

Range Distribution and Occupied Towns of Chimney Swifts in Montana (Poster)

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Chimney swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) are aerial insectivores and a Species of Greatest Inventory Need in Montana. Historically, they inhabited hollow mature trees and cave walls. With European settlement beginning in the 1600s, they shifted predominantly to man-made structures, expanding their range west with the growing availability of suitable nesting habitat, such as chimneys. Prior to 2017, the Montana Natural Heritage Program database contained just 23 breeding records for chimney swifts in eastern Montana. Four of which dated back to the 1800s. In 2017, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) and the Montana Audubon Society developed a survey protocol to define their breeding range and create a baseline for occupied towns in Montana. Between 2017 and 2024, FWP, MT Audubon, and citizen scientists surveyed 67 towns across central and eastern Montana. Twenty-three towns were confirmed occupied by breeding chimney swifts, with Harlowton observed as the furthest west. These data reveal a much broader distribution of chimney swifts in Montana than previously recognized. Currently, FWP is using these data to help identify potential threats and conservation actions for chimney swifts in the State Wildlife Action Plan where the species listing will change to a Species of Greatest Conservation Need, which is scheduled to be completed by October 2025.