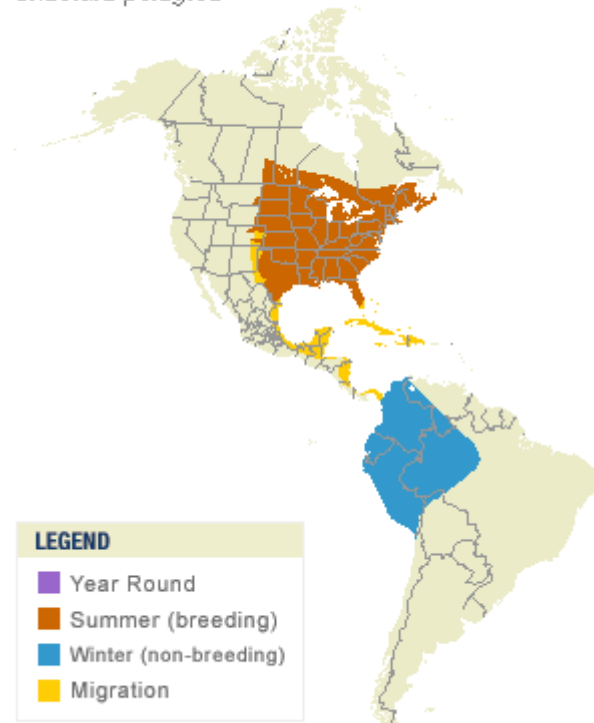




Contacts: Nancy Nabak: 920-793-4007, Rich Staffen: 608-266-4340

Help Declining Populations of Chimney Swifts and Flying Insects in Wisconsin

Chimney Swift
Chaetura pelagica



Map by Cornell Lab of Ornithology
Range data by NatureServe

The chittering sounds of Chimney Swifts will be heard once again in Wisconsin starting mid-April into early May as they return from their winter homes in South America. Swifts are small, unique birds, about swallow-sized, that are in flight all day long as they hunt for flying insects. Their flight is rapid and erratic, and their short, tapered tails and scythe-shaped wings make them look like flying cigars. While migrating through the state, large numbers can be found hunting on the wing during the day, and at dusk entering uncapped brick chimneys to roost in for the night.

To help maintain and increase the invertebrate food base for Swifts, we are encouraging folks to choose plants native to Wisconsin for their gardens. “These plants attract pollinators and other flying insects that swifts love to feast on,” said Karen Etter Hale, member of the Wisconsin Chimney Swift Working Group, a statewide volunteer effort to keep swifts common in Wisconsin.

This spring the Working Group is partnering with the newly launched Wisconsin-based campaign, SOS Save Our Songbirds. Together, they are advocating for homeowners and rental property owners with green space to help turn around both our insect and songbird (as well as Swift) population declines.

“For example, coneflowers are a colorful and easy native plant to grow, which attract hummingbirds, butterflies, bees and other flying insects - producing a healthy food source for Chimney Swifts to feed on,” said Etter Hale. “So the great thing is, when you address one issue, you are also taking care of another.”

The Working Group is also encouraging people to watch for and count the swifts as they return, to identify roost locations, gauge their population numbers and help assess trends for this species.

According to the latest North American Breeding Bird Survey, the Chimney Swift population has declined by 72% in the past 50 years. By continuing to monitor these populations, the Working Group hopes to learn more about them and identify important roost sites so they can find ways to help protect them.

“Anyone can count Chimney Swifts as they enter chimneys in the early evening. It’s a simple process; you don’t need to be a bird expert to do this. All you need to do is count,” said Etter Hale.

Here’s how:

- In the spring, watch and listen for Chimney Swifts up in the sky during the daytime as they hunt for insects to determine when to begin counting. The southern half of the state may see them in late April to early May. The northern half of the state may be a little later.
- Look for tall uncapped brick chimneys. If you find more than one chimney, do some scouting in the evenings to determine where the swifts will roost. Watch for swifts swooping and circling over the chimney for a while before they enter. Be aware that the roost site choice can change from night to night, especially during migration.
- Pick one or more nights to monitor in May. Larger numbers show up two or three weeks after the first swifts arrive.
- Observe the birds entering to roost starting about 20 minutes before sunset until 10 minutes after the last swift enters the chimney. Please stay in one location, even if you do not see swifts right away. They may come to your site later and you do not want to miss them. For accuracy, stay 10 minutes after sunset to know if it was active or not. If you have zero swifts entering your chimney, please record this. This is still valuable information.
- Count (or estimate) the number of swifts as they enter the chimney. It’s useful to count in groups of five or 10 when they enter quickly in large numbers. A hand-held clicker counter can also be helpful.
- Counts may continue at the large chimneys throughout the breeding season, if large numbers of individuals continue to use these roost sites.

Taking it one step further, you can help the Working Group better access and utilize your data by entering it on eBird (www.ebird.org). Click this link for easy instructions:

<https://www.wiswifts.org/report-chimney-swift-sightings/>.

For more information about how to identify Chimney Swifts and how to help protect them locally, go to:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chimney_Swift/sounds

<https://www.wiswifts.org/>

For more information about SOS Save Our Songbirds: <https://www.sossaveoursongbirds.org/>

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