, the chimney has a very poor track record of getting very far with its nesting efforts. The presence of a roost from May to early July also made it difficult to distinguish any behaviours that might have been associated with a nest.

Figure 11 shows the dog's breakfast of fluctuating count numbers that characterize the monitoring story at Phoenix during 4 recent years. In each year the chimney held a spring roost, though size and duration varied; some years there was even a secondary roost peak in June and July. During 3 years, the chimney was essentially empty during August. In the fourth year, a large fall roost was present during this time, dwindling through September. One year, the chimney returned from the dead zone of August to host a modest roost in September that continued into October. Compared to the other years, 2023 (purple line) hosted the smallest spring roost and the fewest swifts for the rest of the season.

Due to the incidence of violent crime in the area and the large numbers of unhoused people who tend to congregate in the immediate neighbourhood of Phoenix, safety is of paramount concert for monitors assigned to this site. Counts were usually carried out either from the Tim Horton's parking lot or the Enterprise Rent-a-Car lot. There is considerable foot traffic coming and going through these lots. Pairs of observers were encouraged to remain in a single car, with one keeping an eye on surrounding activity while the other concentrated on the action at the chimney.

There were no overt incidents during the monitoring season, and many evenings all was quiet. Other times, however, monitors' reports contained strong cautionary advice about the need to be very, very vigilant in the face of dodgy situations they had found themselves in. Monitoring protocol always recommends that monitors immediately abandon a session should they ever feel the least bit uncomfortable. In 2023, no one left early (or only by a little bit).



Preferred locations for observing the Phoenix chimney. Left: from the parking lot of Enterprise Rent-A-Car, looking north (Jun 15, 2021). Right, from the rear part of the parking lot behind Tim Horton's, looking northwest (Jun 17, 2018). (photos L by David Wake, R by Winifred Wake)

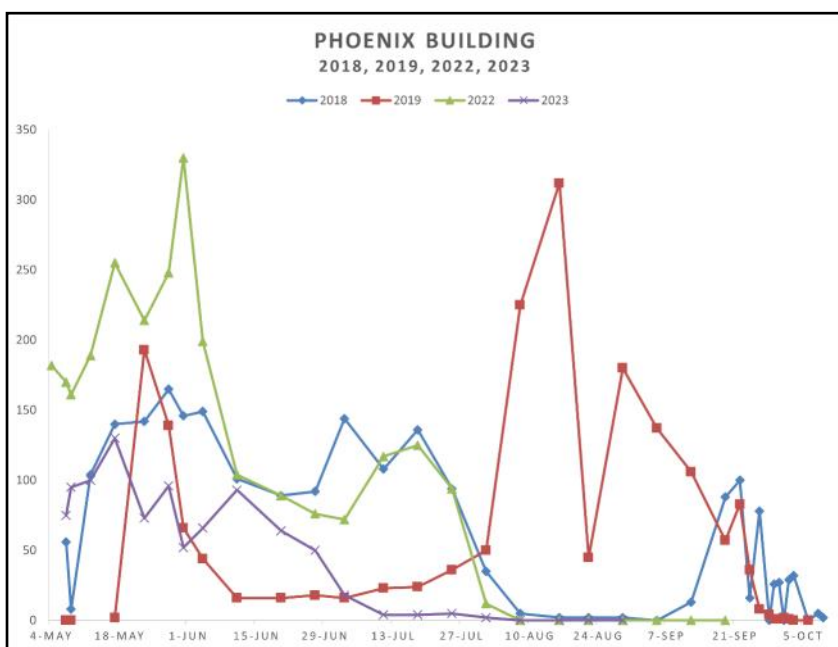


Figure 11. Numbers of swifts roosting at Phoenix from May to October, 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023.

In 2023, major construction at Horton and Wellington sometimes made it difficult to access a safe observation location.

Bird life in this area of downtown London is usually restricted to the occasional House Sparrow or Rock Pigeon. The soundscape is dominated by the endless roar of trains and vehicular traffic, the wail of sirens and the honking of horns. Possible diversions from these themes therefore came as a welcome surprise.

Some volunteers took pleasure in wispy clouds and pink-tinted skies.

Though very few swifts were about, on August 1, a Merlin in hunting mode was cruising the area. Monitors had an excellent view of the bird sitting on a nearby utility pole plucking and eating a House Sparrow.

On June 20, a Great Blue Heron flew over and, on August 15, a noisy flock of Canada Geese honked its way across the sky.

9.6 Old Hunt's Flour Mill / Flanagan's Warehouse, 471 (formerly 551) Nightingale Ave (Nova Craft Canoe)

Between May 9 and September 12, 2023, 20 regular monitoring visits were made to the Hunt's chimney. No supplementary or daytime visits were carried out. Data collected are presented in **Table 2** (page 5) and **Figure 12**.

On the first monitoring night of the year, the Hunt's roost (102) was the largest in the city. It peaked at 124 on May 24, dropping to 44 by the end of spring migration (June 12). In late June and early July, numbers bottomed out at 12. This is typically the time of year when lowest roost counts are found. Numbers then steadily increased to peak at 133 on August 1, before gradually declining to 57 on September 5, the last night the roost was occupied. On September 5, Hunt's was one of only two monitored chimneys that still held a significant roost.

Throughout the season, many of the swifts coming in to roost arrived and entered in waves, though there were also many arrivals and entries by ones and twos.

Of all monitored London chimneys, Hunt's is known as the most likely place to host a roost from spring right through till fall (late August or later). For six years in a row, this has been the case. **Figure 13** presents data for four of these years. Compared to the other years featured in the graph, in 2023, Hunt's held numbers that were often below average, that peaked earlier in the fall than two of the three other years, and that peaked at a lower level than all other years.

Because of the chimney's short, squat shape and the six-storey height of the building, it is challenging to detect entries and exits associated with nesting, especially if they occur on the far side of the chimney. At times, early entries were observed but not generally exits. Based on what could be seen, there was too little activity to support the conclusion that a nest was present. Daytime visits would have helped clarify the situation.

A number of times monitors reported



Figure 12. Numbers of swifts overwintering at the old Hunt's flour mill (behind Nova Craft Canoe) from early May to early September 2023.

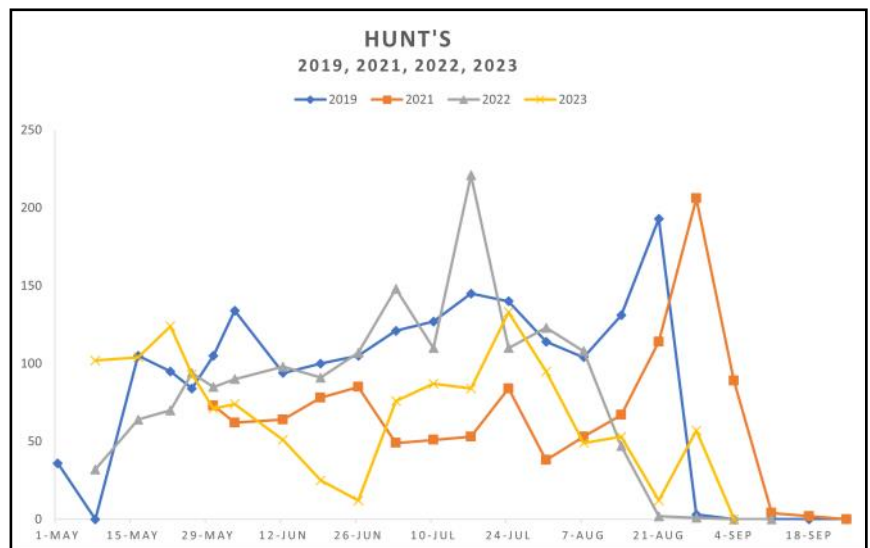


Figure 13. Numbers of swifts overwintering at the old Hunt's flour mill (behind Nova Craft Canoe) from early May to late September 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023.



swifts flying in the vicinity that did not enter the chimney for the night. Several active swift chimneys are known within a few blocks of Hunt's; some of the free fliers may have been associated with these other chimneys.

European Starlings were nesting under the metal lip overhang just below the chimney, at the top edge of the roof. Their presence apparently did not disturb the swifts.

Several raptors were reported: June 12 = Cooper's Hawk, July 4 = possible Red-tailed Hawk, August 1 = probable American Kestrel

eating a small bird.

One bat (plus possibly a second) was seen on August 1.

A raccoon was observed on June 1.

Left and far left: the chimney at the old Hunt's flour mill behind Nova Craft Canoe (June 19, 2020). (photo by Winifred Wake)



9.7 Huron College O'Neil/Ridley Hall, 1349 Western Rd

In 2022, 25 monitoring visits were made between May 9 and September 12. Of these, 20 were regular (see **Table 2**, page 5) and 5 supplementary (Aug 18=313, Aug 25=174, Aug 26=206, Aug 27=200, Aug 31=45).

A good-sized roost was present all 7 evenings of the spring monitoring period (range 45 to 167, peak on May 24). Numbers backed off somewhat in late June, as is typical for roosts during the summer nesting period. The low of 33 was recorded on June 20, from there gradually increasing to 93 on July 25. Numbers held high through much of August, peaking at 313 on August 18. After August 27 (200), there was a relatively quick slide to 55 on August 29, 45 on August 31 and 14 on September 5. The chimney was empty on September 12.

Figure 14 shows data from Huron in 2023 in the context of 3 recent years. This year, substantial spring and fall roosts bracketed a respectable summer roost; 2019 also hosted spring and fall roosts but held very low numbers during the summer. The late-August timing of fall peaks was fairly similar in 2018, 2019 and 2023. The pattern of occupancy in 2022 was very different, with numbers spiking in July and the chimney being empty in August.

In 2023, Huron and Hunt's were the only 2 monitored chimneys that maintained good-sized roosts from early May right through the nesting season until fall migration tapered off.

Similar to other years, from May to July, there were occasional early entries and other behaviours typical of nesting swifts, but these were not frequent enough to suggest a serious nesting attempt was underway. In early July, a new-to-us active nest chimney was discovered at the northeast corner of the building. Some of the early evening swift activity (e.g., courtship, socializing and vocalizing in small groups) observed around the building may have involved swifts associated with that chimney. During many evenings swifts came and went from over the wooded Medway valley, where they were presumed to be foraging. The presence of a large roost throughout the entire season further complicated efforts to interpret any possible nesting activity. Again, daytime monitoring would have been helpful. As has been noted before, the viewing location (facing east) reduces the ability to see late-entering swifts.

In 2023, a new student residence was under construction near the chimney, though there was no evidence that this caused disturbance to the swifts. Especially in the latter part of August, the courtyard and quadrangle from which monitors observed experienced greatly increased evening social activity. This sometimes resulted in noise and distractions for monitors. It also provided excellent opportunities to point out swifts and provide educational resources to passersby. Many people were already aware of swifts, thanks to the new swift sign installed in the spring near the base of the chimney by the Huron administration.

People were delighted to actually see swifts drop into the chimney for the night.

Barn Swallows nest around the Huron building. Reports ranged from "a few" to "lots": May 9, Jun 5, Jun 12, Jun 20, Jun 28, Jul 4, Jul 11, Jul 18, Aug 8, Aug 18. On June 28, 2 Tree Swallows were seen along with the Barn Swallows.

Among monitored chimneys, Huron is by far the best location to see nighthawks. They are known to nest on campus somewhere nearby. They also pass over the Huron area during spring and fall migration. Nighthawk reports occurred during spring migration (Jun 1=2, Jun 5=2), the summer breeding season (Jul 4=1, Jul 11=2, Jul 18=2, Jul 25=1), and fall migration (Aug 18=1, Aug 25=1, Aug 26=2, Aug 27=6 [above soccer fields], Aug 31=1, Sep 5=4).

Other species observed included raccoon (Jun 12), groundhog (Jun 28), tree frog calling (Jun 28), no-see-ums (Jun 28), kildeer (Jul 25=1 and Aug 27=5).



A new swift interpretive sign has been installed near the base of the Huron chimney, where it can readily be seen by passersby. (photo by David Wake)

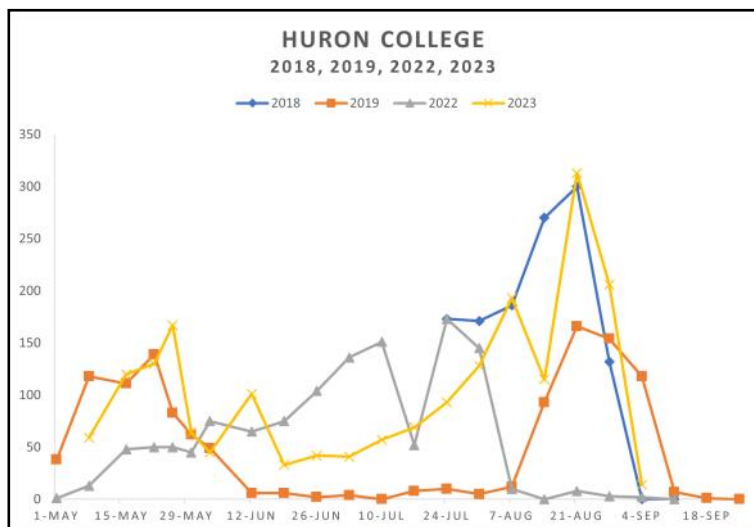


Figure 14. Numbers of swifts spending the night in the large octagonal chimney of O'Neil/Ridley Hall at Huron College, from early May to late September 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023.

9.8 Old North (formerly Ryerson) Public School, 940 Waterloo St

Between May 9 and September 12, the chimney at Old North School was monitored on 19 evenings, all being regular monitoring sessions. See **Table 2** (page 5).

Two swifts occupied the chimney on May 9; on May 28 the pair was engaged in nest-building. On subsequent visits up to mid-July, small groups of 3 to 9 swifts were also socializing and foraging in the area, suggesting additional swifts may be nesting nearby. The pair continued to be resident through this period, entering together or singly, though exits were almost never seen. In mid-July, the number of swifts inside for the night rose to 4, and then to 9 on August 1. On August 8, 22 swifts were seen flying in the vicinity but just 7 entered for the night. On August 22, the total inside peaked at 27. Over the next 2 weeks, the count declined to 7 by September 5, the last night the chimney was occupied. That night the school was one of just 5 monitored chimneys still holding any swifts.

As is typical for this site, there was a pair resident during spring migration and the summer nesting period but evidence of possible nesting was scant, and the chimney would occasionally be empty for a night. Extra swifts were often seen socializing and foraging in the vicinity. In August, the chimney briefly hosted a mini-roost. It is interesting to recall that a decade or more ago, Old North was the location of fall roosts that held hundreds of swifts.

A single nighthawk was observed on each of May 28 and August 22. The school seemed to be under a Great Blue Heron route, as flyovers were recorded on May 28, June 5 and 12, and July 4 (2). Other observations of interest included no-see-ums, a big dragonfly and a Killdeer (all on May 28), trilling toads (May 28, June 12) and raccoons (2 on August 8).

9.9 Elborn College, 1201 Western Rd

From May 6 to September 12, 22 monitoring visits were made: 20 regular and 2 supplementary (May 6=3, Aug 3=in/out activity). See **Table 2** (page 5) for data from regular visits.

During the spring migration period, from 3 to 10 swifts used the chimney each night. From mid-June until the end of July, the number ranged from 7 to 12. The peak count (25) was recorded on August 8. In subsequent weeks, numbers were 0 (rainy conditions), 15, 2, then a series of 0s.

The pattern of having 8 or 9 swifts occupy the chimney per night during July is quite typical of Elborn in past years – more than the 2 or 3 swifts that might be expected for a pair and a helper, but too few to constitute a serious roost. Then, in August, came a brief, tiny surge in numbers to create a mini-roost.

Though relatively small, the number of extra swifts regularly hanging around and overnighting at Elborn during the nesting season was quite sufficient to create confusion. Monitors in past years have referred to Elborn as the “party place” for swifts, an appropriate moniker in light of all the activity, often including entries and exits by several swifts at a time throughout the watch. Still, among all the other happenings, it was sometimes possible to discern the behaviours of a resident pair tending a nest. Starting in early July, apparent food deliveries were detected. On August 3, during a 75-minute early evening monitoring session, six paired entries-then-exits were picked out among the other comings and goings. Clearly, a high rate of food delivery was underway. On the next visit (August 8) there was no sign of food deliveries, though a small roost (25) was occupying the chimney. It is quite probable that young fledged from this chimney.

Barn Swallows were reported most weeks from May 6 to August 8; it is likely that at least one pair nested around the Elborn building, as has been the case in past years.

Nighthawk reports were fewer than in 2022 – none in the spring but 3 dates during fall migration (Aug 22=2, Sep 5=4, Sep 12=2). On September 5, at least 4 nighthawks were repeatedly flying overhead. It may have been more than coincidence that lots of dragonflies were also observed that evening. Nighthawks get their name from their custom of foraging by “hawking” insects from the sky at dusk.

A Red-tailed Hawk was spotted twice (August 15 and 22). Other reports of note included Song Sparrow, Northern Flicker, and Red-winged Blackbird. Canada Geese were regulars. A Tulip-tree was in flower in early June.



Old North Public School, from the parking lot to the southeast, the usual viewing location, Apr 3, 2022. (photo by Winifred Wake)



The Elborn College chimney, from the parking lot to the northeast, the usual monitoring location, Apr 3, 2022. (photo by Winifred Wake)

9.10 First-St. Andrew's (FSA) United Church, 350 Queens Ave at Waterloo

See **Table 2** (page 5) for data collected at 4 FSA chimneys during regular monitoring evenings. Locations of the 4 chimneys are shown in the photo at right. A fifth chimney (FSA-NW) used by swifts in 2023 was not regularly monitored. Monitors usually watched FSA-SE and FSA-NE from the vicinity of the curved driveway. The preferred viewing location for FSA-N and FSA-S was the church parking lot (out of photo to the right); see photo below.

As Londoners emerged from the pandemic, a few more people were coming and going from the church than in the previous few years and more passersby strolled through the grounds. There was some presence of unhoused people, mostly using the benches, wandering about or discreetly settling in to quiet corners for the night. Monitors reported no problems.

Since just one of the FSA chimneys is ever used as a roost (and that only in some years), a major goal of monitoring at FSA is to get a sense of nesting activity. Unfortunately, the evening monitoring protocol we use has its limitations in this regard, especially for capturing the hard-to-detect incubation stage. Still, evening monitoring can indicate whether a chimney is occupied by a pair, which gives a strong hint that nesting could be underway. Observations of entries and exits can provide information on the stage of the nesting effort. Though far fewer than in 2022, in 2023, several daytime and early evening visits were made to check on possible nesting activity at FSA chimneys. On May 24, a swift was observed flying through a tree, presumably collecting nesting material, though which chimney this swift was associated with could not be determined.

During the spring migration period there were often 7 to 14 swifts overhead during a watch. Chasing, chattering and various forms of courtship were frequently evident. A maximum of 25 swifts at once flew overhead during an evening watch on May 28. From mid-June on, monitors usually reported from 9 to 12 swifts in the area.

A 90-minute morning watch on July 24 saw relatively little swift activity in the area, and most of this was very high. Yet swifts were coming and going from all four chimneys, indicating nests were still being tended. During the evening watch on July 25, up to 12 swifts were in the area at once, but only at FSA-NE was nest-tending activity seen.

During a 2-hour early evening watch on August 2, there was relatively little swift activity. Most of this was high, though there was some dipping at the FSA-N chimney (the only 1 occupied that night [121 on Aug 1]).

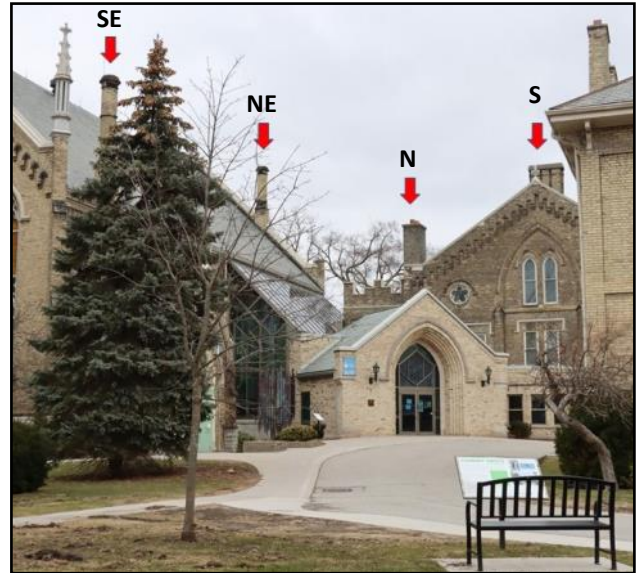
All 4 monitored FSA chimneys seemed to abruptly terminate their nesting efforts at approximately the same time around the end of July. Though it is possible some nests fledged young, this was not confirmed. There is no obvious reason for the sudden, almost simultaneous, abandonment. The weather was favourable around that time and there were no reports of Merlin in the area.

Falcons of three species were observed by monitors. A Peregrine Falcon was heard on May 24. On June 21, an American Kestrel spent some time perched on the weathervane on top of the steeple. Later the same evening a Merlin flying high overhead was chased out of the airspace by 5 swifts.

Bats were reported on 2 dates: July 4 (1) and July 18 (3). Other mammals seen were skunk (May 24, June 5) and rabbit (May 24, June 12).

Birds often seen around the church were House Sparrow, House Finch, Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal, Rock Pigeon, American Robin, Common Grackle, European Starling. Other species of interest were Osprey (July 24) and dragonflies (August 22).

On August 10, FSA's swift chimneys were honoured by a visit from 10 delegates from the American Ornithological Society. That week approximately 700 members of this prestigious group of academics and professionals were gathered at the London Convention Centre (RBC Place) at 300 York St for their annual conference. During an evening walk in the neighbourhood led by Nature London, participants were introduced to chimneys where swifts were actively nesting or have done so in the past. The walk culminated at FSA, where the visitors viewed the swift interpretive sign on the front lawn, then settled in to enjoy the spectacle of 120 Chimney Swifts descending into FSA-N to spend the night.



Locations of the 4 chimneys regularly monitored at FSA. FSA-SE and FSA-NE are usually observed from the vicinity of the curved driveway shown above. FSA-N and FSA-S are best viewed from the parking lot (out of photo to the right); see photo below. (photo by David Wake)



Delegates from the AOS conference wait for swifts coming in to roost for the night in FSA-N, Aug 10, 2023. (photo by David Wake)

FSA-SE: From May 9 to August 29, there were 24 monitoring visits – 18 regular (**Table 2**, page 5) and 6 supplementary. One supplementary visit was made in the evening (Jun 21=1); the remaining 5 supplementary visits took place in the morning or early evening to check for nesting activity (active: Jun 1 & 25, Jul 24; inactive Jul 9 & Aug 2).

Swifts were first observed using this chimney on May 16, when a pair was present. By June 20, incubation may have been underway. For the next month, swifts continued to use the chimney. Feeding may have been underway by July 18; daytime feeding visits were observed on July 24. A swift spent the night in the chimney on July 25, but there were no food deliveries during that watch. On August 1 and subsequent monitoring dates, no swifts used the chimney, and monitoring was discontinued for the season after the August 29 session.

It is not clear what caused the abrupt change in activity at the chimney about July 25. Though there is a possibility, it seems highly unlikely that fledging could have taken place and the family depart in such a short time following the observation of daytime food deliveries on July 24.

FSA-NE: Between May 9 and August 29, FSA-NE was monitored 25 times: 18 regular visits (see **Table 2**, page 5) and 7 supplementary. Two of the supplementary visits were regular evening shifts (Jun 21=2, Jul 20=1); the other 5 were made in the morning or early evening (evidence of nesting activity: Jun 1 & 25, Jul 9 & 24; no activity: Aug 2).

The chimney seemed to be occupied by a single swift for the first 3 monitoring nights, but a pair was present in late May and through June. Interestingly, on 2 nights around peak migration time, a few extra swifts spent the night inside (May 28=6, Jun 5=5). By early July, behaviour was observed indicating that nesting was underway. Probable food deliveries were noted on July 18 and 20 and confirmed by a daytime visit on July 24 and an evening visit on July 25. Visits on August 1 (evening) and 2 (daytime) and thereafter found no swift activity at all. Given the frequency of observations of nest tending over the previous few weeks, it seems highly unlikely that young could have fledged and the family depart in this time interval. Though no occupancy was detected, monitoring was continued for another 5 weeks, the last being August 29.

It is odd that both FSA-SE and FSA-NE terminated their nesting efforts at very close to the same time. There were no untoward weather events that might have caused abrupt nest failure.

FSA-N: From May 9 to September 5, this chimney was monitored 29 times. Nineteen visits were regular evening sessions (see **Table 2**, page 5) and 10 were supplementary. Five supplementary visits used the regular evening protocol (Jun 21=2, Jul 20=1, Aug 4=128, Aug 10=120, Aug 13=95). Five additional visits were made in the morning or early evening (active: Jul 9 & 24; inactive: Jul 1 & 25, Aug 2).

A pair was probably present from the first monitoring night, though a few extra birds around made it hard to be sure. Seven swifts entered for the night on June 5; from then until the end of July, the usual number inside was 2 or 3 swifts. Eggs may have hatched by early July. Through July, rates of entries and exits were very inconsistent, though on July 20 there were 3 paired ins and outs. The chimney was being tended during the day on July 24, and 2 swifts entered for the night on July 25.

Thereafter there was no further evidence of nest tending, either daytime or evening. The outcome of this nest is unclear, though the low and inconsistent rate of nest attendance over many weeks makes success unlikely. This chimney's nesting effort faded at about the same time as did the nesting efforts in FSA-SE, FSA-NE, and FSA-S.

On August 1, a roost of 121 swifts was present. The roost peaked at 128 on August 4, dwindled to 37 on August 15 and was empty on subsequent visits. See **Figure 15**.

Though FSA-N does not host a fall roost every year, it also did so in 2022. See **Figure 16**. Compared to 2023, the 2022 roost began to develop about a week earlier, sustained higher numbers for longer, and was last active a week later. In 2022 the roost peaked at 217, then dropped off fairly quickly after that. In 2023, the decline occurred more gradually.

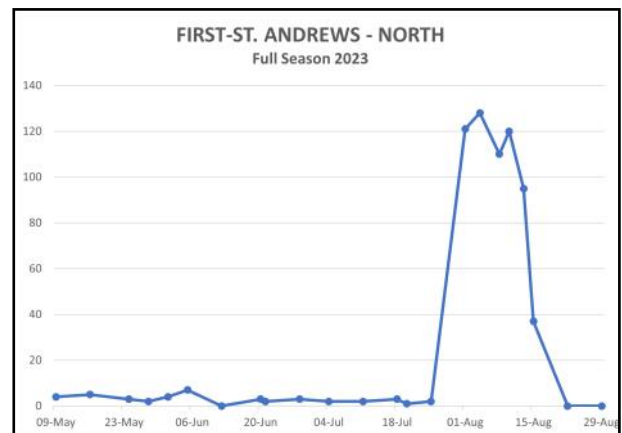


Figure 15. Numbers of swifts spending the night in FSA-N from early May to late August, 2023.

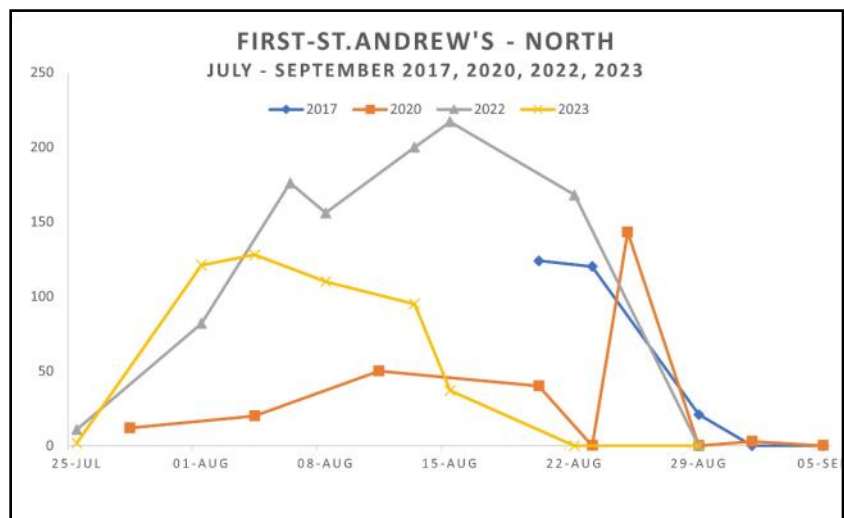


Figure 16. Numbers of swifts spending the night in the chimney at FSA-N from mid-July to September, 2017, 2020, 2022 and 2023.

FSA-S: Between May 9 and September 5, 28 monitoring visits were carried out. Of these, 19 were regular evening sessions (see **Table 2**, page 5) and 9 were supplementary. Five of the latter were regular evening sessions (Jul 20=3, Aug 2=0, Aug 4=0, Aug 10=4, Aug 13=0). The chimney was active during 4 supplementary morning or early evening visits (Jun 1 & 25, Jul 9 & 24).

FSA-S was occupied every monitoring night from May 9 to the end of July, usually with several swifts over-nighting inside (peak of 8 on Jun 5). During May and through to late June, nest-tending activities were occasionally observed. Through July, though 3 swifts spent nights in the chimney, there was scant evidence of nest tending except during a daytime visit on July 24. There were 3 late evening entries on July 25 but no indication of feeding visits or recently fledged young. As happened about this time at the other 3 monitored FSA chimneys, nesting efforts seem to have ended suddenly.

No swifts spent the night in the chimney during the first few days of August. Meanwhile, a large roost was developing in the nearby FSA-N chimney. The small numbers of swifts that entered FSA-S for the night on August 8, 10 and 15, were likely spillovers from the roost.

9.11 Kingsway Academy, 370 Huron St

Early in the summer of 2021, it was learned that Kingsway's two chimneys were occupied by nesting swifts; later in the season a large roost developed in the north chimney. In 2022 and 2023, both chimneys were included in Nature London's weekly monitoring roster. Neither has hosted a roost since 2021.

The 2 chimneys were monitored 20 times from May 9 to September 12 (**Table 2**, page 5). There were 19 regular visits and 1 early evening supplementary session (Aug 7: N chimney active; S chimney inactive).

In 2023, the 2 chimneys were occupied the first monitoring night, when 15 swifts were flying around, though only a few swifts entered each chimney that night. Most nights through the season up to 6 or 8 swifts were seen around at once, but occasionally the number rose to 10 or 15.

Though there was no roost in either Kingsway chimney, from early May to early August, there was a good-sized roost at nearby King's College. It may have been the source of some of the extra birds flying in the vicinity of the Kingsway chimneys but not entering for the night.

Among monitored chimneys, Kingsway was the mosquito capital. From early June to late August almost every report mentioned gazillions of the pesky critters. With so much potential food in the vicinity, perhaps it is no accident Kingsway was also the bat capital: May 24 (2-3), June 1 (1), July 18 (1), July 25 (2), Aug 1 (1), and September 12 (1). Nighthawks were observed twice during fall migration: Sep 5 (1), and September 12 (7). The treed area behind Kingsway slopes steeply down to a wetland valley, which provided excellent foraging opportunities for both swifts and other aerial insectivores, as well as habitat for many additional species of wildlife.

These are a few of many birds observed: Red-tailed Hawk, Great Blue Heron, Downy Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Robin. During August and September, large flocks of black birds (sometimes up to 200) streamed by from west to east, heading for the valley to roost for the night. Most seemed to be grackles, but starlings were also present. Mammals included skunk, deer and grey squirrel. Fireflies were seen on July 18.

Kingsway-N: From May through July, a pair of swifts appeared to be resident, with sometimes an extra swift or 2 also spending the night. From mid-June on, occasional intermittent in/out activity was observed. The strongest indication of possible food deliveries came on July 25, when 3 paired in/out were noted. On August 1 the number of swifts over-nighting increased to 5, possibly including recently fledged young. An early evening visit on August 7 picked up 2 early entries, suggesting some nest-related activity was ongoing. A few swifts continued to enter for the night until August 22. Despite generally low attendance rates at the nest over many weeks, there is a good possibility that at least some young fledged from this nest.

Kingsway-S: Small numbers of swifts (usually 2, sometimes 1, 3 or 4) were present overnight in this chimney every night from the start of monitoring in early May until the end of July. Paired entries and exits were observed fairly regularly during June and July, including on July 25. On August 1, the number of swifts spending the night in the chimney jumped to 6 (from 2 the previous week). Mixed among the entries were 2 exits, perhaps related to food deliveries or to youngsters practising their chimney-entering skills. There were no entries or exits during a 90-minute early evening watch on August 7, but the chimney held from 3 to 5 swifts each night for the next 5 weeks. The last night of occupancy was September 5, when Kingsway-S was one of just 6 monitored chimneys to hold swifts that night. There is a good possibility that some young fledged from this nest.



Kingsway Academy, Aug 10, 2021. South chimney at left, north chimney at right. (photo by David Wake)

9.12 388 Dundas St (former tax office)

In 2023, 20 regular evening monitoring sessions were carried out at this chimney between May 8 and September 12. The chimney was first occupied on May 24, when 1 swift spent the night, though 3 swifts in total had been in and out that evening. From late May to mid-July, 2 swifts usually spent the night in the chimney, though they tended not to spend very much time in the vicinity of the chimney beforehand. The 2 swifts often travelled as a pair, though occasionally entries were by single birds. There were no exits observed nor any other indications of nest building or tending. After July 18, for the rest of the season, the only night on which swifts occupied the chimney was August 8 (4 birds).

Of the 19 monitoring nights in 2023, swifts were inside for the night on only 9 occasions (max of 4 swifts). This is by far the lowest occupancy rate of any monitored chimney this year. In 2022 (similar to 2023), there was no viable nesting attempt but, in 2022, the chimney harboured a one-night roost in the spring (May 25=56) and a fall roost from about mid-August to mid-September (Aug 30=202, peak).

Most evenings the small flock of swifts coming and going from the area above the parking lot never numbered more than a handful. The exception was August 8, when there were 40. These were probably birds intending to roost at FSA that night.

Finding an appropriate viewing location for this chimney has always been challenging. Ideally, the observer would view the chimney silhouetted against the north-west sky and from not too great a distance. The many taller buildings near 388 Dundas make finding an optimal spot difficult. In past years, we have tended to monitor by looking southwest from a sweet spot in the parking lot behind the Fred Astaire dance studio that allowed the chimney to be silhouetted against the sky. This year monitors were not always welcome to use this parking lot. Instead they sometimes watched from other locations that involved some trade offs. Unless lawn chairs were placed

some distance away, from the boulevard across the street, the chimney was silhouetted against another building. Another alternative was to look southwest from a tiny sweet spot in front of 423 Colborne, a location that was prone to distractions from passersby. Such encounters, however, did provide opportunities to educate the public about swifts and hand out our spiffy swift business cards. Although 388 Dundas was a challenging location to monitor in 2023, monitors did their best to document the little swift activity that was happening.

Not surprising for this downtown site, the main bird species observed were House Sparrow, Rock Pigeon, and European Starling. Welcome relief came from the occasional American Robin, Black-capped Chickadee, Mourning Dove, Great Blue Heron, and the tour de force, a pair of Peregrine Falcons (June 5). A bat was seen on August 8.

9.13 423 Colborne St

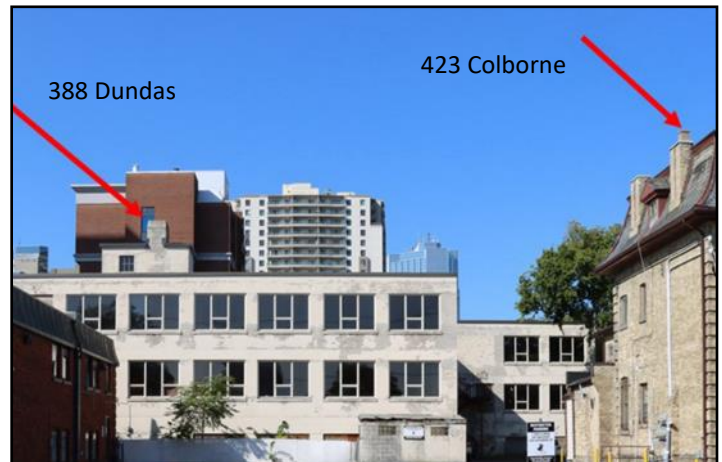
The east side of this two-shafted chimney is topped by a chimney pot, providing an unusually narrow entry passage for swifts. The chimney was monitored during 20 visits from May 8 to September 12 (**Table 2**, page 5). During a supplementary visit on August 10 the chimney was active.

Bordering the same Fred Astaire parking lot as the 388 Dundas chimney, 423 and 388 are often monitored by observers working together. The 423 chimney was occupied by swifts (usually 2) every night from May 8 to August 22, except during one evening of inclement weather. During monitoring sessions, small groups of up to 4 to 6 swifts often circulated through the airspace overhead, though a group of 40 was briefly present on August 8.

A pair was resident by the first monitoring night of the season. By late May nest building behaviour was observed, and incubation seemed to be underway during June. During July and continuing into August, feeding visits were frequently seen. (It is not clear why the period of food deliveries needed to go on for so long.)

On the early evening of August 10, a group of visiting scientists from the American Ornithological Society conference stopped briefly. While they were looking at the chimney, 2 swifts obligingly flew out to prove the nesting attempt was still active. Four swifts were inside the chimney on August 22, the last night it was occupied. These may have been fledged youngsters. If so, it is not clear exactly when they might have first taken flight. A swift having a bit of trouble getting into the narrow opening on August 8 may have been a newbie flier. Though well into August, it seems quite likely this nest was successful.

For details of other wildlife observations, see account for the 388 Dundas chimney.



Two downtown swift chimneys: 388 Dundas and 423 Colborne, Sep 11, 2021. (photo by Winifred Wake)



Delegates to the AOS conference watch swifts tend a late-season nest, Aug 10, 2023; above, Sep 11, 2021. (photos by David Wake)

9.14 ICORR (formerly Selby Shoes), 700 Richmond St

The ICORR chimney was monitored on 19 evenings from May 9 to September 12 (see **Table 2**, page 5). To be seen, this short stubby chimney perched atop a 5-storey building needs to be watched from a considerable distance, which makes it harder to pick out entries and exits.

Throughout the season, occasionally small groups of up to half a dozen or so swifts would be flying overhead in the area. During May the chimney was occupied every night by 3 or 4 swifts, generally including a pair. In June, swifts at the chimney were harder to detect, which would be expected if incubation were underway.

A pair continued to be around during July, but no activity to indicate an active nesting attempt was observed. Swift visits became more intermittent into August. The last night a swift stayed overnight in the chimney was August 22.

Although a pair was occupying the chimney for much of the season, the relative infrequency of visits and the lack of behaviour to indicate nesting activity leads to the conclusion that there was not a viable nesting attempt in the chimney this year.

Other wildlife species reported included Rock Pigeon (they liked to perch on neighbouring rooftops), Red-tailed Hawk, Great Blue Heron, Canada Goose (flocks flying over), and gulls. Squirrels and skunks also wandered the area.



Being in from the edge of the roof, the ICORR chimney must be viewed from a considerable distance, Sep 21, 2021. (photo by David Wake)

10.0 Reactions of Swifts to Noise Disturbance

Swifts have been known to sometimes react to sudden loud noises. In 2023, swifts were observed reacting to noise disturbance at three locations.

- Labatt's warehouse. On August 25, just before sunset, large numbers of swifts were swirling low, immediately above the chimney opening. Entries had already begun when a slow-moving but exceedingly loud motorcycle passed by on the street. The swifts suddenly dispersed and disappeared upward. About a minute later, they began returning and resumed circling in preparation for entry.
- Huron College. On the evening of June 1, 6 to 8 swifts were constantly present and milling about above the building and chimney. When a very noisy helicopter flew directly over the chimney at a relatively low height, the swifts disappeared. About 7 seconds later, they returned and resumed their constant presence.
- Mount Brydges. In the vicinity of Adelaide Rd and the CN tracks, on June 30, about 10-15 minutes past sunset, a flock of swifts was milling, circling, and dipping just above a large roost chimney. During the 3 minutes it took a very long and loud freight train to go by, the swifts moved higher and continued twittering. On August 26, about 15 minutes past sunset, a Via rail train roared past in about 6 seconds; the mass of swirling, dipping swifts briefly dispersed upwards a short distance but soon descended again. On other evenings when swifts were present and a freight or Via train went by, the upward dispersing behaviour was not noted. It may be that swifts react more to a noisy train if one goes by just as numbers of swifts are about to descend into the chimney.

On other occasions, no reaction was noted when swifts were exposed to loud noise.

- King's College. On July 1, swifts were almost all inside the roost for the night when loud fireworks started up in the distance. No swifts emerged and no other reaction was seen.
- Phoenix building. During monitoring sessions throughout the season, swifts in the vicinity of this chimney experienced the sounds of a steady stream of passing fire engines, ambulances, police vehicles, large trucks, trains (both freight and passenger), etc. No reaction was ever noted. It may be that, in such conditions of almost constant noise, swifts have become accustomed to it and are less likely to respond.

11.0 Collisions and Near Collisions by Swifts in Mid-Air

Swifts making close bodily contact in the air has occasionally been observed in past years, usually in late May or early June when swifts are actively courting and setting up nests. Sometimes these encounters seem to happen on purpose, sometimes not. A typical scenario involves two swifts approaching each other at an angle and apparently intentionally crashing together in flight.

On five occasions in 2023, monitors reported collisions or almost collisions between two swifts.

- Elborn. On May 24, about 20 mins before sunset, full bodily contact between 2 swifts was observed.
- Old North. On May 28; twice during the watch 2 swifts nearly collided in the air.
- FSA. On June 1, about 40 mins before sunset, 2 swifts got together in the air and appeared to be mating or fighting (observer couldn't be sure).
- Mount Brydges. On May 27, about 20 mins before sunset, up to 9 swifts were coming and going in the general area of the roost chimney. Some tight flying and V-flights by pairs were seen. Once, 2 such birds seemed to bounce off each other.
- 536 Queens Ave. On June 25, about 20 mins before sunset, 2 swifts flying tightly together bumped into each other on purpose.

12.0 Facilitating the Release of Young Chimney Swifts Raised in Wildlife Rehabilitation Centres

Since 2008, Nature London's swift program has had the privilege of helping to identify appropriate release locations for Chimney Swifts raised in wildlife rehabilitation centres. Most requests that come our way are from wildlife rehabbers who have developed specialized skills in the care of Chimney Swifts, a species that is notoriously challenging to raise well in captivity. Their goal is to ensure young swifts have the very best possible chance of survival in the wild. The rigorous release protocol requires that youngsters not be released until they have passed a long list of readiness indicators relating to feather development, wing length, flight skills, etc. Also essential is a site in a quiet area away from hazards and close to a chimney that held at least 75 roosting swifts the night before. The wild birds overnighing in the chimney adopt the newbies into the flock and serve as mentors.

Sometimes young swifts in rehab are not ready for release until all roosts in their home towns have emptied and their occupants have headed south on fall migration. This is where Nature London comes in. Because we maintain what is thought to be the only program in Canada that monitors multiple swift roosts weekly in August and September, we know which London roosts are still being used by swifts. Such information enables us to identify optimal release locations, from which late-season youngsters are launched into successful lives in the wild.

In the past 15 years, some rehab centres have come to rely on Nature London. Birds have been brought here from a variety of different communities and rehab centres. Since the Chimney Swift is a Threatened species in Canada, every precious young swift added to the wild population is significant.

From 2012 to 2019, Swift Care Ontario operated in London. During those 8 years, SCO became Ontario's leading facility caring for swifts and other aerial insectivores, especially species at risk. SCO often served as a swift referral centre for the rest of the province and beyond. Nature London worked hand in hand with SCO to provide release sites when needed. In 2019, SCO quietly closed its doors when Debbie Lefebvre, its principle caregiver, retired due to declining health.

In recent years Nature London has mainly worked with two wildlife rehab centres that specialize in caring for swifts: Le Nichoir in Hudson, Quebec and Destined to Fly in Harrowsmith, Ontario. Both brought swifts to London in 2023. As befits their philosophy of putting swifts first, during releases, they do their best to keep stress levels as low as possible for their young charges. That means they strictly limit the number of people who can attend such events. See pages 32 and 33 for accounts. At each release, the rehabbers expressed their sincere gratitude for all the volunteers who work so diligently behind the scenes monitoring chimneys to help narrow down the selection of the best location.

On July 5, 2023, Debbie Lefebvre passed away after a long illness. The photos below pay tribute to her love of swifts and her legacy of expert nurturing and tireless advocacy on their behalf. She made an enormous contribution by putting London on the map as a centre of excellence in the care of Chimney Swifts and other at-risk aerial insectivores.

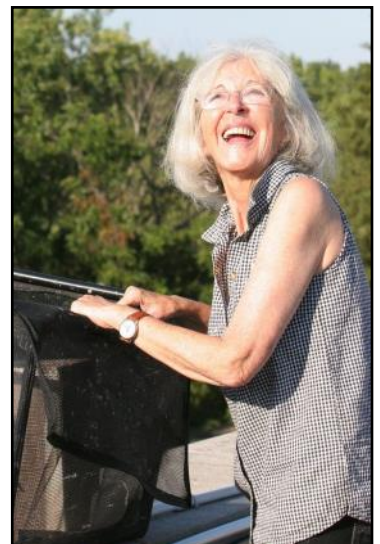


Jul 18, 2011 (photo by David Wake)



Aug 1, 2011 (photo courtesy of Debbie Lefebvre)

Left & far left: Debbie's first batch of nestlings. In 2011, under the mentorship (via email) of Sue Wylie of Le Nichoir, she honed her skills in caring for swifts. Right: pure joy when the young swifts successfully fledged at King's College on Aug 19, 2011.



Labatt's, above: preparing for a release, Sep 12, 2017; right Sep 15, 2018, celebrating after a particularly difficult group of youngsters defied the odds and made it to the sky. (photos by David Wake)



Jul 13, 2016 (photo by David Wake)



Left & above: Watching a release at Smith Fruit, Sep 8, 2020 (photos by David Wake)

12.1 Le Nichoir (Hudson, Quebec)

In July, Le Nichoir contacted the Nature London swift team to let us know they had taken in young swifts. The birds were fairly good sized and it was hoped they could be released close to home. Unfortunately, a run of poor weather led to delays. Eventually all known roosts in the area were vacated for the year. It was decided to bring the 11 swifts to London for release. The date was set for August 27.

The London team began making extra monitoring visits to potential release chimneys to determine the best one. Huron College was the winner. Enroute to London on August 27, Jo-Annie Gagnon, Bird Care Coordinator at Le Nichoir, and her volunteer driver, Roxana Robles, stopped at Birds Canada at Long Point. Here all 11 swifts were banded and 2 were fitted with Motus tags. Each tag consisted of a tiny backpack weighing 0.03 g to which an aerial was attached. Whenever a tagged swift passes a Motus tower, its presence is detected, allowing scientists to follow its travels.

Early that evening, the rehabbers and reps from Nature London met in the courtyard beside Huron's big octagonal chimney. It had been home to a roost of 200 swifts the night before. Groups of students were occasionally passing through the area, creating a level of disturbance Jo-Annie deemed too high. The operation was moved to the much more secluded soccer field to the north of the college buildings. Here the soft-sided travelling cage was set out on the expansive grassy slope.

After half an hour, 3 wild swifts were sighted high overhead. Around this time (about 30 mins before sunset), the cage was unzipped and the swifts were free to go. Nine whizzed out in a blur of wings, but 2 needed a little encouragement from Jo-Annie. Soon all were circling overhead, flying strongly. They continued flying in this way, at a relatively low height, mostly about 25 to 100 feet up. Occasionally we saw the flash of a tiny silver disc on the back of a tagged bird. Perhaps the wild swifts were still foraging very high up, but no welcome wagon of swifts descended to envelope the youngsters. Jo-Annie was not worried; she was certain youngsters and wild birds would meet up in due course.

Towards sunset, we noticed swifts beginning to gather in the vicinity of the big chimney at Huron. Our



Eleven young swifts in their artificial chimney at Le Nichoir. (photo courtesy Le Nichoir Wild Bird Conservation Centre)



Jo-Annie uncovers the travelling cage so the youngsters can experience the sights and sounds of the area before their release. (left photo by David Wake, right photo by Susan Berry)



group moved back to that location and enjoyed watching the twittering, dipping flock of swifts, as small groups gradually entered the chimney for the night. At one point a Merlin dashed across the courtyard below the chimney, apparently in pursuit of a swift, though we did not see the outcome. At that instant, the loose, swirling mass of swifts above the chimney dispersed slightly before resuming its focus on dropping inside. About 200 swifts went in for the night. We couldn't pick them out, but we assume the youngsters were among them, all set to embark on their next great adventure – life as wild birds.

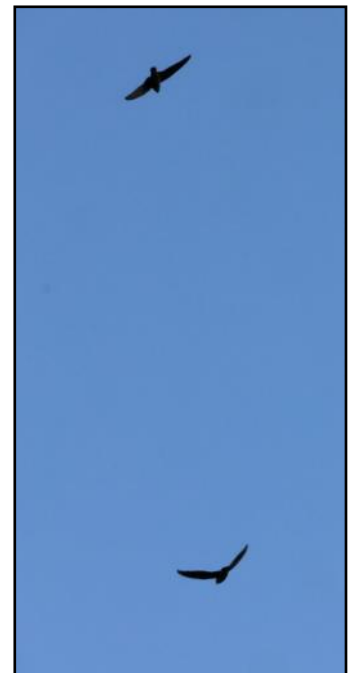
As we lingered in the gathering dusk, we had many opportunities to chat with passing students and introduce them to Chimney Swifts, the marvellous little birds circling overhead. We also enjoyed good conversation with Jo-Annie and Roxana, creating or re-

newing warm bonds of friendship between the Quebec rehabbers and the London swift team. All in all, it was a grandly successful evening, with 11 healthy young swifts added to the flock of Canadian swifts heading to South America for the winter.

Two huge thank-you's are in order. One is to the dedicated caregivers at Le Nichoir, who do such a beautiful job of raising these exquisite little creatures. The second is to the equally dedicated team of London monitors, whose weekly efforts ensure we have the knowledge to provide the best possible release site.



The silver spot on the back of this young swift is a Motus tag, which will allow researchers to follow its route as it heads south for the winter. (photo by David Wake)



Newly released young swifts test their wings in the open sky. (photo by David Wake)

12.2 Destined to Fly (Harrowsmith, Ontario)

On August 12, the Toronto Wildlife Centre transferred 3 swifts to Connie Black of Destined to Fly in Harrowsmith. The birds were in poor shape and one died that night. Connie toiled diligently over the remaining two. By August 16 she was guardedly optimistic they had a fighting chance. She contacted Nature London with a heads up that she might be needing a release site. The birds, which had just fledged, were placed in an aviary and began to develop flight skills. Connie continued a regimen of intense nurturing, gradually bringing them to a state of robust health.

By the end of August, both youngsters were flying beautifully, and they had become proficient in entering the fake chimney in the aviary. Connie began doing practice feeds in their travelling chimney. As the swifts polished their readiness at Destined to Fly, plans for the trip to London were coming together. The weather forecast was clear and dry for the coming weekend, and Connie was able to line up a volunteer driver. The target release date was set for Saturday, September 2.

Meanwhile, swift migration through London was early this year, and counts were dropping rapidly at many chimneys. The young swifts were ready to go but, by the weekend, would there still be a suitable chimney holding at least 75 swifts? And would it be in a location safe for young birds whose flying abilities were not yet fully up to snuff?

The London team began closely tracking Labatt's and Huron, the only 2 London roosts still holding good numbers. Through the week, counts held at Labatt's but fell at Huron. Unfortunately, the release space at Labatt's is narrow and uncomfortably close to several hazards. Labatt's has hosted successful swift releases, but is always a last resort.

Fortunately, a roost site in Mount Brydges, 20 mins west of London, is ideally situated in a secluded area surrounded by open space. On September 1, it held more than 200 swifts. Mount Brydges was declared the preferred location. Arrangements were made for Connie and her driver, Stephanie, to meet the Nature London reps there. On the evening of September 2 all was quiet and peaceful on the grassy strip where the release was to take place.

The swifts had a last feeding inside the car. Then their soft-sided travelling cage was set out on a small table.

The few people present sat quietly on lawn chairs some distance away, watching and waiting. All was calm except for an early fly-over by a Merlin, a few Turkey Vultures tilting in the distance, and the occasional raucous Blue Jay.

About 30 mins before sunset, a swift was spotted circling high overhead, a tiny black speck against the retreating clouds. Over the next 15 mins, though still high, groups of swifts gradually moved downward, drifting in and out of



At home in Harrowsmith, Aug 26, 2023.
(photo by Connie Black, Destined to Fly)



Up, up and away! Mount Brydges, Sep 2, 2023.
(photos by David Wake)

the area. Connie unzipped the top of the cage. One swift head popped up for a look around. Then it was off like a shot to investigate the wide, wide world. Soon after, a second head peered over the rim and it, too, was off.

As the youngsters circled just above our heads, 25 additional swifts materialized out of nowhere to mingle and fly with them. Suddenly, we

were in the midst of a welcome wagon of wild birds adopting newcomers into their community. Gradually, the circling flock of swifts drifted upwards.

We turned our attention to watching the twittering, swirling swifts enter the chimney. While the sky gradually dimmed, we lingered to bask in the magic of the moment and reflect on the experience. Two young swifts had been on the brink of death 3 weeks earlier. Tonight, they had exuberantly joined a wild flock of swifts on their way to South America for the winter, a tiny ray of hope for a species in decline. Warmed by friendship and a shared sense of achievement, we bid adieu to Connie and Stephanie as they headed into the night for the long drive back to Harrowsmith.

Our sincere thanks go to Connie for her skill and dedication in making this joyous occasion possible. A big thank you also goes to the Nature London swift monitors whose eyes on the skies ensured a safe release site.



Part of the flock descending into the chimney for the night.
(photo by David Wake)

13.0 Documenting Other Wildlife Species

During evening visits to chimneys, swift monitors often have the opportunity to see or hear other species besides swifts. The timing of monitoring is particularly advantageous for making observations of species that are active around dusk. Monitors are encouraged to report records of aerial insectivores such as Common Nighthawk, Barn Swallow, and bats, which are species at risk and/or are undergoing population declines. Also of interest are observations of potential swift predators (e.g., raptors), as these can influence swift behaviour around roost and nest chimneys. Some monitors also submit information on other species of wildlife, including mammals and insects. Nature London retains all such data in its files. At the end of swift season each fall, swift records and accompanying information on other species are shared with Birds Canada / Ontario SwiftWatch.

13.1 Common Nighthawks

Common Nighthawks are not nearly as common in London as they were 20 or 30 years ago. Most reports in the city are of birds passing through during spring and fall migration. Spring migration takes place during May and into early June, peaking in late May and early June. From early to mid-June until about the end of July is considered prime nesting season for this species. Fall migration takes place in August and September, peaking in late August and early September. The core nesting season runs approximately from mid-June to the end of July.

Nighthawks occupy relatively small territories during the nesting season. In the evening, the same individual may be seen or heard several times as it flies around foraging within/above its territory. For this reason, during the nesting season, monitors are asked to report only the maximum number of nighthawks observed at once. This way, the same nighthawk will not end up being counted many times.

During migration, nighthawks often travel in a specific direction, sometimes broadly following a river corridor, or perhaps generally moving from one side to the other across an open space. During the evening, several birds may be seen or heard at intervals, always heading in the same direction. It is therefore usually considered safe to count all migrating nighthawks, even if not all are seen at the same time. Judgement is useful in deciding how to count.

Table 6 presents nighthawk records submitted by London swift monitors in 2023. The earliest date was May 24 and the latest was September 12. Forty-six birds were documented at 6 different locations during 22 monitoring visits. By comparison, in 2022, 53 nighthawks were counted at 10 locations during 31 monitoring visits. In 2022, there were 15 spring reports compared to 6 in 2023. There were 6 summer reports each year.

Several factors may be pertinent to the variability between the 2 years. Chance is always a possibility. In 2023, monitoring began a week late in the spring (due to inclement weather) and ended 3 weeks earlier in the fall (because swifts headed south early). Due to the shorter season and for other reasons, there were about 100 fewer visits made to the 18 monitored chimneys in 2023 than in 2022. The shortened season in early spring should have little effect on nighthawk counts because few pass through London in early May. On the other hand, good numbers of nighthawks often move through London in September, including the weeks in 2023 when swifts (and nighthawks) were not monitored. In 2023, the largest group of nighthawks reported during fall migration was 7; in 2022, the biggest group was 10, plus 26 observed at a non-monitored location.

Table 6. Dates, numbers and locations of Common Nighthawks observed during swift monitoring in 2023.

LOCATION	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	TOTAL
Huron	Jn 1=2, Jn 5=2	Jl 4=1, Jl 11=2, Jl 18=2, Jl 25=1	Au 18=1, Au 25=1, Au 26=2, Au 27=6, Au 31=1, Se 5=4	25
Elborn			Au 22=2, Se 5=≥4, Se 12=2	8
King's	My 24=1		Au 29=1	2
Kingsway			Se 5=1, Se 12=7	8
Old North	My 28=1		Au 22=1	2
Labatt's			Se 1=1	1
TOTAL	6	6	34	46



Two migrating nighthawks foraging over the soccer fields at Huron College on Aug 27, 2023. (photo by David Wake)

Almost all 2023 records came from the northern part of the city, specifically the area of the university campus and Old North School. Only one report came from elsewhere: Labatt's, which lies in the river corridor south of downtown.

All nesting season reports came from a single site, Huron College. During a monitoring session at Huron, multiple flyovers by 1 or 2 nighthawks were often reported. Nighthawks are thought to nest on the flat roof of a nearby building, perhaps on University Hospital or on another building on the Western campus. A nighthawk observed on July 7 near the university heating plant may well be a bird associated with the same nesting/foraging territory that includes Huron.

13.2 Barn Swallows

Of the 18 monitored chimneys, only 3 locations, all on the university campus, hosted Barn Swallows. At the King's College Wemple building, many swallows nested under the awnings around the building. They were reported on 10 dates from May 24 to August 8, the maximum number being 20.

Elborn College had Barn Swallows present on 10 occasions from May 9 to August 8. Usually just 1 or 2 birds were seen, but occasionally several would be reported. In past years there has generally been a single nest at Elborn.

Many Barn Swallows nested around the windows at Huron's O'Neil/Ridley Hall, often foraging over the courtyard near the swift chimney. They were seen on 11 occasions, from May 9 to August 18. On June 28, 2 Tree Swallows were among the Barn Swallows.



Newly fledged young Barn Swallow, June 27, 2023. (photo by David Wake)

13.3 Raptors

A number of species of raptors nest in London and/or pass through during migration. To varying extents, some of these can cause grief for swifts. The Merlin, however, is the main species that poses a significant threat.

Red-tailed Hawk: Monitors reported this species 10 times: 3 sightings at Elborn, 2 each at King's and Labatt's, and 1 at each of Hunt's, Kingsway and ICORR. Red-tails were observed in May (2 reports), June (1), July (2) and August (5). Most observations were of Red-tails sitting placidly for stretches of time in a tree or on a structure. Occasionally screaming was heard. This large chunky hawk often hunts small mammals from a perch, a hunting style that is not well suited to catching swifts. Swifts generally ignored the presence of Red-tails and no encounters between the two species were reported.

Cooper's Hawk: The single Cooper's report was of one bird at Hunt's on June 12.

American Kestrel: There were two reports of kestrels: one perched atop the steeple at FSA on June 21, and one on August 1 at Hunt's eating a small bird (species unknown) while perched on a nearby communications tower. Kestrels are not well suited to going after swifts, but occasionally they do so, and swifts usually treat them with respect. No kestrel/swift encounters were reported.

Peregrine Falcon: One was heard at FSA 10 mins after sunset on May 24. On June 5, at 388 Dundas / 423 Colborne, a pair flew over at sunset.

Merlin: In the right situation, this compact little falcon is sometimes more than a match for a swift in speed and maneuverability. In London, the Merlin is the main predator of the Chimney Swift. In 2023, it was reported at 7 of the 18 monitored chimneys (2 occasions in June, 7 in August and 1 in September), as well as from 5 additional locations where chimneys were being checked for swifts. Merlin nest in London. Numbers pick up in late summer.

- **South:** About sunset on Aug 20, 1 flew high over the chimney; few swifts were around; there were no interactions.
- **King's:** Based on their silhouette and flying style, 3 possible Merlin were observed on Aug 22. Very few swifts were seen that evening and only 1 entered for the night.
- **Labatt's:** On Jun 20, 1 flew overhead going north; few swifts were in the area that evening. On Aug 29, a possible Merlin was noted; hundreds of swifts were around the chimney that evening. On Aug 31, there was almost no swift presence in the area until 7 mins after sunset when a big, compact twittering flock appeared very high up (at the edge of visibility). The flock mostly stayed high until the main time of entries; then a sub-group of the circling mass hastily entered, and remaining swifts quickly moved high again. At 10 mins after sunset, when a Merlin was seen chasing swifts above the street, the swirling flock dispersed somewhat and moved upward; a minute later the Merlin made another pass over the street, where some swifts were milling about. On Sep 4, 1 Merlin was reported.
- **Smith Fruit:** On Aug 29, few swifts were in the area; about sunset a small falcon (possibly a Merlin) flew by.
- **Phoenix:** On Aug 1, about 40 mins before sunset, a Merlin landed on a utility pole beside the car rental building, where it was darting its head in hunting mode; 6 mins later it flew off. Four mins after that, it reappeared carrying a House Sparrow, and landed on a utility pole across Horton St to the south. It spent 15 mins plucking and eating the sparrow, then flew off 16 mins before sunset. No swifts were in evidence during the time the Merlin was around. A few swifts later appeared high up but just 2 entered for the night.
- **FSA:** 20 mins before sunset on Jun 21, a Merlin was observed flying high, north of the church, heading west. It was being escorted (mobbed) by about 5 swifts. Earlier in the watch a kestrel perched on top of the steeple for 12 mins.
- **Huron:** After sunset on Aug 27, as groups of swifts entered the chimney, a Merlin pursued a swift across the courtyard below (outcome unknown). The swirling mass of swifts dispersed slightly, then continued entering.
- **Additional swift chimneys:** Mount Brydges: 10 mins before sunset on May 27, 5 swifts closely on the tail of a Merlin flew off when it landed in a tall deciduous tree nearby; 1 flew over the area well before sunset on Sep 2 (no swifts were around). 100 Ridout St: 4 mins before sunset on Jun 24, a screaming Merlin repeatedly circled the area just east of the building; 13 Rock Pigeons took flight and milled about for 5 mins; a few swifts milled about higher up. 1 min before sunset, the Merlin was screaming to the south; pigeons were still milling but swifts had vanished. 2 mins after sunset, the Merlin was in the area again, silent. 1020 Elias St: 80 mins before sunset on Jul 3, a Merlin repeatedly circled the area screaming. 785 Trafalgar St: 7 mins before sunset on Jul 27, a possible Merlin flew over. 91 Askin St: Distant Merlin heard 3 times on Jun 23, ending 6 mins after sunset.

13.4 Bats

Monitors reported 19 bats at 7 locations during 14 monitoring visits. Most sightings were of single bats, but occasionally up to 3 were seen. The first bat of the season was noted on May 24; the last on September 12. By way of comparison, in 2022, 24 bats were reported from 5 locations during 15 monitoring sessions.

Similar to past years, among the 18 chimneys Kingsway had the most sightings (9): May 24=3, Jun 1=1, Jul 18=1, Jul 25=2, Aug 1=1, Sep 12=1. Six sites had 1 or 2 sightings each: Smith Fruit (Aug 29=1), King's (Aug 29=1), Labatt's (May 24=1, Sep 1=1), FSA (Jul 4=1, Jul 18=3), Hunt's (Aug 1=1), 388 Dundas / 423 Colborne (Aug 8=1).

It is not surprising Kingsway had the greatest number of bat sightings. It also had the most reports of swarms of mosquitoes during almost the entire swift (and bat) season. The wetland below the wooded slope behind Kingsway provides rich natural habitat for not only insects eaten by swifts and bats, but also for many other species of wildlife.

13.5 Other Observations

In addition to species discussed earlier, many other observations of nature were submitted. On the mammal list were cottontail, coyote, raccoon, skunk, grey squirrel, groundhog and deer. Toads and tree frogs were sometimes heard. Insects included mosquitoes, no-see-ums, fireflies, cicadas, and crickets. Six reports of large dragonflies (often multiple individuals at once) came from 5 locations (South, Labatt's, Old North, FSA [2 dates], and Elborn). One report was from late May, the rest from late August and early September. All records may have been of migrating dragonflies.

The greatest diversity of observations involved birds. Most expected urban and suburban birds were reported. Canada Geese tended to be abundant near grassy expanses. A Mallard nested at Huron. Also heard or seen were Carolina Wren, Baltimore Oriole, Gray Catbird, Black-capped Chickadee, Cedar Waxwing, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Red-winged Blackbird, Song Sparrow, Northern Flicker, Downy and Red-bellied woodpeckers, and more. Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, American Crow, Killdeer, Osprey and gulls sometimes flew over. In August large flocks of Common Grackle and other blackbirds streamed over Kingsway to roost for the night in nearby natural habitat.

Monitors frequently commented on the heavy haze in the sky, due to smoke from northern wildfires. Air quality was particularly bad in late June, but smoky haze was noticeable on many other evenings throughout the season.

14.0 Outreach

In early 2023, Ric and Sandy Symmes created updated Nature London swift business cards. These were a useful means of quickly connecting people to information about swifts, especially at public events. They were also a handy way to establish credibility if monitors were ever questioned as to why they were "loitering" in an area at dusk.

The Nature London swift program had a presence at the club

booth at EarthFest, held in City Centre Plaza on April 22. This proved to be an excellent venue for introducing the public to swifts and for recruiting new monitors.

While at a chimney site, monitors often had opportunities to converse with curious passersby. From time to time, families, children, teens, cyclists, dog walkers, ordinary walkers, security staff, and even people in cars stopped by to inquire what the people sitting in lawn chairs were up to. Our crew of friendly monitors was always happy to chat about swifts, share information, and serve as ambassadors for the species.

Late August proved to be an especially good time for outreach at Huron because many new students were enjoying the college quadrangle in the evening, just at the time monitors were present to count swifts at the large roost. The new swift sign (see page 24) installed by the college in the spring had already given the campus community an intro to swifts. Now people were thrilled to have the actual birds pointed out to them and to enjoy watching and listening to the swifts before they headed in to bed.



The Nature London swift program had its own table as part of the club display at EarthFest on April 22. (photo by David Wake)



NATURE LONDON

CHIMNEY SWIFT PROGRAM



For online information,
enter "Nature London Swifts"

CHIMNEY SWIFTS NEED OUR HELP

- Chimney Swifts are small, high-flying, grey birds
- Swifts eat about 1000 insects per day
- In Canada, numbers have declined 90% since 1970
- Single nests are built in old, unlined brick chimneys
- Non-breeders spend nights together in chimneys
- Volunteers count Swifts entering chimneys at dusk
- We share data with scientists for conservation

To help count Swifts, contact "londonswifts@gmail.com"

New Nature London Chimney Swift business cards, freshly updated for 2023.

On August 10, Nature London hosted a stroll of downtown swift chimneys for delegates to the American Ornithological Society conference at the Convention Centre. Participants on the walk came from Nova Scotia, Ontario, British Columbia, Maine, New York state and India. At 423 Colborne, as if on cue, two nesting swifts delighted the group by popping out of the chimney one after the other. Later, at First-St. Andrew's church, about 120 swifts put on a great show, twittering, circling and demonstrating their acrobatic flying skills before dropping into the chimney for the night. See pages 26 and 29.

During 2023, several chimney owners were contacted and provided with information about the swifts using their chimneys.

Glenn Berry ensured there was always a well-organized abundance of information on the swift page of the Nature London website.

Hand-outs about swifts were generated as needed.

Thank you to all monitors for embracing outreach opportunities as they arose. Your warmth, enthusiasm and knowledge have made you excellent advocates for swifts.



On Aug 10, delegates to the AOS conference gathered in front of the Convention Centre prior to an evening stroll to view swifts and swift chimneys in downtown London. (photo by David Wake)

15.0 Summary and Highlights of the 2023 London Swift Monitoring Program

In 2023, a team of six provided leadership for the 60 to 70 volunteers involved in the Nature London Chimney Swift monitoring program. Data were collected from 18 chimneys during 20 scheduled monitoring evenings from May to September. Additional visits were made to these chimneys, plus 75 other known London swift chimneys that are not regularly monitored. Five out-of-town swift chimneys were also checked. In total, 501 documented visits were made to 98 swift chimneys. Of these, two-thirds were found to be occupied by swifts at the time of the visit.

Two new swift chimneys were discovered in London and four out of town. Several London chimneys known to have been used by swifts in the past were found to be capped or demolished when visited.

All data were shared via spreadsheet with the provincial swift database maintained by Birds Canada. As appropriate, data were also submitted to the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. The entire London swift data set, representing almost 6000 documented chimney visits from 2003 to 2023 has been made available to researchers at Western.

During 2023, daytime visits, mainly at non-monitored chimneys, sought information on nesting activity. Although the Nature London monitoring protocol is best suited to documenting numbers of swifts spending nights inside chimneys, some data were also collected on nesting at the 18 chimneys monitored weekly. Early in the season, all 18 offered at least a few hints of possible nesting. Eight did not result in viable nesting attempts. The remaining 10 are believed to have hatched young. Beyond that, outcomes are uncertain, though several may have fledged some young.

A notable feature of the 2023 season was the abrupt departure of swifts from some chimneys, just as fledging time was approaching. This was most noticeable at the four chimneys at FSA, each of which held an active nest until all were suddenly abandoned in late July. If young have fledged, it is more usual for swift families to continue to occupy chimneys overnight for a number of days afterwards.

Inclement weather delayed the start of spring monitoring by a week. Spring migration featured two main waves of swifts. The combined tally for 18 chimneys peaked at 591 on May 24. During prime nesting season, from mid-June through July, higher than average numbers of swifts (i.e., non-breeders) were occupying communal roosts. During fall migration, the peak combined tally at monitored chimneys was the lowest and earliest (Aug 8) of the last six years. The last night of occupancy of any roost was on Sep 12 (1 bird). It is unprecedented to have such a complete and early final exodus of swifts from London in the fall.

It has been proposed that swifts head south earlier and in lower numbers in years when they have had low rates of nesting success. If this is so, 2023 may have been a very poor year for London's nesting swifts, as well as those nesting farther north and passing through the city on their way south.

In late August and early September Nature London was honoured to assist two out-of-town wildlife rehab centres in finding suitable release sites for hand-reared swifts (see pages 32 and 33). As the years go by, it becomes increasingly difficult to find roosts still occupied by the dates needed for such releases.



A swift tail feather. The spiny tip (left), braces the roosting bird and prevents feather wear. (photo by David Wake)

End-of-season contact with swift colleagues in other provinces explored the possibility of a trend towards swifts leaving roosts to head south earlier as the years go by. Seemingly, London is the only place in Canada that collects data throughout fall migration over multiple years at multiple swift roosts. London data may thus be an invaluable resource for any researchers seeking to document and better understand fall trends in swift numbers and migration timing. Such knowledge may have implications for swift conservation. Nature London, as a totally volunteer organization, can take pride in its contributions to swift science. Heartiest thanks go to the club's very competent and very dedicated crew of volunteer swift monitors.

16.0 Acknowledgements

The year 2023 was yet another banner year for the Nature London swift monitoring program. More than 65 volunteers helped during scheduled monitoring nights, about 50 forming the core group. Roles included primary observer, recorder, safety buddy, extra eyes, congenial companion, or all of the foregoing. Your ongoing enthusiasm for swifts and your willingness to be there when needed were key to the year's achievements. Thank you all!

A team of six oversaw the monitoring operation: Sandy and Ric Symmes, Glenn and Susan Berry, Dave and Winnie Wake. Special thanks to each one. A key component of the program's success has been frequent and meaningful volunteer engagement and support.

- Sandy and Ric created business cards and worked quietly behind the scenes, ensuring the Wufoo system was in place, offering expert advice and helping as needed.
- Glenn was in charge of the weekly schedule of monitoring assignments, a huge task that required multiple skills executed simultaneously. These included good naturedness, efficiency, the ability to solve problems quickly, computer proficiency, unflappability, patience, and more. A huge tip of the hat goes to Glenn.
- Susan worked tirelessly behind the scenes assisting Glenn and handling many of the writing and communications tasks that create a smoothly running admin function.
- Dave managed the database, generated from all the individual chimney reports entered each week via Wufoo. He turned data into tables that were sent out with the weekly reports to monitors. He also created all the graphs and tables and took many of the pictures that appear in this report. And he cheerfully handled endless rounds of trouble-shooting on many fronts.

All members of the team carried out many additional behind-the-scenes duties. THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

Nature London's one-of-a-kind swift-monitoring program is well respected elsewhere in Canada. Everyone, give yourselves a big pat on the back!

The Nature London swift team acknowledges with gratitude the financial, moral and other support of the club. We truly appreciate your faith in the work we have been doing to learn more about Chimney Swifts to better inform conservation action on their behalf.

We thank Ontario SwiftWatch (Birds Canada) for maintaining a provincial swift database. We also extend our appreciation to Yolanda Morbey and other researchers at Western for taking an interest in our London swift data set.

Thanks to the photographers whose pictures are used in this report: David Wake, Winifred Wake, John Emms, Susan Berry, Debbie Lefebvre, Connie Black (of Destined to Fly), and Le Nichoir Wild Bird Conservation Centre.

Below are the names of people who participated as monitors. We are aware that some additional volunteers helped in this way or in other ways. Even though your name may be missing, we still appreciate your contributions.

Congratulations and many, many thanks to all the team! You are the best !

Mackenzie Amlin, Marguerite Annen, Leslie Baker, Betsy Baldwin, Carolyn Beacroft, Glenn Berry, John Berry, Susan Berry, Jack Blocker, Erin Boynton, Garth Casbourn, Linda Chanyi, Jenn Como, Caitlin Daley, Mark Daley, Karin DeVries, Ruth Dickau, Joanne Does, Margo Does, Julia Eastabrook, Grace Edwards, Shelley Garner, Trish Gaudry, Barb Gibson, Sandy Grant, Shelagh Grant, Chris Guglielmo, Nora Guglielmo, Tim Hain, Rick Hayman, Stacey Jaczko, Stephen Jarrett, Miriam Love, Kathy Ludanyi, Carol MacKenzie, Yolanda Morbey, Ron Martin, Kathy McCoy, Gail McNeil, Jim Moorhead, Ros Moorhead, Mary Morris, Theresa Morrissey, John Ninness, Vianne Ninness, Reg Patterson, Blaine Prentice, Susan Price, Cathy Quinlan, Leslie Rockwell, Evelyn Rogers, Judy Shaw, Charles Spina, Susanne Sutherland, Ric Symmes, Sandy Symmes, Paul Thomas, Pat Tripp, David Wake, Winifred Wake, Emma-Lynne Wiegiersma, Frits Wiegiersma, Lynda Wiegiersma, Garry Williams, Heidi Williams, Glen Winegarden, and Barb Yeo.

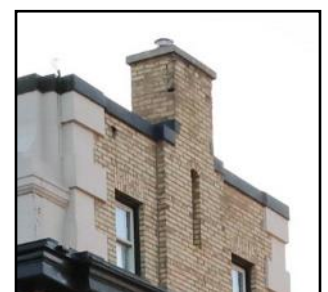
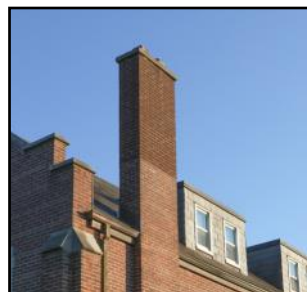
Sincere thanks are extended to owners who steward their chimneys with care and foresight, playing an essential role in keeping critical habitat available for swifts.

Finally, thank you to the Chimney Swifts. They are truly our *raison d'être* and our inspiration. They give us hope. These enigmatic little birds brighten our evenings with their exuberance and their commitment to survival, no matter what vicissitudes life throws their way. In the precarious future that lies before them, may our efforts to track numbers and chimney use in London help lead to improving prospects in the years ahead.

Happy Swiftling! 😊



Nature London's Chimney Swift organizing committee., Aug 31, 2023. L to R: Susan and Glenn Berry, Sandy and Ric Symmes, Winnie and Dave Wake.



New swift chimneys. Left: NE corner of O'Neil/Ridley Hall at Huron College (Jul 7, 2023). Right: a former bank in Strathroy (Jul 30, 2023); swifts enter via an open flue to the right of the aluminum topknot. (photos by David Wake)