

# Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*)

**Description:** Gray overall, best known by shape: stubby at both ends, with scimitar-shaped wings (sometimes called "a cigar with wings"). Distinctive high-pitched chattering call while flying.

**Trends:** Declining- Conservation Tipping Point Orange Alert

**Habitat:** Open sky, especially over cities and towns. Forages in the sky over any kind of terrain, wherever there are flying insects. Now most common over towns and cities; within its range, few forests remain with hollow trees large enough to serve as nest sites. Forages only while flying, pursuing insects and scooping them out of the air. Often flies high but will forage very low during wet weather. Typically seen foraging in small flocks. Nest site is inside a chimney or similar hollow tower, usually well down from opening, in a well-shaded area. Originally nested (and sometimes still does) inside large hollow trees. Chimney swifts have linked their future with ours by using chimneys as roosts.

**Ways You can help with Conservation:** Chimney swifts are threatened by declining insect prey populations, loss of large hollow trees and open brick chimneys for nesting, and loss of larger chimneys as communal roosts during spring and fall migration.

*If you have an older, brick chimney, allow chimney swifts to nest inside during summer. Keep your chimney open or uncap your chimney if it is capped. Newer chimneys with metal liners are too slick for swifts to use so they can be capped. Swifts prefer older chimneys with brick linings. Raised caps are available to shelter a chimney from rain but also allow swifts access.*

*Do not use pesticides or pest control services, especially mosquito-spraying.*

*Save large brick chimney roosts.* Schools and industrial buildings are replacing older chimneys. Join us in meeting with administrators and managers to influence plans before chimneys are removed. Contact New Hope Bird Alliance if you know of a roosting chimney that may have been removed or capped.

*Be a Community Scientist – count swifts and report nesting and roosting sites to New Hope Bird Alliance and eBird. NHBA organizes swift roost surveys each fall around Durham, Orange and Chatham Counties. Volunteer to count with us or find new sites and share them with [newhopebird@gmail.com](mailto:newhopebird@gmail.com).*



*Photo by Alessandro Retacchi*



*Photo by Barbara Driscoll*

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Check out a few of the known locations below.

*Build a Chimney Swift tower to provide more nesting habitat for swifts.*

*Plant native plants and manage natural, native habitat to foster healthy insect populations.*

*Turn off outdoor lighting from 11pm-6am to help migrating birds – Lights Out! Engage your workplace, schools, local business, and places of worship to do the same.*



Join us for a Swift Night Out to enjoy this natural spectacle! NHBA hosts a number of Swift Nights Out each fall (Sept-October) when swifts start roosting in preparation to migrate to South America. Local roosts in our area may have thousands of swifts on any given night. For example, an estimated 8,500 swifts gathered in a chimney on Trinity Avenue in Durham on September 23, 2020. Swifts will often move to different locations and chimneys each night. If you would like to watch the spectacle of thousands of swifts swirling through the air as they gather in the evening. NHBA holds several Chimney Swift night out events each fall: [Check the NHBA Calendar in September for group events.](#)

## **UNC Avian Society with Aerial Insectivore shirts**

Some locations where Chimney Swifts may be seen roosting in the Fall:

### **Durham**

- Old North Durham Park: Swifts can be seen entering the chimney on Trosa's dormitory at North and Geer Streets.
- Pearl Mill Flats Apartments, 807 W. Trinity Ave, Durham. The best view is from the end of Minerva Avenue behind 600 N. Duke Street, behind the apartment complex. This is a very large tower which can be seen from a number of locations.
- NC Cooperative Extension Office – 721 Foster Street, Durham – the chimney is on the backside of the office building and can be best viewed from Washington Street.
- Chimney on the backside of the Farmers and Mechanic Bank at 116 Parrish Street – Easily viewed from the Velvet Hippo Bar.

### **Chapel Hill**

- Davie Poplar Historic tree on UNC Campus – 204 E. Cameron Avenue, UNC Campus, Chapel Hill. This historic tree is located on the campus grounds between the Old Well and McCorkle Place. This is the only known tree roost in NC. Swifts can be seen in mass circling over the grounds before entering the tree.
- Porthole Alley between Ackland Art Museum and Top of the Hill off of South Columbia Street. There are several chimneys on the backs of buildings along the alley that are used by the swifts.

### **Pittsboro**

- There are several chimneys near the intersection of Business 64 and Highway 15-501 (Sanford Rd) in downtown Pittsboro. Swifts have been seen going into a chimney near the ABC store and the Pittsboro United Methodist Church.