

*Natural. Valued. Protected.*

## Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*)

The Chimney Swift is a relatively small bird, about 12 to 14 centimetres long, with a sooty brown, cigar-shaped body, long slender wings and a lighter throat. It can be distinguished by its telltale acrobatic and erratic flight pattern.

The Chimney Swift spends most of its time flying and even forages in the air, catching its prey (flying insects) in flight. Flocks can be heard making high-pitched chipping or twittering noises as they fly above the rooftops in urban areas.

### Habitat

Before European settlement Chimney Swifts mainly nested on cave walls and in hollow trees or tree cavities in old growth forests. Today, they are more likely to be found in and around urban settlements where they nest and roost (rest or sleep) in chimneys and other manmade structures. They also tend to stay close to water as this is where the flying insects they eat congregate.

### Range

The Chimney Swift breeds in eastern North America, possibly as far north as southern Newfoundland. In Ontario, it is most widely distributed in the Carolinian zone in the south and southwest of the province, but has been detected throughout most of the province south of the 49th parallel. It winters in northwestern South America.

### Threats

Historically, Chimney Swifts were likely sparse across their range and probably limited by suitable nesting sites (e.g., tree cavities and caves). Following European settlement, their numbers increased substantially as they began using chimneys as nest sites.

The primary causes of the current Chimney Swift population decline are unknown, but are likely related to declines in their prey, flying insects. Chimney Swifts are one of many bird species that feed on flying insects and are declining. Chimney Swifts face the added pressure of habitat loss resulting from the modernization of chimneys (capped, round, metal flues) that prohibits the swifts from entering potential nest sites.



### Did you know?

As its name implies, the Chimney Swift breeds and roosts in chimneys, as well as other manmade structures including air vents, old open wells, outhouses, abandoned cisterns and lighthouses.

Once a pair has mated, Chimney Swifts can stay together for years coming back to the same nesting site together.

## Natural. Valued. Protected.

### Protection

The Chimney Swift is threatened and receives automatic species protection under Ontario's *Endangered Species Act, 2007*. General habitat protection also protects the species' habitat from damage and destruction. A recovery strategy and a species-specific habitat regulation are being developed.

The Chimney Swift has also been assessed nationally as endangered by the federal Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).

**Status:** threatened provincially and designated threatened nationally

### What you can do to help the Chimney Swift

- Volunteer with a local nature club, stewardship council or provincial park to participate in surveys or stewardship work focused on species at risk. [www.ontariostewardship.org](http://www.ontariostewardship.org)
- As with all wildlife, don't disturb or harass the birds or nesting sites. Be respectful and observe from a distance.

### Did you know?

It is very uncommon to see a Chimney Swift perched or resting. They are usually observed flying at high speeds above the city or darting in and out of chimneys

These birds can congregate in flocks numbering in the thousands during migration and can be seen circling above traditional roosting sites such as, large old fashioned chimneys.

It is not unusual for one or two adult Chimney Swifts to help parents with nesting duties such as incubation, brooding chicks and feeding nestlings.

- The Ministry of Natural Resources tracks species at risk such as the Chimney Swift. You can use an online form to report your sightings to the Natural Heritage Information Centre. Photographs with specific locations or mapping coordinates are always helpful! [http://nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/species/species\\_report.cfm](http://nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/species/species_report.cfm)
- Report any illegal activity related to plants and wildlife to 1-877-TIPS-MNR (847-7667).
- There is a program geared to eligible farms registered under the Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plan to encourage greater protection and conservation of habitat for species at risk. For more information, visit: [www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/environment/efp/efp.htm](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/environment/efp/efp.htm).
- Private landowners have a very important role to play in Chimney Swift recovery. If you find a Chimney Swift or nest on your property, you may be eligible for stewardship programs that support the protection and recovery of species at risk and their habitats. For more information contact your local Ministry of Natural Resources district office.
- Bird Studies Canada is working to advance the understanding, appreciation and conservation of wild birds and their habitat, in Ontario and elsewhere. For more information on how you can help, visit: <http://www.bsc-eoc.org>

### For additional information:

Visit the species at risk website at [ontario.ca/speciesatrisk](http://ontario.ca/speciesatrisk)

Contact your MNR district office

Contact the Natural Resources Information Centre  
1-800-667-1940

TTY 1-866-686-6072

[mnr.nric.mnr@ontario.ca](mailto:mnr.nric.mnr@ontario.ca)

[ontario.ca/mnr](http://ontario.ca/mnr)

© Queen's Printer for Ontario 2009

MNR # 52578