

# Ontario SwiftWatch Monitoring Protocol

The primary goal of Ontario SwiftWatch is to identify as many active Chimney Swift nest and roost sites Ontario. Knowing the locations and status of each of these sites will assist in the conservation and stewardship of Chimney Swifts and their habitat.

## What are SwiftWatch Monitoring Activities?

- Presence/Absence Surveys are conducted to determine the presence of nesting or roosting Chimney Swifts, or chimney activity. The goal is to determine every active chimney within a given survey area.
- A National Population Monitoring Blitz is performed twice (over two, 3-day periods) to calculate population trends for Chimney Swifts in Canada

## Why are the SwiftWatch Monitoring Activities important?

- Presence/Absence surveys help determine the number of occupied chimneys within the surveyed areas, and assist in the protection and stewardship of existing nest and roosting chimneys.
- The National Population Blitz helps identify provincial and national trends in Canada's breeding population of Chimney Swifts, and will help researchers determine if Chimney Swift populations continue to decline, are stable, are increasing, and if there are any specific geographic locations associated with these trends.

## Where do I perform the SwiftWatch Monitoring Activities?

- With the assistance of your Regional Coordinator, every volunteer will choose a survey area within your community, and subsequently plan a survey route that traverses the entire area passing by all potential Chimney Swift nest and roost habitat within your survey area. The size of each survey route will depend on chimney density and volunteer preference, but you must be able to cover the entire route on foot in a 65 minute period.
- **Large City Adjustment:** Consult with your regional coordinator for a list of pre-determined "potential" chimneys in your area. Please ensure that your route passes by all likely habitat sites on this list. If incorporating all the sites on the list is not possible, a volunteer may start with the high priority sites only (i.e. schools, older industrial stacks, historic buildings, and downtown commercial buildings).

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- To participate in the National Population Monitoring Blitz volunteers (or volunteer teams) choose a single roost to count, and report, the total number of Chimney Swifts seen entering the chimney on each night of the blitz.

### How do I record information during the surveys?

- The **Presence/Absence Worksheet** (PA Worksheet) provides you with the means to track all chimneys where you observe swifts entering or exiting (**Example on pg. 6**). There is no need to submit the worksheet to Ontario SwiftWatch. It is a tool for you, and your Regional Coordinator, to keep track of the active/observed sites within your survey area. You will use this worksheet throughout the season, filling in details of Chimney Swift activity as the season progresses.
- A **SwiftWatch Data Entry Form** is filled out, and submitted, for every active site identified (**Example on pg. 7**). They can also be used to report your count data recorded during the national blitz nights, and on any optional population monitoring your Swiftwatch Community chooses to conduct.
- Please submit hard copies of your observations at the end of the season, to your regional coordinator. Before doing so, we encourage all volunteers to first submit their results electronically using the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/OntarioSwiftWatch>

### When do I do perform SwiftWatch Monitoring Activities?

- The amount of surveys conducted should be based on volunteer availability and schedules. However, we ask that that Presence/Absence surveys are performed at least once a week during the following stages of the Chimney Swifts life cycle:
  - **Spring Migration** May 14<sup>th</sup> – May 26<sup>th</sup>;
  - **Nesting** June 9<sup>th</sup>- June 25<sup>th</sup>;
  - **Roosting** July 7<sup>th</sup> – July 23<sup>rd</sup>;
  - **Fall Migration** August 4<sup>th</sup> – August 18<sup>th</sup>;
- The National Population Monitoring Blitz occurs twice over a season; the spring migration blitz starts on the last Sunday of May each year, and continues twice more 4 and 8 days after your first night of observations. The fall blitz follows the same pattern, and starts on the last Sunday in July.

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- The 2012 Survey Dates are as follows:
  - **National Spring Migration Blitz:** May 27, May 31, and June 4;
  - **National Fall Migration Blitz:** July 29, August 2, and August 6;

## Ontario SwiftWatch Survey Instructions

### Step 1: Planning your activities

- In consultation with your local Regional Coordinator each volunteer will be assigned an area of the city when you join the program. Your goal as a SwiftWatch volunteer is to plan a survey route through this area that will pass by all potential Chimney Swift nest and roosting sites (i.e. open chimneys).
- Volunteers work with their partner and determine the dates to conduct Presence/Absence Surveys (at least once a week during the previously mentioned survey periods, include a few “rain dates” as well).
- **Large City Adjustment:** When given their survey area, each volunteer will also be given a list of potentially active chimneys.
- **Large City Adjustment:** This site list is compiled based on known of Chimney Swift habitat preferences, but these chimneys have not been verified. You may find that some addresses do not actually have open chimneys while unlisted address may include appropriate locations. Note these on your PA Worksheet and report them to your regional coordinator.

### Step 2: Day-time route check

- Walk your route at least once during daylight hours to identify suitable chimneys before your first official evening observations. Record the locations of potential chimneys on your PA Worksheet, You will use this worksheet during the entire season to keep track of what chimneys have been surveyed and/or confirmed active. Allow yourself extra time on this trip to ensure no potential chimneys are missed.
- Potential sites are open chimneys (no caps or animal guards) on buildings and/or in locations that look to be appropriate for chimney swifts to nest or roost in. All open chimneys can are considered suitable, but our current research shows that Chimney Swifts tend to select longer, larger chimneys situated on non-residential buildings (i.e. schools, older industrial sites, historic buildings, and downtown commercial buildings).

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- **Large City Adjustment:** Make sure to include the addresses on your PA Worksheet of potential sites that may not have been included on listed on your original list of likely active chimneys

### Step 3: Determining presence of Chimney Swifts

- At least twice during each of the four survey periods, start your survey, each night, 45 minutes before sunset moving along your route and noting any Chimney Swift activity you observe on the PA Worksheet (i.e. did you see swifts flying overhead? circling a chimney? or entering a chimney?).
- To determine your local sunset time use the following link;
  - <http://www.theweathernetwork.com/weather/>)

### Step 4: Recording Chimney Use

- When you encounter an open chimney, or a chimney with a lot of swift activity around it (i.e. swifts can be heard or seen in the vicinity and they swoop low over an open chimney to look inside), mark the presence of birds flying over the chimney on your PA Worksheet.
- Watch the chimney until you see a swift enter/exit or until it is too dark to see swifts, whichever comes first. Mark the presence/number of birds you observe entering the chimney on your PA Worksheet.
- Use the SwiftWatch Data Entry Form to record the following information:
  - Site address and/or GPS coordinates
  - Date of visit
  - Time observations were made (i.e. time you saw swifts entering the chimney)
  - Number of birds seen entering the chimney
- Continue surveying the route until 20 minutes after sunset or until it is too dark to see swifts. Try to plan a route you can complete in a single evening. If this is not possible for some reason, try to finish the route you started within a few days of your first attempt.

### Step 5: Complete the SwiftWatch Season

- Repeat your presence/absence survey route a minimum of twice for each of the four predetermined survey period. Don't spend a lot of time watching chimneys already identified as active but do keep an eye on them for changes in swift activity. By the end of the monitoring season, you should have a list of active habitat sites for your entire route, recorded on your PA Worksheet (s) and a completed Ontario SwiftWatch Data Form for each chimney identified as active.

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## Step 6: Returning Your Data to BSC

- At the end of the SwiftWatch season enter your active site information online using: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/OntarioSwiftWatch>, and submit hardcopies of both your SwiftWatch Data Forms and PA Worksheet (s) your regional coordinator.

## Monitoring Safety

- Work in pairs, bring a cell phone with you, let a friend or family member know where you are and when you plan to return;
- Keep in mind that you will finish well after sunset, wear light colours or bright reflective clothing, have a flashlight with you and leave your vehicle in a well-lit parking lot and/or safely out of traffic;
- Do not survey during thunderstorms, the Chimney Swifts will not be out and neither should you;
- Monitor your route from the sidewalk or other public places.
- If in doubt – don't survey. If you feel you are in an unsafe situation, please leave immediately and use your cell phone to call for help. IF you feel the area should never be surveyed contact your regional coordinator and/or the Ontario Volunteer Coordinator and ensure the site is flagged as unsafe.

## Final words from Bird Studies Canada

Thank you for participating in this important program. With over 63% of Canada's Chimney Swifts breeding in Ontario many people are needed to ensure that Chimney Swift nesting and roosting sites are known and that Chimney Swift population monitoring is accurate. You help with research and conservation of this unique urban species cannot be underestimated.

If you have any questions or concerns please don't hesitate to contact: Kathy Jones, Ontario Volunteer Coordinator at [volunteer@birdscanada.org](mailto:volunteer@birdscanada.org) or 1-888-448-2473 ext. 124

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## Example Chimney Inventory Worksheet

Observer Name: Elisabeth van Stam  
 Observer Contact: evanstam@bsc-eoc.org  
 City: Tillsonburg

Site Address	# Swifts Seen Flying Overhead	# Swifts Seen Entering Chimney	Date	Time	Comments
123 Main Street	10	0	05/14/2012	20:24	No entrances observed, but chimney looks promising. Should return to this chimney at later date
45 Alley Street	2	2	05/14/2012	20:28	Confirmed CHSW Presence
65 Dundas Street, East Chimney	2	0	05/14/2012	N/A	No entrances observed, but chimney looks promising. keep an eye on it for the next survey period
65 Dundas Street, West Chimney	2	2	05/14/2012	20:45	Confirmed CHSW presence, suspect nest site
173 Jackson Street	~ 75	68	05/14/2012	20:58	Confirmed CHSW presence, suspect roost site
20 Letson Avenue	0	0	05/14/2012	21:05	No activity noted, keep an eye on it for the next survey period
123 Main Street	3	3	06/11/2012	20:35	Confirmed CHSW presence, suspect nest site
65 Dundas Street, East Chimney	2	0	06/11/2012	N/A	No entrances observed, likely not used and swifts seen overhead are from west chimney. Keep an eye on it for the next survey period just to be sure
20 Letson Avenue	0	0	06/11/2012	N/A	No activity noted, keep an eye on it for the next survey period
86 Main Street	~34	29	06/11/2012	21:15	New chimney, confirmed CHSW presence, suspect roost site

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## Example Ontario SwiftWatch Data Form

Please complete one form for each nest/roost site

**Observer Name:** Elisabeth van Stam  
**Observer Contact:** evanstam@bsc-eoc.org  
**Province:** Ontario  
**City:** Tillsonburg  
**Site Address:** 1023 Main Street  
**GPS Coordinates (Decimal Degrees):** 42.859360 N, -80.731127 W

### Visit Details:

Visit #	Date (dd-mm-yy)			Time (24hr)				Total Individuals Overhead	Total Individuals Entering Chimney	Precip.	Wind	Cloud	Comments
1	29	05	2 0 1 2	2 1 0 0	89	75	None	0	2	Birds seen flying West just before entrance			
2	2	06	2 0 1 2	2 1 0 4	100	93	None	1	1	Activity at site already happening 45 minutes before sunset			
3	6	06	2 0 1 2	2 1 0 8	179	142	None	1	1	Birds turned up right at sunset, entrance fairly quick			
4	24	07	2 0 1 2	2 0 4 5	45	41	None	2	3				
5	28	07	2 0 1 2	2 0 4 1	56	46	None	1	2				
6	1	08	2 0 1 2	2 0 3 7	52	51	None	3	0				
7													
8													

### Weather Details:

#### Precipitation

None  
Trace  
Rain

#### Wind (Beaufort Scale)

0 Calm, smoke rises vertically  
 1 Light air movement, smoke drifts  
 2 Slight breeze, wind felt on face  
 3 Gentle breeze, small twigs move  
 4 Moderate breeze, small branches move  
 5 Fresh breeze, small trees sway  
 6 Strong breeze, large branches in motion

#### Cloud Cover

1 0-25%  
 2 25-50%  
 3 50-75%  
 4 75-100%  
 5 Fog

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