



How to Help

Chimney Swifts

The small, agile, fast-flying Chimney Swift is readily identified by its characteristic "flying cigar" profile. These swifts breed across much of eastern North America from southern Canada east of Saskatchewan, south through Texas and to the Atlantic seaboard. They nest and roost in chimneys and other building openings, and can be helped by making these structures safe for the birds or by building specially designed swift towers.

What Chimney Swifts Need

Food: Swifts eat a wide range of flying insects that they capture by flying high over cities, fields, forests, and wetlands.

Nesting: Chimney Swifts apparently nested in hollow trees and possibly caves before European settlement of North America. Now they prefer nesting in chimneys and other artificial sites, including air vents, open wells, cisterns, out buildings, garages, silos, barns, and light houses. Nest sites need to be shaded from sunlight and the elements. When chimneys are not available, they may nest in the shadier side of a silo or high on a sheltered barn or garage wall. Nests are constructed of small twigs and swift saliva, and are attached directly to the side of the chimney or other surface.

Shelter: Chimney Swifts roost in chimneys and similar structures at night, as pairs during the breeding season or in flocks that may number hundreds of individuals during the non-breeding season.

Other: These swifts bathe and drink on the wing by dipping low to break the surface of rivers, lakes, and ponds.

How You Can Help

- While difficult to provide food for swifts directly, avoid using pesticides that kill flying insects the birds depend on for food.
- Allow swifts to nest in uncapped chimneys, but close the damper to keep nestlings from falling into the fireplace, and avoid sweeping the chimney until after the birds have finished nesting.
- Have functioning chimneys cleaned of creosote build-up so swifts can safely attach their nests to the side of the chimney.
- Make sure that your chimney sweep is educated about how to protect nesting swifts.
- Consider building an artificial nesting structure. For more information see www.audubonathome.org/chimneyswifts
- Maintain residential chimneys uncapped and with the damper closed when swifts are present.
- Make sure that large commercial or industrial chimneys in the neighborhood are allowed to remain standing as communal roost sites, even if decommissioned by heating system upgrades.
- Support efforts to keep rivers and lakes free of pesticides and other pollutants.
- Additional Chimney Swift conservation efforts are detailed online at www.chimneyswifts.org.