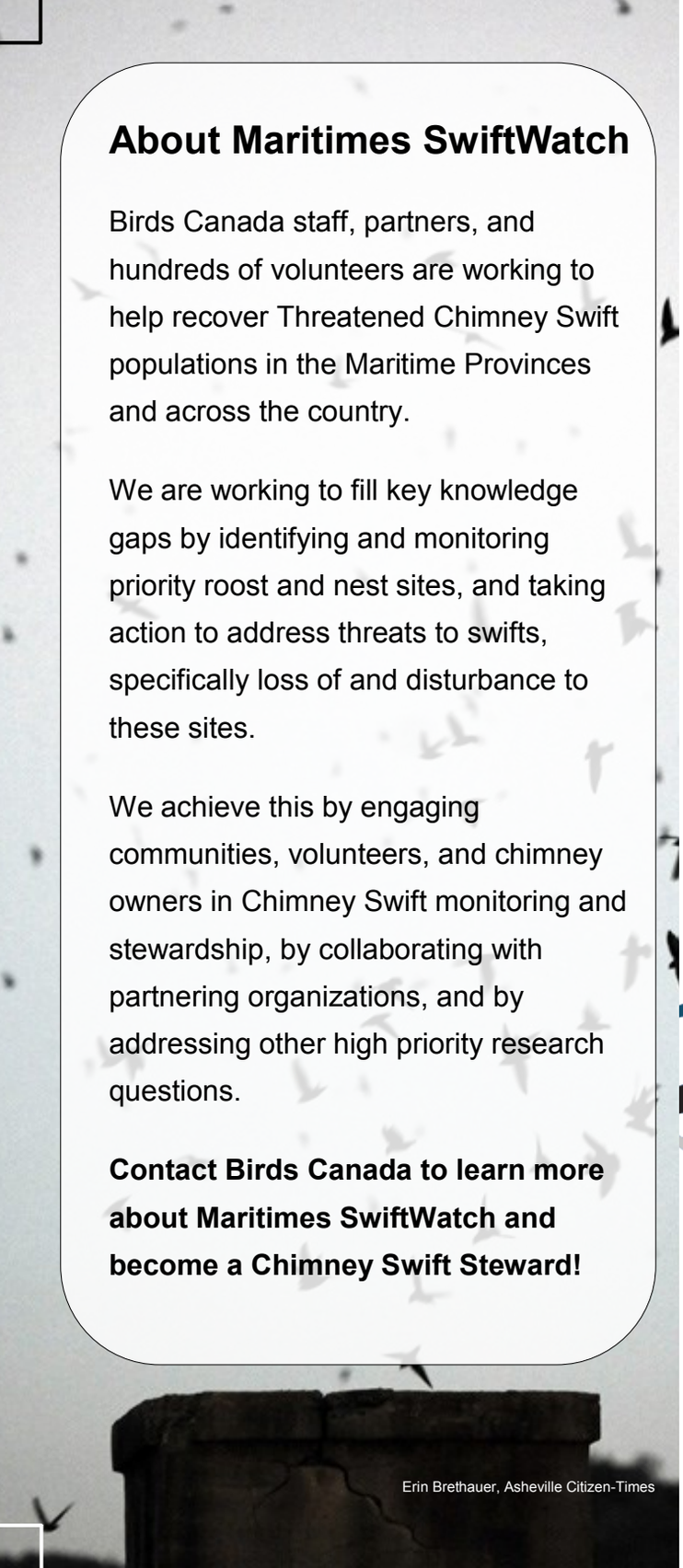
About Maritimes SwiftWatch

Birds Canada staff, partners, and hundreds of volunteers are working to help recover Threatened Chimney Swift populations in the Maritime Provinces and across the country.

We are working to fill key knowledge gaps by identifying and monitoring priority roost and nest sites, and taking action to address threats to swifts, specifically loss of and disturbance to these sites.

We achieve this by engaging communities, volunteers, and chimney owners in Chimney Swift monitoring and stewardship, by collaborating with partnering organizations, and by addressing other high priority research questions.

Contact Birds Canada to learn more about Maritimes SwiftWatch and become a Chimney Swift Steward!



Erin Brethauer, Asheville Citizen-Times

Project Partners

BIRDS CANADA Your Voice for Birds

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Supporters

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Canada

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Maritimes SwiftWatch

How to be a good Chimney Swift host

Bruce DiLabio

BIRDS CANADA
Your Voice for Birds

Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) are tiny, fast-flying birds capable of devouring thousands of insects per day, helping control populations of mosquitoes, flies, and other insects!

Swifts are often mistaken for other birds like swallows and starlings. However, unlike other birds, swifts have very short legs and cannot perch or walk so are almost always seen flying.

Tree Swallow **Chimney Swift** European Starling

Historically, Chimney Swifts used hollow trees but this habitat has become scarce. Now, Chimney Swifts use chimneys as communal roosts during migration . From May until August, hundreds of swifts roost together overnight in these roost chimneys.

Adult swifts leave roosts in June to nest but return in July and August with their young. Chimney Swifts nest in chimneys and other dark, sheltered sites such as barns and large sheds. Unlike roost sites, each nest site hosts only one swift nest. Nesting swifts attach their tiny (10 cm wide) nest to vertical surfaces such as brick or wood using glue-like saliva.

Advances in technology have greatly reduced the need for traditional brick and mortar chimneys, so many landowners have retrofitted or demolished these chimneys.

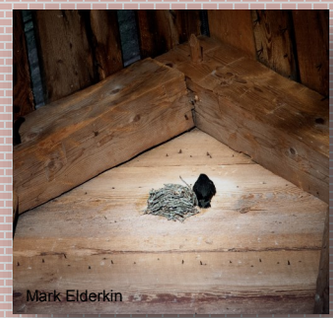
New chimneys are narrower, lined with metal, and/or capped, rendering them unsuitable for Chimney Swift nesting or roosting.

However, it is possible to maintain chimneys in a way that is safe and healthy for both people and swifts.

Common concerns addressed:

No Fire Hazard: Only one tiny nest is built per chimney. It does not block the chimney, and often detaches over the winter. It does not pose a fire hazard.

No Health Risk: Only one nesting pair occupies a chimney. They spend most of the time outside hunting insects and do not present a health risk to homeowners, nor do they create a substantial mess in the chimney.



Minimal Noise: Chimney swifts usually have four or five chicks per year, which make a dry rattling sound when begging for food. This nesting stage usually lasts less than two weeks.

How to search for Swifts:

- Check **chimney cleanout** and smoke shelf for feathers, or nest bowl or egg fragments.
- Listen for hissing, chittering, or rattling sounds in your chimney or high up in your barn.
- Look for birds flying in and out of your chimney or barn during the day.
- Look for swift nests in the highest, darkest corner of your barn, often above a window.

I think I have swifts! What should I do?

- Avoid using your fireplace or furnace from early May through September.
- Keep the fireplace damper closed when not in use.
- Contact Birds Canada to let us know about your swifts!

Tips for being a good Chimney Swift host:

- Avoid cleaning or repairing your chimney between May and September.
- If you are converting to a gas furnace or hot water heater, consider venting these through a different chimney than the one swifts are using.
- If raccoons or squirrels are a concern, prevent access by adding a 60 cm band of metal flashing to the outside of your chimney, just below the top.
- Install a small 'roof' high enough above the top of the chimney (about 30 cm) to allow swifts to enter while keeping out rain.
- If your chimney is already lined with metal, keep it capped to prevent swifts and other wildlife from entering and getting trapped.
- **Remember, because Chimney Swifts are protected under federal and provincial acts it is against the law to disturb, kill, or collect adults, nestlings, nests, or eggs.**

To learn more, visit:

www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/swiftwatch