

CHIMNEY SWIFT NESTING OUTCOMES IN ST ADOLPHE, MB, 2025

~ The Smokie Skies and Stealthy Swifts on the Fly Edition ~

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The annual monitoring report from St Adolphe is taking on new dimensions this year. It was a summer of record-breaking weather and record-breaking swift activity. Here is a summary of the St Adolphe Chimney Swifts' remarkable breeding season.

RECORD-BREAKING WEATHER – WILDFIRE SMOKE AND HEAT. In the summer of 2025, records for wildfire smoke reducing air quality and scorching heat were shattered (e.g., <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/winnipeg-wildfire-smoke-record-environment-canada-1.7600812> ; <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/winnipeg-weather-may-heat-record-1.7533172>). Those conditions impacted Chimney Swifts and their monitors. Here's a note from a July 29 monitoring sheet: "Air Quality = 10+; the smoke is thick and on the deck; have not see swifts in the air from the Club or at the Church area; have only seen the birds associated with events in and out of the SE Club chimney." Typical Chimney Swift activity patterns were altered during wildfire smoke and heat events. Often, adult swifts were not seen feeding or socializing locally and they were feeding their young less frequently than expected. A one-hour shift normally would include several feeding exchanges for non-brooded juveniles and that wasn't always happening. Using conventional standards for monitoring did not capture the real situation that was unfolding inside the chimney. Under these circumstances, more frequent and lengthier monitoring sessions may be advantageous, but it is also a challenge for monitors to be subjected to wildfire smoke and heat.

RECORD-BREAKING SWIFT ACTIVITY. On July 29, 2025 at 10:37 AM, I was moving from the Club Amical to the Church. As noted above, thick, irritating wildfire smoke hung low. It had been a difficult morning for swift monitors and swifts trying to feed. While heading east on the driveway leading to The Tower, which is situated in the Paroisse St Adolphe Parish Church field, an adult swift was seen to fly over The Tower, circle to the east, return low over the rim and drop in. WOW! At 10:54 AM, another swift buzzed the rim as it flew south. Then a similar unhesitant flare 'n' drop adult entry occurred at 10:55 AM. Importantly, 2 adults left together ~1 minute later. The swifts were able to safely exit The Tower. I'M GOBSMACKED! *The first observations of Chimney Swifts using one of the five MCSI-built original style 12' towers had been made.* After 17 years, without any observations of 12' tower use, why did those swifts decide that The Tower was now an attractive site? And just where did they arrive from?

Stealthy Swifts were in action so it was time to get eyes focussed on the rim! Tim Poole followed up with a daytime observation on August 10, then Barb Stewart and Frank Machovec & Jacquie Machovec carried on with daytime observations. Lewis Cocks and Frank monitored on the evening of August 12 and noted 3 swifts using The Tower during

the daytime preceding the roosting hour when 6 adults entered for the night. Tim and Linnea Poole monitored during the evening of August 16 and likely observed 2 fledglings using The Tower; 5 swifts roosted.

See MCSI Blogs: “An Update and A Surprise!”, Aug. 4; “Early August Recap”, Aug. 11; “Mid-August Updates”, Aug. 18; “End of August Recap”, Aug. 25.

(<https://www.mbchimneyswift.com/news-and-posts/>)

The fledgling plot thickened on September 17 when the St Adolphe ground crew assembled to observe contents inside The Tower. Physical evidence confirmed Chimney Swift use of The Tower. An entire nest had dropped to The Tower floor in the northwest corner; dark ½ egg shells equivalent to 4-5 hatched eggs were seen in that location. Moreover, there was an intact nest attached to the south wall of The Tower ~ below it was evidence of a more recent nesting attempt = whiter eggs: 1 unhatched and 2 hatched. No carcasses were seen. **Chimney Swifts had successfully used The Tower as a nest site in both 2024 and 2025!**

BACKING UP TO 2024 FOR A POSSIBLE PIVOT POINT. *Maybe* the arrival of The Swarm of from-away swifts at the Church in July 2024 was pivotal in the colonization of The Tower that year. *Perhaps* a variation of a Kansas City Shuffle was playing out = the swifts had us looking at the novel Church activity while some real stealth action was happening behind our backs at The Tower!

To refresh your memory, here is an excerpt from Marissa’s July 26, 2024 blog

(<https://www.mbchimneyswift.com/2024/07/>):

“However, there was a noticeable change in swift numbers in St Adolphe on July 19. While monitoring the Church site, Barb saw a group of about 16-17 swifts which is a higher count than has been accounted for this year. She has dubbed this group of swifts “The Swarm”. She knows they are adults (and not fledglings from the local nest sites) because of the easy-to-see moulting happening in the wings. She describes “*big gaps in the trailing wing margin plus very frayed wing tips*”. It’s the time of year when adult swifts are replacing their feathers, while fledglings will have brand new feathers that aren’t yet in need of replacing.

This new influx of adults must be a “pre-migratory grouping” – swifts that have arrived into St. Adolphe, on their way out of the breeding grounds and towards their wintering grounds down south. This pre-migratory grouping is noteworthy because of how early it is – the local nest site has not even fledged yet. Very interesting!

“The Swarm” brought some drama. On July 20, Barb was monitoring the Church and saw some typical feeding exchanges and the usual count of 3 swifts entering and exiting (breeding pair + helper). However, “The Swarm” then arrived, with a lot of low-level flyovers and “peer ‘n’ veers” at the chimney. They then began entering the chimney! She saw 12 consecutive entries within 90 seconds. Over the next 8 minutes, she counted 19 consecutive exits. This mass use of a chimney with an ongoing breeding attempt, by non-breeding swifts during the daytime, is an unprecedented observation for Barb and was certainly worrying – how might this impact the breeding pair + helper + young that have yet to fledge? A monitoring session on Sunday with a lack of typical feeding patterns led Barb to fear a nest failure.

On July 24, Barb completed 3 monitoring sessions to try and understand what was happening here. Here is her executive summary:

“Session 1 – 05:20 to 7:20 AM: three birds were accounted for; max seen was 2 exiting the Church chimney together; the activity pattern included three consecutive entries and three consecutive exits, suggesting that the breeding pair and helper were onsite feeding. Some juveniles have survived.

Session 2 – 10:20 to 12:00 noon: The Swarm was active – 13+ swifts were accounted for; Drop ‘n’ veer, tilt ‘n’ veer flyovers etc. telegraphed interest with something(s) inside the chimney; small groups of 3-4 dropped into the chimney from the swarm and exited into the swarm. Single entry/exits took place = likely feeding events but the swarm activity tends to mask this.

Session 3 – 8:36-8:52 PM (daytime) then 8:52-9:52 PM (roosting hour; sunset 9:22 PM): single entry/exits during the daytime. Roosting entries began at 9 PM – the total for the night =14! Rob was instrumental in doing sky counts as I did rim watching...our “swifts in + sky counts” totalled 14 during the roosting hour, so we feel confident all the birds flying about roosted in the Church.”.

And a summary of swift count timeline: *“The baseline count in St A was 12 before the influx of from-away birds on July 19th; the peak count was 19 last weekend; yesterday the max count was 14, so 5 swifts have shuffled along. There are at least 3 ST*

A birds still in town = breeding pair and helper. The other 11 could be some combo of St A swifts + from-aways.” This situation is fascinating and unprecedented...”

THE TOWER HISTORY. The original St Adolphe tower was completed by mason Tony Smith on June 7, 2008. Situated at the Old Ferry Site (RM of Ritchot property due north of the Main St home then owned by Arthur & Suzanne Leclerc), the open topped, cinder block 12' tower was made using Kyle & Kyle specifications. This design is used very successfully by swifts in the southern US (see link to the Kyle's book in <https://www.mbchimneyswift.com/chimney-swift-towers/>). No interest was paid to the tower by the St Adolphe Chimney Swifts. Investigations showed the tower had poor thermal stability and was soaked internally by heavy rains, so it seemed unsuitable as a Manitoba nest site. The tower base started to sink in one corner and it was discovered to have been put over an old drainage conduit that was used historically to drain wastewater from the Church and adjacent Convent to the Red River. Bob Stefaniuk, then Reeve of the RM of Ritchot, sponsored the lifting and relocation of the tower in 2010. A first attempt to move the tower, made by Dan Ross on October 18, resulted in the deflation of a very expensive tire on the John Deere TC44H wheel loader. A new tire supported the next fork lift attempt on October 20. Paul Dumont, aided by Louis Rouire, picked up the tower and gingerly drove it across the road. The new site at the Church field, owned by the Paroisse St Adolphe Parish, was chosen by parishioners Hubert Brodeur and Auguste Lagasse. Parishioner Leon Verhaeghe assisted with preparing/leveling the pad and constructing the retaining wall. Mason Bill Anderson, and assistant Randy, added a new brick exterior to the tower November 3-6, 2010 with the goal to improve thermal stability. A sun/rain shield (made to Kyle specifications) and redesigned cleanout trap panels to improve air flow were built by Rob Stewart and installed on May 26, 2011 by Auguste Lagasse, Frank Machovec, Jacquie Machovec, Barb Stewart, Rob Stewart, Ryan Stewart and Leon Verhaeghe (see "Renovations at Swift Tower", May 29, 2011; <https://www.mbchimneyswift.com/2011/05/>). The final landscaping and signage installations were supported by Blue Grass Sod Producers, Sage Garden and the Lady Gray'I Trust. For many years, Chimney Swifts continued to snub use of the upgraded tower although follow-the-leader style flyovers were seen annually, especially in late June when non-resident birds moved through St Adolphe.

LONG TERM MONITORING OF FIVE NEST SITES IN ST ADOLPHE. Behaviour observations of Chimney Swifts using five nest sites in four historical St Adolphe buildings were made for the 19th consecutive year (see summary below). In 2025, all sites were occupied and breeding pairs moved through nest building, egg laying, incubation, and hatching stages. Unfortunately, nest failures began in early July and by mid-month nests of brooded juveniles were lost at the Church, NE Club Amical, and Brodeur Bros./Daycare. Fortunately, the breeding pair at the SE Club Amical nest site prevailed, assisted by a helper, and 2 fledglings took their first flights outside the chimney August 11. Good news continued with the Main St nesting attempt appearing successful based on cleanout trap evidence.

The 2025 Church nesting attempt had failed before 6 swifts “from away” arrived in St Adolphe on July 20 and were seen using the Church during the daytime. That was similar timing of new arrivals to St Adolphe in 2024 (The Swarm mentioned above).

From Marissa’s July 21, 2025 blog: “**Church:** The Church nest failed earlier this month. Interestingly, on July 20, Barb caught sight of a swift exiting the Church chimney with her peripheral vision. Within 30 seconds, she saw a total of 6 swifts exit the chimney... Who are these swifts, and what are they doing? Very strange, but not totally unfamiliar....

In Barb’s words: “*There seems to be a replay from the CHSW playbook – a year to the day! Cast your thoughts back to exactly 1 year ago when a swarm of swifts started using the Church chimney as a premigratory roost before the Church nestlings had fledged (End Of July Update July 2024; <https://www.mbchimneyswift.com/2024/07/>)”*

WHAT’S NEXT? The last swift seen in St Adolphe this year was a bird exiting from The Tower on the morning of August 21. The last known Manitoba swifts, a late-breeding pair, left Selkirk in mid-September. Our swifts winter in the Amazon Basin and begin to migrate north in early March. Crossing the Gulf of Mexico, the birds arrive in the southern US – Texas to Florida – then continue north as they distribute themselves through the summer breeding range. We can look forward to hearing the characteristic chittering of Chimney Swifts in early to mid-May as they race about St Adolphe skies.

New trends need investigating. The colonization of The Tower and shifting dynamics of premigratory swifts arriving in the third week of July are noteworthy. Departure dates at the end of the season vary between years (Stewart and Stewart 2023; https://www.mbchimneyswift.com/Documents/bluejay_winter2023.pdf). For the 2014-2022 breeding seasons, unsuccessful and successful Chimney Swifts typically left St Adolphe on August 2 and August 14 respectively. This was 5-6 days earlier compared to the 2007-2013 breeding seasons when unsuccessful and successful Chimney Swifts typically departed on August 7 and August 20 respectively. This year, later fledging in mid-August (nominally August 11-16) was the trend, so a large number of swifts were flying about much later in the season once more. Clearly, Chimney Swifts have some capacity to adapt to ever changing environmental conditions such as intense wildfire smoke and heat events. We have to learn from the swifts, adapt our approaches to monitor the birds accurately, understand the conditions required for them to breed successfully and provide suitable habitat for their needs.

In 2026, MCSI will be celebrating 20 years of Chimney Swift outreach, monitoring, habitat stewardship and research activities. I am looking forward to meeting up at The Tower and other chimney sides in St Adolphe next year for more swift experiences and learning opportunities. Those Stealthy Chimney Swifts at The Tower will be monitored with Eagle Eyes!

Merci et thank you to our swift-friendly landlords and tenants: the new homeowners of Main St, Alexia and Darien Krasnesky; Paroisse St. Adolphe Parish; the RM of Ritchot; and the St Adolphe Child Care Centre. Your support of this Manitoba Chimney Swift Initiative research program and St. Adolphe's Chimney Swifts is appreciated! Many thanks also to the St Adolphe ground crew for assisting in the all-important monitoring and Tower inspection/upkeep: Marissa Berard, Lewis Cocks, Frank Machovec, Jacquie Machovec, Linnea Poole, Tim Poole and Rob Stewart.

Summary of Chimney Swift breeding outcomes, for six St. Adolphe nest sites in 2025. These results are based on 62.5 hours of observations.

SITE	NESTING ATTEMPT?	OUTCOME OF NESTING ATTEMPT
SE CLUB AMICAL	YES	SUCCESSFUL; behaviour observations estimate 2 fledglings on August 11; helper present.
NE CLUB AMICAL	YES	UNSUCCESSFUL; failed at feeding brooded juvenile stage, July 15; helper present.
BRODEUR BROS./ DAYCARE	YES	UNSUCCESSFUL; failed at feeding brooded juvenile stage, mid-July; no helper detected.
CHURCH	YES	UNSUCCESSFUL; failed at feeding brooded juvenile stage, July 7-8; helper likely.
MAIN ST.	YES	SUCCESSFUL; fledging date unknown; helper status unknown.
TOWER (LOCATED IN THE CHURCH FIELD; MCSI ORIGINAL STYLE - T3)	YES	<p>SUCCESSFUL 2025 NESTING ATTEMPT (based on behaviour observations and cleanout trap evidence); breeding pair and helper observed during the daytime; 2 fledglings using site August 16; 1 unhatched egg and 2 hatched eggs; no carcasses. Nest attached to south wall of Tower above eggs. Additional roosting adults observed pre-fledging; site designated as combination nest/roost site. THESE ARE THE FIRST OBSERVATIONS OF USE OF ANY OF THE FIVE ORIGINAL-STYLE 12' TOWERS BUILT BY MCSI IN 2008.</p> <p>SUCCESSFUL NESTING ATTEMPT IN 2024 INDICATED (based on cleanout trap evidence only); 4-5 hatched eggs; no carcasses. Nest dropped in northwest corner of Tower beside eggs. THIS IS NOMINALLY THE FIRST SEASON OF USE OF THE ST ADOLPHE TOWER.</p>

Behaviour observations plus the physical evidence seen in cleanout traps were used to assess nesting success at the Brodeur Bros./Daycare, Main St., and Tower sites. Only behaviour observations were available to assess nesting success at the SE Club Amical, NE Club Amical, and the Church sites as there are no accessible cleanout traps associated with those chimneys.