

“Do you hear chirping in your chimney?”



© George Peck

**MANY HOMEOWNERS ARE UNAWARE**

**THEY SHARE THEIR CHIMNEYS**

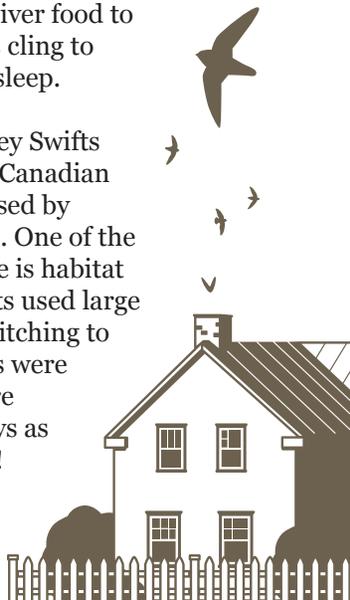
**WITH A THREATENED SPECIES,**

**THE CHIMNEY SWIFT.**

Some homeowners are concerned about having a Chimney Swift nest in their chimney. It is important to remember that a Chimney Swift nest is not known to damage chimneys, block the flue or pose a fire hazard. In fact, a swift nest is only 10-cm wide! Only one pair of swifts nest in a chimney at a time. In addition, Chimney Swifts are not known to pose a health hazard to homeowners.

Chimney Swifts cannot perch or walk like other birds. Instead, they fly all day. Swifts only visit the chimney during daytime to incubate eggs or deliver food to chicks. At night, swifts cling to the chimney wall and sleep.

Unfortunately, Chimney Swifts are disappearing. The Canadian population has decreased by nearly 90% since 1970. One of the reasons for this decline is habitat loss. Historically, swifts used large hollow trees before switching to chimneys when forests were cut down. Now they are quickly losing chimneys as well. But you can help!



*For more information about Species at Risk contact:*

**Canadian Wildlife Service – Ontario Region**  
P. 613-990-8355  
E. [ec.faune.ontariowildlife.ontario.ec@Canada.ca](mailto:ec.faune.ontariowildlife.ontario.ec@Canada.ca)

**Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks**  
For rules applying to altering a chimney:  
[tinyurl.com/rr4sx5j](http://tinyurl.com/rr4sx5j)

*For more information about Chimney Swifts, contact Ontario SwiftWatch:*

**Birds Canada**  
P.O. Box 160, 115 Front St.  
Port Rowan, ON N0E 1M0  
P. 519-586-3531  
E. [ontarioswiftwatch@birdscanada.org](mailto:ontarioswiftwatch@birdscanada.org)



# Chimney Swifts

BALANCING  
SPECIES  
CONSERVATION  
AND CLIENT  
SATISFACTION



**FOR CHIMNEY SERVICE PROFESSIONALS**



© Ron D'Entremont

## WHAT IS

## A CHIMNEY SWIFT?

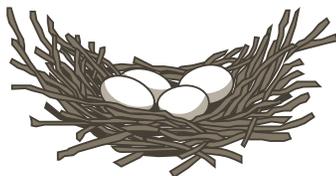
A flying Chimney Swift looks like a “cigar with wings”. It flies high in the air with very fast wingbeats. Chimney Swifts are roughly the size of starlings, but unlike starlings, swifts cannot perch on chimneys or rooflines.

Chimney Swifts are fascinating, entertaining, and well-behaved “houseguests”. Plus, each swift eats hundreds of insects per day, providing us with natural pest control! Chimney Swifts are also an important indicator species; their population decline is likely reflecting a broader issue with our natural environment.

## NEST

Made exclusively of sticks glued together with swift spit

Tiny white eggs, no markings



10 cm

## HOW CAN CLIENTS BE SWIFT-FRIENDLY?

- Avoid capping masonry chimney, or remove the cap between late April and October when Chimney Swifts are nesting (unless there is a metal liner).
- Close your damper to prevent nestlings from falling into the fireplace. This also acts as a sound barrier to minimize disturbance to nesting swifts.
- Routine chimney sweeping is important for maintaining good nesting habitat.

## WHAT ABOUT RAIN AND ANIMALS?

- Metal flashing can be installed around the exterior of the chimney to keep animals like raccoons and squirrels out.
- A rain cap with open sides can be installed 30 cm above the chimney. This allows swifts to enter and exit but keeps rain out.

## CLIENT CONCERNED/UNSURE ABOUT

## HAVING SWIFTS IN THEIR CHIMNEY?

The Chimney Swift is protected under the *Endangered Species Act* in Ontario and nationally under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act* and *Species at Risk Act*. Homeowners are responsible for understanding how these laws apply to them and should contact the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) and Canadian Wildlife Services (CWS) for help (contact info on back).

## WHAT IF CLIENTS WANT TO MAKE

## CHIMNEY MODIFICATIONS?

- If the chimney hosts Chimney Swifts, the homeowner will need to contact the Ontario MECP as well as CWS.
- When possible, consider venting through a different flue when switching heating sources, such as installing an exterior metal chimney.

Remember:

**Schedule chimney maintenance between October and late April to avoid disturbing Chimney Swifts!**



## CAPPED...

## OR UNCAPPED?

**Can a chimney be uncapped for part of the year?**

**YES.** In Ontario, Chimney Swifts arrive in late April and depart again by October. Removing the chimney cap (of a chimney with no metal liner) during spring and summer, when clients are not using their chimneys, can provide access to nest sites for swifts.

- Chimney caps are designed for easy removal (required under the National Fire Protection Association NFPA).
- Chimneys should be inspected and cleaned at least once per year to prevent dangerous buildup of soot or creosote (per NFPA). Cap removal/installation can be scheduled at the same time as the client’s inspection and cleaning.

**Chimneys should remain capped if...**

A masonry chimney can be capped if it has a metal liner. Metal flues are too narrow and slippery for Chimney Swifts and other animals to escape if they enter the chimney.

If the chimney is regularly used for heating between late April and October and has NEVER hosted Chimney Swifts then yes it should be capped.