

Citizen science guide to: *CHIMNEY SWIFTS, Chaetura pelagica*



Citizen efforts to monitor Chimney Swifts have emerged across North America to help track the decline of this unique aerial insectivore. Its behavior of communal roosting and nesting in chimneys throughout cities and towns make them a fun and interesting species to monitor. During spring and fall migration Chimney Swifts fly most of the day, only roosting between sunset and dawn. During the breeding season in June and July, pairs will separate from the communal roost to nest alone in individual chimneys, and occasionally hollow cottonwoods. In our state, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and Montana Audubon are working throughout eastern Montana to find out just where our Chimney Swifts are active and breeding.



This small, uniformly dark bird, is one of four swift species in Montana, and the only with a distinct eastern distribution. Often called a “cigar with wings”, these birds can be seen around towns and cities at dusk, where they frequently roost and nest in chimneys or hollow cottonwoods. They eat insects and feed “on the wing” (while flying), and are often seen foraging high in the air, exhibiting a characteristically swift-like fast, stiff wingbeat. The sexes look similar but are slightly different in size. Plumage is slightly glossy, especially on the wings, and the short rounded tail occasionally has spiny tips visible. The rump and upper tail-coverts are more blackish than gray, while the throat, chin, and cheeks are pale colored. Chimney swifts cling to vertical surfaces rather than perch like swallows and songbirds.



Swift photos courtesy of Richard Crosby, WikiCommons

Narrowing your search:

- Potential chimneys are built of brick, stucco, stone, or concrete
- Occupied chimneys are often at least 2.5 bricks wide, and extend well above roofline
- Occupied chimneys do not have visible covers, spark protectors, guards, or flues



Appears Open



Appears open with clay or terra cotta liners



Appears closed by metal liner - may not be visible



Appears closed by animal guard/ spark protector



Appears closed or open





Citizen science guide to CHIMNEY SWIFTS Survey Protocol

Objective

The objective of this survey effort is to identify potential Chimney Swift habitat and follow up with volunteer surveys to determine if sites are being used by Chimney Swifts for either nesting or roosting.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and Montana Audubon are working throughout eastern Montana to discover just where our Chimney Swifts are active and breeding. Unlike searching for other swifts, Chimney Swifts are best surveyed in towns and near buildings with large chimneys! Surveys occur for 30 minutes before and after sunset, during June and July, with observers being stationed for just a short time at selected chimneys. Surveys will take place in Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Regions 5, 6, and 7 (see map below).

Protocol

- > Review this document to ensure proper identification of Chimney Swifts and survey chimneys.
- > Select an eastern Montana town you'd like to visit. Using this guide to "narrow your search", locate a chimney within the town that looks like it has good potential to house swifts (i.e. is a good-sized, open-looking, chimney made of brick, stucco or concrete).
- > Please arrive at your chimney observation point **at least 30 minutes prior to sunset, 45 minutes prior to sunset on cold, cloudy or rainy evenings** because swifts often return to their roost early in poor weather. Surveys can be conducted in most weather conditions even if there is a light drizzle or light intermittent rain, but not during a thunderstorm or downpour. **Observe the chimney until approximately 30 minutes after sunset or until a chimney swift is observed** (this link will download a pdf of sunset times by county: <https://bit.ly/2I2HYLC>).
- > If possible, please survey each chimney three times – Between June 1st and July 31st (if Chimney Swifts are detected prior to the third visit, repeat visits are not required).

Data Collection

At each chimney site and on accompanying data form:

- Record the city name and site address or Latitude and Longitude. Be sensitive of private location data.
- Record the date, start and end time, visit number and weather data (see datasheet).
- Record the building type (School, Church, Commercial Building, Residence, Other) for each chimney.
- Record the chimney material (Bricks, Terra Cotta, Cement, Other) for each chimney.
- Record the number of chimney swifts seen flying overhead and the number of chimney swifts entering the chimney.

If you'd like to participate, please contact Amy Seaman,
Montana Audubon Conservation Program Manager
(aseaman@mtaudubon.org or 406-210-9449).

Please submit your completed data sheets to Amy Seaman,
Montana Audubon
P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624

