

**2015 ACORN Conference & Trade Show
Delta Prince Edward Hotel, Charlottetown, PE**

Workshop Title: Encouraging Swifts & Swallows on the Organic Farm

Speaker & their title: Ally Manthorne, Bird Studies Canada

Executive Summary:

Ally shared information about swifts, swallows and other insectivores, some of the findings from recent research in the Maritimes, and what landowners can do to encourage these threatened birds to nest on their farms.

DETAILS

Ally introduced participants to "Swift Watch," a program launched in New Brunswick in 2011 and subsequently in Nova Scotia.

The objectives of the project are to:

- Identify nesting sites
- Encourage stewardship and habitat, and
- Monitor populations

Project Activities consist of:

- Population counts, roost counts, nest checks
- Swift nights out: an activity to view swifts, conduct a count and educate the public
- In 2015 swallows were added as an additional species to the project

The species studied are all aerial insectivores - birds that specialize in a diet of flying insects.

These include:

- Flycatchers
- Night Jars (aka Night Hawks)
- Swifts
- Swallows

Habitat for all these birds is disappearing in North America. Aerial insectivores are declining faster than other species. In particular swallows, swifts and night jars are disappearing more rapidly than flycatchers.

Barn Swallow:

- Blue back, rufous face, tan-buff belly
- Forked tail
- Threatened across Canada
- Many threats: habitat loss, climate change, disappearance of insect prey
- Population decline of 75% since 1960s

Cliff Swallow

- Rufous face and throat
- Buff underside
- Often found near barn swallows
- Population declining
- Similar threats to barn swallow

Tree Swallows

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- White throat and belly, steely blue back
- Declining but not yet threatened
- Return early in the Spring
- Threats: habitat loss, climate change, disappearance of insect prey
- Readily accepts nest boxes

Chimney Swifts:

- Charcoal grey
- Stubby tail
- Pale throat
- Bow and arrow silhouette
- Cigar with wings
- Constant twittering call
- Nests on a vertical surface, sticks and saliva
- Threatened in Canada
- Decline of 95% since 1960s
- Threats: Habitat loss, climate change, nest destruction, disappearance of insects

How can we help?

1. Maintain or create nesting habitat.

- Provide an access point to suitable buildings by leaving open a door or window. This benefits barn swallows, cliff swallows and chimney swifts.
- Maintain a source of mud near barns and other buildings for the birds to use for nesting. This benefits barn and cliff swallows.
- Resist the temptation to remove old nests; swallows often rescue them.
- Mount artificial nest cups or shelves in a sheltered area out of reach of predators (rats, cats, raccoons). Benefits barn swallows, phoebe, robins.
- Mount nest boxes in an open area, out of reach of predators. Benefits tree swallows and eastern bluebirds.

2. Maintain Foraging Habitat

- Nests should be within about one km of foraging habitat. Marshes, ponds, streams - maintain a diverse ecosystem.

3. Become a citizen scientist.

- This initiative has helped a great deal to establish an estimate on population. There are a number of programs:
 - Maritimes Swiftwatch
 - Project Nestwatch
 - Swifts and Swallows

Go to www.birdscanada.org/volunteer

Complete our landowner survey! Get woodworking for birds, a great resource for nests.

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Q Whip-poor-wills and Night Hawks were common in the Moncton area when I was young.
What has happened to them?

A. The same things have happened to these species as well. Habitat loss has been a major issue.