



Maritimes Swiftwatch Newsletter

Fall/Winter 2011

The pilot season of Maritimes Swiftwatch officially began on the weekend of May 28 with a Chimney Swift presentation at Temperance Street Elementary School in New Glasgow, for the Nova Scotia Bird Society AGM. Karen Potter (Environment Canada), Ken McKenna (Pictou Co. Naturalists) and I spoke to 80 bird society members and swift enthusiasts about Chimney Swift biology, threats, why open chimneys are important, and what we can do to help conserve swifts in our communities. The presentations were followed by a trip outside to watch more than 270 swifts fly down the large school chimney to roost. This event garnered a fair bit of media attention which, together with other presentations, interviews and notices posted on community bulletins, helped raise the profile of Chimney Swifts in the Maritimes. This is an encouraging start to the program and something we hope to build on in 2012.

Evening Roost Monitoring

The first of six scheduled evening roost watches began on May 29, when Swiftwatchers covered eighteen sites across Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Throughout the season we added sites, and dropped others, depending on swift activity. Over 30 participants contributed evening roost watches on scheduled Swift Watch dates, and on many nights between. The casual observations submitted by volunteers were especially helpful as they allowed us to gauge whether the six dates adequately covered spring and fall migration (see attached figures). Participants also shared daytime observations and searched for additional sites in communities where Chimney Swifts have been observed flying, such as Cambridge-Narrows, NB. Naturalists also shared over 30 sightings of Chimney Swifts not associated with any specific chimney, many in southern New Brunswick.

We identified an additional 5 roosts and nest sites over the season, which we hope to add to the roster of sites to be surveyed in 2012. Chimney Swifts were notably absent from two historically important roost sites. The Enterprise Building in Fredericton, NB reported zero swifts and the NS Agricultural College in Bible Hill reported one single swift entering the chimney.

Chimney Inventory and Assessment

In November I joined a group of keen volunteers in Wolfville, NS to pilot our Chimney Inventory and Assessment protocol, which was created to address questions about urban habitat quality and availability. We surveyed for two days and covered the entire town of Wolfville, documenting the number of chimneys that were open and recording characteristics of open chimneys. Next spring, we will conduct additional surveys in Wolfville to find out which available chimneys swifts are using. From this, we will develop a protocol to use across the Maritimes and which will help us gain a broader picture of the types of chimneys swifts are choosing to use, and equally important, what chimneys they avoid.

Roost Destruction

Unfortunately, the large, freestanding chimney behind the mercantile building in Sussex, NB was torn down in November, thus eliminating an important roost site that has hosted over 300 Chimney Swifts on one night. Swiftwatch staff and partners are working together to determine what, if any, actions can be taken to mitigate this loss. BSC, together with project partners and local naturalists, plans to conduct a Chimney Inventory/Assessment to determine whether there are any nearby alternative roost structures. If you wish to participate, please contact us at marswifts@birdscanada.org

Coming Up This Year

Bird Studies Canada (BSC) plans to introduce a new student education and stewardship program to Maritime schools. *Students for Swifts* will work with schools that host Chimney Swifts, conducting workshops and presentations, as well as using live video cameras installed inside the chimney, to teach staff and students about the birds that share their schools. BSC is currently participating in an online funding competition through Shell Canada's FuellingChange program, where our project, Students for a Swift Recovery, is competing for popular support. Voting is open to all Canadians, and we encourage Swiftwatchers to visit the website (www.fuellingchange.com) to learn more about BSC's project, register for a free account, and vote in support of the project.

Online Data Entry and Website

Maritimes Swiftwatch now has a website that features information on Chimney Swifts, links to other swift projects, and downloadable project materials. Check it out at <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/volunteer/acswifts/index.jsp?targetpg=index&lang=EN>. Online data entry will be available for the 2012 season for those who prefer to submit data digitally. Instructions for online data entry will be sent out before the start of Swiftwatch 2012.

Chimney Swift Nest and Bird Salvage

Swiftwatch is looking for used Chimney Swift nests and specimens to mount for teaching and display. Chimney Swifts are protected by the Migratory Birds Convention Act and the Species at Risk Act, so collection and possession of carcasses and used nests requires a salvage permit issued by the Canadian Wildlife Service. As a permit holder, Swiftwatch has been authorized to salvage Chimney Swift carcasses and nests and can nominate others to do so as well. Please contact Swiftwatch for more information and guidelines for collecting and submitting nests and specimens.

Volunteering in 2012

We were very fortunate to have a dedicated team of volunteers in 2011, and we would like to extend our thanks to all of you for making Swiftwatch's pilot year a success. We hope to build on the success of our volunteers in 2012 and expand the program to include more sites to watch. We also hope to take on more swiftwatchers this up-coming season to fill those watches.

We have included a short volunteer survey with this newsletter. Please take a moment to fill out the survey and return it to Maritimes Swiftwatch (by mail, fax or email). Your feedback will help us grow and improve the Swiftwatch program.

We Need Your Contact Information!

Please include your contact information in your completed survey (see back side of survey form). This ensures that Swiftwatch participants are using the most up-to-date survey materials, and receive newsletters, protocols, data forms and other materials. It will also allow BSC to provide you with a unique login ID, which is used to enter data online for Swiftwatch as well as other BSC programs. If you already have an ID through other projects such as the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas or Nocturnal Owl Survey, you can use that same ID for Swiftwatch.

To read BSC's full Privacy Statement, please visit the BSC website at:

<http://www.birdscanada.org/shopping/privacy.html>

Acknowledgements

Thank-you to our Partners: Environment Canada, NatureNB, Nova Scotia Bird Society, Blomiodon Naturalists Society, Mersey Tobetic Research Institute, Pictou Naturalists Club, Ecology Action Centre.

Maritimes Swiftwatch gratefully acknowledges funding from: NB Wildlife Trust Fund, NS Habitat Conservation Fund, and the Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk.

Figure 1: Number of Chimney Swifts counted during evening roost watches at seventeen regularly monitored sites (*n/a denotes no survey conducted).

	Province	Town or Location	Swiftwatch Site	29-May	2-June	6-June	24-July	28-July	1-August
1	NS	St. Bernard/Weymouth	Church	101	77	120	188	181	170
2	NS	McGowan Lake	Unused smithy	87	124	119	n/a	74	37
3	NS	Middleton	School	91	123	183	154	234	254
4	NS	Wolfville	Robie Tufts Nature Centre	62	82	62	51	52	48
5	NS	Upper Falmouth	House	7	7	9	56	200	92
6	NS	Martock	House	2	n/a	2	0	0	0
7	NS	Bible Hill	Nova Scotia Agricultural College	1	0	0	0	0	1
8	NS	New Glasgow	School	228	271	517	223	262	223
9	NS	Oxford	Freestanding chimney	2	0	2	5	8	9
10	NB	Sussex	Freestanding chimney	173	197	302	245	218	153
11	NB	Fredericton	University of New Brunswick	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	NB	Island View /forest nursery	House/office	0	0	2	3	n/a	n/a
13	NB	Sainte-Anne-de-Madawaska	Church	34	5	2	0	0	0
14	NB	Sainte-Anne-de-Madawaska	School	n/a	n/a	n/a	84	91	41
15	NB	Bathurst	Former post office	242	108	127	102	123	2
16	NB	Paquetville	Church	1	n/a	5	2	2	2
17	NB	Hampton	Former post office	n/a	n/a	n/a	46	47	31
		TOTAL		1031	994	1452	1159	1492	1063

Figure 2: Additional roost sites monitored on a casual basis, including locations where a specific roost chimney has not yet been identified.

	Province	Site	Building Type
1	NS	Bear River	community centre (capped)
2	NS	Halifax Kings College	multiple buildings scouted
3	NS	Mabou	church
4	NB	Sussex	private residence
5	NB	Fredericton	private residence
6	NB	St. Martins	private residence
7	NB	Cambridge Narrows	multiple buildings scouted
8	NB	Memramcook	multiple buildings scouted