

## Town of Erin Species at Risk – Chimney Swift



Chimney swifts are often described as ‘cigars with wings’. Their twittering calls give them away as they fly over older parts of cities and towns.

**Description:** Chimney swifts look a bit like swallows, but their swept-back wings and lack of a forked tail sets them apart. They are not the most colourful of birds – plain sooty olive or sooty brown, but their fast, agile flight with rapid wing beats are distinctive. The Chimney swift spends most of its time flying and even forages in the air, catching its prey (flying insects) in flight.

**Habitat:** Before European settlement of North America, chimney swifts nested primarily in large hollow trees. However with the decline of old forest habitats over much of their range, swifts showed their adaptability and became urban creatures – relying on chimneys as nesting habitat. Chimney swift flocks can be heard making high-pitched chipping or twittering noises as they fly above the rooftops older neighbourhoods in Erin during the summer.

**Threats:** Several factors have combined to cause swift populations to plummet more than 90% in the last three decades. Throughout North America there has been a wide-spread decline in insect populations, likely caused by changing agricultural practices and widespread use of insecticides; construction practices have reduced the number of suitable chimneys for swifts to nest in, and land management throughout swifts’ wintering range in South America has become much more intensive.

**Status:** The chimney swift is currently listed as Threatened under the Ontario Endangered Species Act.

**What can you do?** If possible, keep your old brick chimney; don’t have your chimney cleaned in nesting season (mid-May to mid-August). If possible keep your chimney free of obstructions and avoid the use of grills or caps. Keep any old trees with hollow trunks on your property if it is safe to do so. Eliminate or reduce your use of insecticides to an absolute minimum.

Bird Studies Canada (BSC) is a non-government organization dedicated to conserving wild birds of Canada. One of BSC’s citizen science projects is the monitoring of chimney swifts and other aerial insectivores through its ‘Swift Watch’ Program. Volunteers conduct surveys of swifts and gather information to help understand how swifts are faring and what is behind their population declines.

Check out BSC’s web site on swifts and swallows to learn more and see if you are interested in becoming a volunteer.

<http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/ai/index.jsp?lang=EN>

## SARs in the Town of Erin

### Birds

Barn Swallow  
Chimney Swift  
Common Nighthawk

### Mammals

Little Brown Bat  
Small-footed Bat  
Northern Long-eared Bat

### Reptiles and Amphibians

Jefferson Salamander  
Milk Snake



### Flora

Butternut  
American Chestnut  
Ginseng

### Insects

Rusty-patched Bumblebee

## What is ESAC?

ESAC is the Environment and Sustainability Advisory Committee of Council for the Town of Erin. Our mission is to provide sound environmental advice to our Council, develop partnerships with neighbours, businesses and the community, communicate important environmental issues, and help make Erin a sustainable, climate-change-ready, and environmentally progressive community.



**For more about ESAC or to join ESAC contact:**

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## Chimney Swift

### Species at Risk



Did you know that here in the Town of Erin there are many species at risk (SAR)? They are not the “stars” of the natural world, but are populations of grassland, woodland and wetland creatures that were once plentiful but are now threatened by habitat loss and other factors. How can we help? First, get to know what these threatened species are, then learn what actions might help them flourish again.

