Rare birds roosting on Wells Street School

Last summer, Birds Canada organized a province-wide survey of Chimney Swifts that was recently scheduled as an endangered species. As part of this survey, the Naturalization and Wildlife Committee undertook to survey Aurora's Chimney Swift population. We successfully located four pairs nesting in chimneys in the downtown core. Members of the group also watched the chimney at Wells Street School. To our amazement, 32 Chimney Swifts flew into the chimney at dusk, which makes this chimney an important local roosting site. A family living close by told us that it had been used as a roost for many years, but they thought that the swifts entering the chimney at dusk were bats.

We have some concerns regarding the future renovation to this school and the proposal to increase the height of the building by adding two new floors. This will have an adverse effect on our Swift population unless measures are taken to ensure that this critical local roosting site is not obliterated.

Before development takes place, the height of the chimney needs to be raised so that it will be a similar height above the proposed roof line as it is above the present roof. The same type of brick and, even more important, the same method of mortaring must be used inside the chimney and the chimney must not be metal lined.

This should be carried out prior to any work on the proposed new storeys and as part of the design the architects should create a few false chimneys which should apply to all new buildings within the downtown core. This would provide additional new, safe nesting sites, as a lack of nesting chimneys is considered to be a factor in this Chimney Swift decline.

Small changes like this could greatly improve Aurora's nesting Swift population that in the past was much more common than it is now. It would also be advisable for the Town's staff to discuss this proposal with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Birds Canada staff before this project is finally approved.

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