

Chimney Swift Natural History

- Neo-tropical migrants—spend winters in Upper Amazon Basin.
- Most of life spent “on the wing.”
- Consume 3,000–5,000 insects per day.
- Population in sharp decline—over 70% decline in last 50 years.
- Conservation threat level was upgraded from “Near Threatened” to “Vulnerable” in 2018.
- Typically arrive in Western Pennsylvania the 3rd week of April and depart the area by the first week of October.
- Migrate in large social groups, usually 6–20 birds.
- Generally mate for life.
- Use saliva to affix nest to vertical surface; egg incubation takes 18–21 days.
- Average lifespan is 4.6 years.



Get Involved

There are many ways that you can help to support Chimney Swift conservation.

If you have Chimney Swifts nesting or roosting in your chimney, do not disturb them. They stay only temporarily, do not cause any damage, and are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Have your chimney serviced between November–March to avoid disturbing them.

Consider building your own Chimney Swift tower or contracting ASWP to help.

Reduce or eliminate pesticide use to ensure that Chimney Swifts and the many other birds that rely on insects have plenty to eat.

Help ASWP with our tower and roost monitoring program—see inside of brochure for details.

Become a ASWP member, make a donation, or volunteer with us to support our Chimney Swift conservation efforts.

Special thanks to following funders of Chimney Swift conservation efforts: Fred and Shirley Jordan Foundation, Allegheny County, Allegheny County Parks Foundation, and the Peaceable Kingdom Fund of the Pittsburgh Foundation.

 **Audubon Society**
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Photos are courtesy of Jose Rodriguez Photography, Paul & Georgean Kyle, David Seibel, and George L. Armistead/VIREO



Chimney Swift
— Conservation —

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What are Chimney Swifts?

Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*), neotropical migrants that can only perch on vertical surfaces, are quickly losing their nesting and roosting habitats. They are voracious hunters, each consuming thousands of flying insects every evening—the perfect urban insecticide!

Chimney Swifts are small smudge-gray birds that spend a majority of their life in flight. They're often described as 'cigars with wings' and they historically nested in hollowed limbs, snags, and even in caves. As cities became more common and mature trees became less common, Chimney Swifts adapted to roosting and nesting in chimneys.



Chimney Swift Conservation

Although still relatively common in older communities, Chimney Swifts are now designated as Vulnerable. Over the last 50 years, their population has declined over 70%. Their decline is attributed to a shift in chimney design, the capping and demolition of chimneys, and a decreased availability of their food source (insects) due to widespread use of pesticides.

Since 2013, Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania (ASWP) has installed Chimney Swift Towers throughout our region to support swift conservation. These unique structures mimic an actual chimney, serving as roosting and nesting habitat for the birds. ASWP has installed nearly 150 towers through a variety of partnerships, with more being built on a regular basis.

A tower may be used by as many as 100 birds during migration. However, Chimney Swift social structure dictates that only one pair of birds will use a tower during nesting. Therefore, each and every tower built is critical in supporting the Chimney Swift population.



Tower Monitoring and Roost Reporting

Your help is needed to identify roosting locations and track Chimney Swift Tower usage throughout southwestern Pennsylvania. It's quick and easy—and it's good for the birds. When you submit a report on Chimney Swifts, you provide valuable information that helps us to understand how the birds are doing.

The monitoring portal, a map of the tower locations, observations, and reported roosting locations can be found at aswp.org. If you observe a Chimney Swifts using ASWP's towers or flying near them, please take note of the tower ID number, date, and time of day. Submit your observations to the Chimney Swift portal at aswp.org. Additionally, if you know of a chimney or tree that Chimney Swifts are using for roosting, please submit the information to the monitoring portal so that we can add it to our database.

