

## Naturalists record 100+ species during annual Birdathon



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By Nate Smelle

Every spring the Bancroft Field Naturalist Club gathers to take part in Bird Studies Canada's Great Canadian Birdathon. While this year's initiative looked somewhat different than usual due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the club still managed to conduct their study last weekend. While respecting restrictions in place to prevent the spread of the virus a small group of naturalists gathered just before sunset on Saturday evening in the parking lot of the old Ministry of Transportation building on Hwy 28 to observe the magnificent annual return of the chimney swifts nesting in the building's brick chimney. Known to congregate in flocks numbering in the thousands during migration, what makes this species return to the area so special is how it can be seen circling above traditional roosting sites such as, large old fashioned chimneys. As a threatened species the chimney swift receives automatic species protection under Ontario's Endangered Species Act. The club's past president Terry Bradt said the group observed approximately 100 chimney swifts circling and diving into their roost at the MTO building on Saturday. Later in the season he said the flock can grow in number to more than 1,000 birds. The next morning another small faction of citizen scientists from the Naturalist Club reconvened at the Bronson Marsh to continue with their study. With many bird populations across the country in decline due to a variety of pressures such as reductions in insect numbers, habitat loss, pesticide use, and climate change, the information gathered by the club during the Great Canadian Birdathon will help Bird Studies Canada monitor the health of populations throughout Canada. Speaking to this year's findings, Bradt said "With the combined totals of the various members who participated in our Great Canadian Birdathon from 6 p.m. May 23 to 6 p.m. May 24, we ended up with a total of 106 species. Not bad at all." Thanking everyone who participated in the Birdathon locally for their enthusiasm and support, he noted that a portion of the funds raised through the initiative from sponsorships will go to Bird Studies Canada, while a small percentage will go back to the club to be used for future citizen science-based initiatives.