

Telling the story of the Swifts and our Bethlehem S.O.S. project

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Environment](#), [Swifts](#) February 6, 2021

🧶 Latest in a series of posts on the Swifts 🧶

“S.O.S. Save Our Swifts by Saving their Urban Habitat: Telling the Story of the Chimney Swifts and their Connection to Our City”



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Join us at the Bethlehem Area Public Library (virtually) for a series of presentations in partnership with Lehigh Valley Audubon Society and the South Side Initiative: *S.O.S. Save Our Swifts by Saving their Urban Habitat: Telling the Story of the Chimney Swifts and their Connection to Our City*. Each session will stream live on [BAPL's YouTube channel](#). Register for each session using the forum title links below. This series is supported by the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium (LVEHC) Mellon Grant for Public Forums.

Forum #1 Wednesday, February 17, 2021, 7:00-8:30 PM Chimney Swifts and their Adaptation to Urban Habitats:

Scott Burnet, Lehigh Valley Audubon Society (LVAS) Chairman of the Habitat Committee

Peter Saenger, LVAS President, Ornithologist at Muhlenberg College
Acopian Center for Ornithology

Jennie Gilrain (moderator), LVAS Member and Bethlehem Area School District Teacher

Peter Saenger and Scott Burnet will educate the public about these unusual birds. Swifts originally roosted in hollow trees of old growth forests, but since the Industrial Revolution, have adapted to live in chimneys in urban environments. Approximately 2,200 birds were

counted entering the Masonic Temple chimney in South Bethlehem in August 2020. Scott Burnet estimates that tens of thousands of chimney swifts use this roost yearly. Since the Masonic Temple was built in 1925 (95 years ago), it is reasonable to assume that up to 95 generations of swifts have called this chimney home. Peter Saenger and Scott Burnet will tell the story of how these aerial acrobats have cohabitated with the people in multiple roosts in Bethlehem since the Industrial Revolution.

Forum #2 Thursday, March 11, 2021, 7:00-8:30 PM
Changing Methods of Construction and the Impact on
Chimney Swifts

Christine Ussler, Architect and Founder, Artefact, Inc.; Professor of Practice, Art, Architecture and Design, Lehigh University; Board Member, Pennsylvania Historic Preservation; Advisory Board Member, South Bethlehem Historical Society

Scott Burnet, Chairman of the Habitat Committee of the Lehigh Valley Audubon Society (LVA)

Peter Saenger, LVA President, Ornithologist at Muhlenberg College Acopian Center for Ornithology

Mary Foltz (moderator), Director of South Side Initiative and Professor of English, Lehigh University

Scott Burnet visited the Masonic Temple redevelopment site in South Bethlehem on December 11, 2020 to consult with developer, John Noble, and Architect, Christine Ussler, about the potential relocation and design of the 40-foot-high 5-foot square Masonic Temple chimney. Christine Ussler will tell the story of the changing form and function of chimney structures throughout Bethlehem's history. Scott will connect our human (his)story to the story of the swifts' adaptation from hollow trees in old growth forests to masonry chimneys in urban environments. Scott and Christine will ask the audience to reconceptualize our relationship with nature to acknowledge the interconnection between human and natural history.

Forum #3, Wednesday, April 21, 2021, 7:00-8:30 PM
Modeling a Solution of Cooperation between Conservation and Development, A Panel Discussion

John Noble, Developer and property owner of Masonic Temple and Wilbur Mansion

Peter Saenger, Ornithologist, Lehigh Valley Audubon Society, President
Lynn F. Rothman, Environmental Scientist, Bethlehem Environmental Advisory Council, Chair

Karen Beck Pooley, Professor of Practice, Director of Environmental Policy, Lehigh University

Breana Holland (moderator), Professor of Political Science and the Environmental Initiative, Lehigh University

Developer and property owner, John Noble will tell the story of his commitment to conservation, his discovery of the birds in the Masonic Temple Chimney in South Bethlehem, his decision to save the birds by saving an important part of their migratory habitat and the impact of this decision on his development project. Peter Saenger will speak about the impact of this project on the population of Chimney Swifts, as well as the broader impact of urban development on bird migration. Lynn Rothman will speak about the balance between environmental protection and development. Karen Beck Pooley will speak about how we might design and implement policies that protect wild species in urban areas. Finally, we will invite the public to imagine: What does it mean for a city to befriend a bird? How might the symbolic gesture of naming the Chimney Swift the Bird of Bethlehem impact our relationship to the species? Then how might we implement policy changes that reflect that changing relationship? How might this story encourage a city-wide attitude of respect for wildlife, a changing relationship to the earth?

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