

# “SWIFTING” UP HIGH, UNDER CHIMNEYS, & IN THE COTTONWOODS, 2018

MONTANA  
AUDUBON



You can add the Chimney Swift to your list of notable Montana birds as both a Species of Greatest Inventory Need, and one with unique nesting habitat requirements; preferably brick or stucco chimneys extending far above the roofline of an eastern Montana building.

Chimney Swifts are one of four swifts found in Montana, and most closely related to the Vaux's Swift. They are restricted to the eastern portion of the state. Its isolated distribution and behavior of using chimneys in

residential areas make them a species particularly well-suited for community involvement in determining nesting sites.



(Top) A lone Chimney rises over the prairie within the range of the Chimney Swift in Montana. (Above) A chimney we surveyed in Rock Springs. (Below) Chimney Swift survey volunteers and FWP staff gather around a Miles City school; photo by volunteer Beth Riggs.

Photos by Amy Seaman





Known to forage over a diversity of habitats including cottonwood groves, parkland, agricultural fields, and wetlands, these birds increased in number during the industrial revolution and expansion of small towns.

**This summer** we worked closely with three Montana Fish, Wildlife & Park's (FWP) regions to establish a range-wide survey effort for this unique species.

Beyond assisting with protocol, data sheets, and identification guides, we were excited to help create a new citizen science survey website and help train surveyors to use a new data collection application for smart-devices called survey 123.

The app can save biologists hours of data entry work, and will allow partners to share data the moment it is submitted. In 2018 we



*Photos by Amy Seaman*

Images of foraging habitat available to Chimney Swifts throughout their breeding range in Montana. (Above Top) Agricultural areas in Rock Springs. (Above) Wetlands and scattered cottonwoods. (Left) Cottonwood groves with a more dense canopy.





are proud to announce that we worked with 34 individuals, from agency personnel to volunteers, during in-field Chimney Swift training sessions in Miles City, Glasgow, and Billings. Heather Ristow helped host the survey crew at the Montana Audubon Education Center in Billings during an evening program. During this time we helped survey 16 chimney locations, turning up seven, previously unknown nesting sites. Of course we are asking folks to be careful not to share confidential information during this work. Many thanks to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, the National Audubon Society Sargent Endowment and Montana Audubon donors for helping make this project possible.

(Top) Examples of chimneys where Chimney Swifts were observed entering or leaving. (Below) I had my first anecdotal observation of a Chimney Swift foraging over cottonwood stands north of Forsyth during my Breeding Bird Survey in the area.

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