

Chimney Swift Conservation Project

Silver Bay, MN

Minnesota Ornithologists' Union – 2018 Savaloja Grant Final Report

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Objectives: 1) Construction of two artificial nesting/roosting towers for Chimney Swifts – one at the William Kelley School in Silver Bay, MN and one at the Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center in Finland, MN and 2) increase education and awareness of Chimney Swifts.

Background: Chimney Swift populations have declined by 50% or more in the last 40 years, with the most precipitous drop within the last decade. The removal of chimneys and lack of new structures is one suspected cause for their decline along with reduced availability of insects. In Minnesota, Chimney Swifts are a State Species of Greatest Conservation Need and Audubon Minnesota promotes conservation efforts for this species with their Chimney Swift Conservation Project http://www.audubon.org/sites/default/files/documents/06-27-11_tower-handout.pdf.

Recent research by the Univ. of MN, Duluth and NRRI has shown the north shore of Lake Superior to be a critical migratory pathway for birds, including Chimney Swifts. There are fewer towns and structures along the shore as compared to other parts of the flyway and very likely the availability of chimneys and other roosting structures is limited. These old structures continue to be removed with no alternative nesting/roosting sites available for swifts; for example, the recent removal of the old high school building in Two Harbors.

In the 2017, we documented 250+ Chimney Swifts roosting in the William Kelley School chimney while participating in the MN Chimney Swift Count. Shortly after completing the count, we discovered that plans were in place to remove the chimney due to structural damage. Our goal was to provide an alternative nesting/roosting site at the school and to increase awareness. We proposed a second tower be built at the Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center where visiting children and adults would have an opportunity to learn about swift conservation efforts.

Accomplishments

Construction of two artificial nesting towers

The nesting structure at William Kelley High School was completed in the spring of 2019 before the arrival of migrating swifts. High school students in the natural resource's and shop classes participated in preparing the site, construction and installation. The nesting tower at Wolf Ridge ELC was

completed in this same timeframe with the help of workers and volunteers at the Wolf Ridge Organic Farm.



William Kelley High School Students constructing Chimney Swift nesting tower



Finished tower at William Kelley School
With MP3 player and Bluetooth Speaker for
Broadcasting swift calls.



The nesting tower at Wolf Ridge ELC is located at the Wolf Ridge Organic Farm and was completed with the help of volunteers

Raising awareness about Chimney Swifts

- Two articles were published in local newspapers:
 - North Shore Journal. July 20, 2018. *Summer School for the Chimney Swifts of Silver Bay*
 - Lake County News Chronicle. May 17, 2019. *Help for 'evicted' birds: Kelley students build home for chimney swifts.*
- Radio interview on Chimney Swift conservation with WTIP in Grand Marais
<http://www.wtip.org/chimney-swift-sit-peg-robertsen>
- Swift programs for William Kelley Third Grade classrooms in 2017 and 2018
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzgnl1MXaWc>
- Public program for United Protestant Church, Silver Bay
- Public Swift Sit program in 2018 and 2019
- Public YouTube Video of swifts going to roost in William Kelley Chimney
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98FE1_kTnnA

Budget Reconciliation

We received \$2,000 for completion of this project. As of July 2019, a total of \$1834.54 of this has been spent:

Total Materials Menards: \$1268.32
Total Shipping from Menards: \$398
Total Materials from Saw tooth Lumber: \$168.22
Total Expenses for Grant: \$1834.54

We would like to use the remaining dollars to complete an interpretive sign for each tower. We are currently working on a design for these signs and expect to complete them by the end of September.

THANK YOU to the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union for this Savaloja Grant!!!



Photo Credit: Macaulay Library Cornell Lab of Ornithology