



# Chimney Swift

## 2016 Bird of the Year

BIRD-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

### Background

Over the past century, Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) have been extremely adaptable – learning to roost in urban chimneys as large hollow trees, their natural roosting sites, disappeared. But populations are decreasing steeply – 53 percent between 1966 and 2007 in the United States – as chimneys are capped or removed, leaving fewer places for swifts to nest and raise their young. During breeding, there is some sharing of chimneys for roosting, but only a single pair will build a nest in a particular chimney. During migration, swifts will roost in large numbers – often thousands of swifts in one chimney. Chimney Swifts breed in the central and eastern United States and winter in the Amazon basin of Peru, northern Chile, and northwest Brazil.

### Conservation Status

#### IUCN Red List of Threatened Species:

Near Threatened

#### Audubon Birds and Climate Change Report 2014:

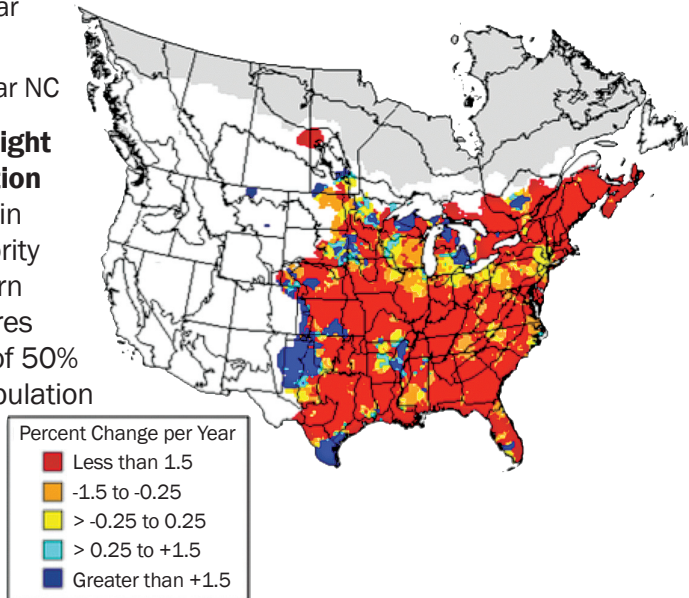
Climate Stable

#### USGS Breeding Bird Survey trend 1966-2013

- Declined 2.48%/year survey-wide
- Declined 1.61%/year NC

#### 2016 Partners in Flight Landbird Conservation Plan:

Common Bird in Steep Decline – priority species for all eastern regional Joint Ventures with predicted loss of 50% of current global population in under 30 years.



# Four Ways You Can Help

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## Keep Your Chimney Open

The practice of capping older chimneys makes them inaccessible to swifts. One solution is to hire a chimney sweep to cap the chimney in November and open it up again before Chimney Swifts arrive in the spring. Or simply keep your chimney open. Newer chimneys tend to have metal liners that are too slick for the swifts to perch on, so older chimneys with brick linings are really important. Encourage neighbors, Audubon members, and others to keep their chimneys open too.

### Fast facts about Chimney Swifts

Swifts are more closely related to hummingbirds than any other groups of birds, even swallows which they resemble. Swifts and hummingbirds make up an Order of birds called Apodiformes.

- Chimney Swifts do everything on the wing – eating, drinking, bathing; even snapping off twigs for nesting material. If they're not sitting on their nest or roosting, they are flying.
- Swifts stick their nests together with their spit, which basically glues the nest together and sticks it securely to the wall of the chimney.
- Swifts have toes that are kind of like our opposable thumbs – two of their four toes can point backward, as they do in flight, or swing forward for clinging to a tree or chimney. This toe arrangement is called “pamprodactyl.”

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## Be a Citizen Scientist

Report nesting and roosting sites at [nc.audubon.org](http://nc.audubon.org). Audubon NC staff will upload the data collected at [nc.audubon.org](http://nc.audubon.org) to [eBird.org](http://eBird.org). If you are an eBird user, enter your observations on eBird with Chimney Swift Roost (or Nest) in the Location Name, choose Stationary Count, and enter No for whether you are reporting all species you could identify.

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## Construct A Chimney Swift Tower

Provide more nesting habitat to your neighborhood swifts. We recommend the book *Chimney Swift Towers* by experts Paul and Georgean Kyle. The cost is around \$500 for the version with an educational kiosk; cost depends on materials. There are also great videos available online to help you get started. Swift towers make excellent Eagle Scout projects. Schoolyards, church grounds, parks and other open areas make good sites. Open sites are best – swifts will occupy a tower much sooner if there is no tree canopy for at least 25 feet radius around the tower. The tower may be attached to an existing structure such as a house or garage so long as the tower extends at least 4 feet above the structure. Once you have completed your tower, register it at [nc.audubon.org](http://nc.audubon.org).

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## Save Roost Towers

Schools and industrial buildings are replacing heating and cooling systems at a rapid rate in North Carolina, causing the loss of suitable roost towers. Be proactive and write letters and arrange to meet with school administrators, facilities managers, and others who influence decisions on chimneys before plans are made to tear the chimney down. Offer to give a brief presentation (which we will provide) about Chimney Swifts to administrators, staff, employees, teachers – any group of people connected with the building.

