

Winter 2013-2014

Season Review

Led by Bird Studies Canada (BSC), Maritimes SwiftWatch is a citizen-scientist monitoring and conservation program designed to bring together volunteers and community groups to act as stewards for Chimney Swifts and their habitat.

The 2013 season was full of surprises.

As always, a sincere “thank you” is due to the volunteers, partners, and funders whose contributions make SwiftWatch possible. – *Allison Manthorne, Maritimes SwiftWatch Coordinator*

School SwiftWatch Launch



(more on page 3).

This spring, Maritimes SwiftWatch received funding to pilot School SwiftWatch at two Nova Scotia schools. Middleton Regional High School (Middleton) and Temperance Street Elementary School (New Glasgow) host up to 700 swifts between them during spring migration, which provides a unique opportunity for students to learn about this provincially endangered species. In early May, Ally Manthorne helped school staff install small, wireless surveillance cameras inside the chimneys. These cameras, which were readily accepted by the swifts, allowed the schools to broadcast live feed online throughout the season, and highlights were posted on YouTube

Temperance Street Elementary students have since transferred to a different building in preparation for the upcoming amalgamation of three schools in New Glasgow. New Glasgow Junior High students now occupy the Temperance Street building for the time being, and Ally is helping teachers develop activities to study and celebrate the 2013 spring migration.



Photo: Holly Lightfoot 2012



Photo: Jim Gushue 2012



Photo: Jim Gushue 2012

Left: Middleton Regional High School Chimney.

Center: Mr. Stephen Tumilty (Computer Technician) and Mr. Adam Taylor (Custodian) holding the ladder.

Right: Mr. Merrill Cox (Tech Ed Teacher) on the ladder installing camera.



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Roost Spotlight: Middleton

Built in 1949, Middleton Regional High School (MRHS) has undergone three sets of renovations. Although all have greatly benefited students, teachers, and the community, one renovation nearly destroyed an important provincial roosting site for Chimney Swifts. In 1990, along with many upgrades, the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board decided to remove the old brick chimney which was no longer in use. However, what the board did not know was that the chimney was a communal roost site for several hundred Chimney Swifts.

Upon arriving in the Maritimes, Chimney Swifts roost in communal chimneys like the MRHS chimney until they begin to breed, during which they disperse to smaller chimneys in the area. Many people are surprised to learn that each nest chimney is only occupied by one breeding pair. However, non-breeding individuals (often young birds) commonly remain in communal chimneys throughout the summer. After breeding, swifts then re-group prior to their journey south.

Although the MRHS chimney was deemed structurally sound, it was no longer in use and subsequently the school board felt it was no longer needed. However, community members fought to reverse the decision. An awareness campaign initiated by MRHS teacher and Middleton mayor Sylvester Atkinson included a news story by the CBC about the ecological value of retaining the chimney. This publicity caused the school board to examine other options. Subsequently, an agreement was reached between the school board and Middleton Town Council in which the town agreed to pay for any required repairs until 2010. Since signing the agreement, Mr. Atkinson explains, “the town did not have to spend a cent”.



A bird's eye view of the MRHS chimney, captured by our surveillance video camera.

This spring, Maritime SwiftWatch began working closely with students and staff at MRHS to improve Chimney Swift knowledge at the school. The installation of a camera in the chimney to monitor swift activity was fully embraced by the school and generated a great deal of interest, curiosity, and enthusiasm from staff and students alike. Additionally, Ally Manthorne has begun to work with teachers to incorporate swift activities into school curriculum. Although a logical area of implementation is biology, Jim Gushue, current MRHS principal, explains that they are working to “establish cross-curricular opportunities in subjects including writing, art, and computer

science.” Staff and students at Middleton Regional High School recognize their unique situation and are very keen on sharing their story with the community. Suffice to say with this type of local support, it is unlikely that the chimney will be slated for demolition any time in the near future. - Holly Lightfoot, BSC Projects Assistant

SwiftWatch in Sussex

The Kennebecasis Naturalists Society (KNS) has been watching Chimney Swifts in Sussex, NB for many years, and had even created an interpretive panel and a brochure to share with the community. After the unexpected demolition of the swifts' main roost chimney late in 2011, the Society felt a need to take stock of the town's potential swift habitat so that if and when swifts returned, the Society would be



ready to protect the birds' new roost.

In March and April, 18 KNS members conducted an inventory of the town's potential habitat. During the survey, a handful of nest sites were identified and large, open chimneys were noted for follow-up in May when the swifts returned. On May 11, Chimney Swifts were sighted high over the town and that evening, members tracked a large group of swifts to a chimney in an apartment building. The swifts used this site all spring, with more than 200 birds counted on some evenings. The inventory stirred up interest about swifts in the community, and helped the Society identify additional roosts and nest sites in the town. The data collected from the inventory is now being analysed and will provide answers about the availability of roost and nest chimneys in Sussex, as well as any hotspots for further surveys. As well, BSC and KNS are working with the Town to help promote Chimney Swift conservation in Sussex, with community events planned for the upcoming season. Stay tuned! Many thanks to the volunteers involved in this project!

Acadian Peninsula Update



[Nature NB](#) has been very active on the Acadian Peninsula this second year of Maritimes SwiftWatch. Because of our ongoing work with Chimney Swifts and the media coverage that came along with that, in 2010 we discovered the biggest roost site in our region, the Old Post Office chimney in Bathurst, NB. Since this discovery, we have coordinated monitoring at two important known roost sites in the Acadian Peninsula; the Bathurst Old Post Office and the Paquetville church. We include the Chimney Swift and Maritimes SwiftWatch in our school presentations and in our kiosk on species at risk. We also integrate information about our Chimney Swift work in media appearances and through written articles in various printed media.

What happens when scientists dig down through 50 years (that's 2 metres!) of Chimney Swift poop? Read all about this fascinating study and listen to interviews with the researchers at Queen's University's [PEARL](#) website.

In 2012, we began working with a local group in Bathurst, the [Daly Point Nature Reserve](#). A simple evening roost count done by our staff turned into a very good connection between two organisations. We are planning to give presentations on the Chimney Swift this winter to get the community prepared for the next season of SwiftWatch. We had volunteers going to the roost everyday to record the counts. We are pretty excited to get more work done in the Bathurst area, both with the Daly Point Nature Reserve and with future volunteers. This year, the Bathurst's roost site recorded, at its peak, a maximum of 363 swifts!

The Paquetville church roost site has been monitored by our local naturalists club, le Club de Naturalistes de la Péninsule Acadienne. This year again, swifts have been seen going in and out of the chimney at all hours of the day, thus indicating the possibility of a nesting site. During the spring and fall watches, up to six Chimney Swifts were seen on location.

Mark your calendars! The 2013 SwiftWatch dates are:

Spring: Summer:

May 22 July 24

May 26 July 28

May 30 August 1

June 3 August 5

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All through the season, many volunteers (17) gave over 39 hours in order to monitor and check for roost sites. One very enthusiastic naturalist even has plans to construct his very own Chimney Swift dormitory in the Paquetville region. Stay tuned! - *Nathalie Paulin, Nature NB*

Connect With Us

We'd love to hear from you! There are many ways to share your photos, stories, questions and more with fellow SwiftWatchers:



Visit the SwiftWatch [website](#) to learn about Chimney Swifts, find other Chimney Swift programs, and download factsheets, data forms, and more



Find us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), where you can share your photos, connect with other SwiftWatchers and hear about upcoming events



Subscribe to our [YouTube](#) channel to watch new and archived videos, and share your own

Swifts around the World

There are many organizations dedicated to Chimney Swifts and their relatives:

- [Audubon Minnesota](#) has a Frequently Asked Questions page.
- Connecticut has a Chimney Swift program called [Chimney Swift Watch](#) and information on how to monitor your own chimney, locate a roost chimney, etc.
- [Driftwood Wildlife Association](#) wrote the book on Chimney Swifts-literally. They also coordinate the annual Swift Night Out and even provide advice on rescue and rehabilitation of swifts.
- [Manitoba Chimney Swift Initiative](#) maintains a blog about its program.
- Led by Bird Studies Canada, [Ontario SwiftWatch](#) also has a Facebook page and great resources online.
- Finally, overseas, [Swift Conservation](#) in Britain has videos, sound clips, and links to Common Swift projects in Europe.

If you know of other swift projects, let us know and we'll link to them on our website.



Tracking Swift Numbers

In 2012, more than 80 volunteers participated in 210 roost counts and contributed more than 50 other sightings of Chimney Swifts around the Maritimes. In addition, 15 new roost and nest sites were confirmed. As well, this year saw some changes in where swifts were roosting and thus, where volunteers were monitoring swifts. One roost in Sussex was torn down late in 2011; however, the Chimney Swifts relocated to another chimney nearby when they reappeared in May. We also dropped two historic roost sites (the University of NB's Enterprise building and the NS Agricultural College chimney) from the regular monitoring schedule, as these sites appear to have been abandoned by swifts in recent years. While swifts preferred the school roost in Ste-Anne-de-Madawaska in 2011, the birds chose to use the nearby church this year instead, for unknown reasons. And lastly, June 4th proved to be a very stormy evening for a swift count in many parts of the region, resulting in low counts at many roost sites (the birds simply stayed put in their roosts all day).

One thing you'll notice as you look at the table below is that many sites had missed counts. Our volunteers work very hard to make sure counts are done at each site but busy schedules occasionally prevent us from completing a watch. If this describes you, let us know and we'll help you arrange a 'backup' counter in case of illness or previous commitments. Or, if you're looking to help out at a watch, we'll gladly find a site for you and connect you with other SwiftWatchers.

Province	Site	Building Type	23-May	27-May	31-May	4-Jun	25-Jul	29-Jul	2-Aug	6-Aug
NS	St. Bernard (Weymouth)	Church	18	23	16	36	n/a	48	n/a	n/a
NS	McGowan Lake	Unused smithy	68	98	56	15	68	n/a	55	9
NS	Middleton	School	129	123	247	104	210	181	214	139
NS	Wolfville	Freestanding chimney (Robie Tufts Nature Centre)	55	50	105	85	33	42	38	55
NS	Upper Falmouth	House	2	n/a	70	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NS	Martock	House	n/a	3	n/a	n/a	2	n/a	n/a	2
NS	New Glasgow	School	247	262	405	0	86	98	86	48
NS	Oxford	Freestanding chimney	3	1	12	0	7	0	4	n/a
NB	Island View forestry nursery	House (used as office)	2	2	2	2	n/a	n/a	2	5
NB	Sainte-Anne-de-Madawaska	Church	59	107	n/a	n/a	n/a	74	33	n/a
NB	Sainte-Anne-de-Madawaska	School	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NB	Bathurst	Former post office	48	103	8	363	60	52	34	17
NB	Paquetville	Church	2	2	3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NB	Hampton	Former post office	39	59	76	1	47	25	10	3
NB	Sussex	House	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	2
NB	Sussex	Apartment complex	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	1
TOTAL			672	833	1000	606	513	520	476	278

"n/a" means that no count was conducted on this date

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Pictou County
Naturalists Club



Maritimes SwiftWatch is a multi-partner project led by Bird Studies Canada, together with the Blomidon Naturalists Society, Environment Canada, Kennebecasis Naturalists Society, Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute, Nature NB, Nova Scotia Bird Society and Pictou County Naturalists Club.

