

Chaetura

SPRING 2005

Driftwood Wildlife Association

Volume 10 Issue 1



We are often asked for data that corroborates our claim that Chimney Swift numbers are declining. Usually these inquiries are directed to the National Breeding Bird Survey where the trends are quite clear. In 2004, Audubon magazine published an article on the status of many of our North American birds, and the Chimney Swifts were included.

The article states that Chimney Swift numbers had declined by a dramatic 44% since 1969. The total number of Chimney Swifts in the world is currently estimated to be only 15 million birds.

When we attended an avian conservation meeting earlier this year, one delegate told us that when developing conservation plans in their state, Chimney Swifts were omitted because “nothing could be done”.

Public education and tower construction can and do make a difference. It seems that we all need to make a greater effort to get the word out.

Paul Kyle, Editor

“Counting Chimney Swifts is easy...” (or is it ???)

Cub Scout Den 6 counted swifts as partial fulfillment of the Cub Scout World Conservation Award. Eight boys gathered at 7:15 pm on a very pleasant evening and heard an overview of bird migration and Chimney Swifts. By 7:30 the swifts starting appearing, and by 7:45 they were in their “hurricane” formation (Category 4, the boys said!). A few individuals entered the chimney early, and the boys said “This is easy!” By 7:50 the mass entry was underway, and the boys were totally amazed (and of course lost count). A small crowd of passers-by stopped and watched with us. By 7:55, only 6 birds remained. Right around 8:00 the last pair entered the chimney. A total of about 200 were counted. The Scout Den hopes to participate in the swift arrival project next spring – they had a blast! (*for more information, see A Swift Night Out on page 11*)



Cub Scout Den 6 before counting for A Swift Night Out 2004

Number of swifts counted: 200

Time (and time zone): 7:30-8:00 pm EDT

Date: Friday, September 10, 2004

Location: Warrenton, VA (45 miles west of Washington DC)

Address: SW corner of 4th and Main Streets, Warrenton, VA

Broad description of the site: Brick building, business on first floor, residence on 2nd floor. Brick chimney is set back only about 15 feet from Main Street, which is fairly busy with vehicle and foot traffic. One lady walked by with her dog and said the swifts have been using this chimney for a number of years. Weather conditions: mostly clear, with some clouds moving in, 74 degrees, winds calm, barometer 30.18, dew point 68 degrees.

/Chris Eberly (Assistant Den Leader)



Report from Chaetura Canyon

Chimney Swift research began at Chaetura Canyon in 1989 with the construction of two large wooden towers. To date, fifteen structures are available for swift habitation. Seven towers are constructed of wood; the other eight are constructed from cinderblock. Three of the structures are monitored with miniature video cameras. In 2004, nine of the fifteen were utilized by swifts, six of the wooden and three cinderblock. A total of 43 eggs were laid, 31 hatched (72%) and 28 (90% of those hatched) resulted in fledged young. No second broods were attempted. The towers were utilized for 203 consecutive days in 2004.

For detailed information, check out the **Chaetura Canyon** link at www.chimneyswifts.org

Here and there...

Austin, TX

Deborah Herczog reported "success at St. Edward's University tower. I could see the nest thru the bottom holes. Am very pleased about that obviously!" When the tower was cleaned and Tangle foot reapplied to the legs in late winter, it was learned that four of six eggs hatched and fledged.

On August 6, Karol and Jim de Vries wrote: "We have swifts in our chimney! We had had the chimney top modified during the winter, but all summer the swifts did not come. Now they are here."

The 12' tower at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department headquarters had a nest again last year. However, the bottom of the tower came loose, so it was not

possible to determine the number of eggs laid or hatched. *(ED. Note: this is a good lesson in tower maintenance. See the article on Tower Maintenance on page 12)*

The Center for Environment Education at Hornsby Bend had mixed results: one Kiosk Tower had five eggs / four hatched while the other Kiosk Tower had a partially completed nest with no



Photo by Paul Kyle

indication of any eggs laid. The 8' tower that was installed in 2002 was still unoccupied.

Carters Lake, GA

Paul Jastram reported "another successful nesting season at Carters Lake, located in NW Georgia. We have a total of 5 nesting towers. We build them out of old picnic table seats and tops when we replace them. Boards are 8 feet long and we cut one in half to make the towers 12 feet. Three of the towers fledged 3 young and one fledged 4. The other tower did not have a nest nor did it have a nest last year, the first year. Guess something is wrong with the location. It is a little close to the edge of a wooded area, maybe 6 feet. Will move it this winter."

Here and there 1.1



Photo by Jerry Cunningham

Kingsland, TX

Packsaddle Elementary School has a new swift tower. Jerry Cunningham reported, "We put it up on Earth Day!!" The Lower Colorado River Authority Clean Texas program funded the construction of a tower at Highland Lakes Elementary last year, Packsaddle this year and has plans for a third tower in 2005.



Photo by Brian Bockhahn

Wake Forest, NC

Brian Bockhahn continues to enhance Falls Lake State Park for Chimney Swifts: "I have another scout who just built a free-standing tower, but it was not used. I need to cap the nearby shelter fireplaces, and hopefully the birds can relocate to the tower."

Staunton, VA

Mary Penn-Soranno and Bill Soranno noted, "swifts came to Staunton right on time this year, April 15th. It always seems to coincide with Tax Day! We have many more swifts this year than we have in years past. Hopefully this is a good sign. We still have not had any interest in our tower, but we continue to hope...". However, in the fall they reported, "once again this year our tower did not get used. One of these times I would love to tell you that Chimney Swifts decided to grace us with their presence!"



Photo by Alan J. Stanevich

Beecher, IL

Alan J. Stanevich "was excited to see my first Chimney Swift entering my new tower at 7 PM tonight (June 8)! I saw 3 or 4 more in the area too. I'm glad they saw the Vacancy sign on top of my 20 foot tower"

Cedar Creek, TX

A report from Jim Roecker: "The birds that used my tower as a nest site were successful this year. They had one nest on the south wall of the tower, 78 inches down from the top of the rain guard, slightly west of center. I heard the feeding noises of the young but do not know how many young there were."

Bath, NY

Longtime supporter Marlene Cramner sent "a note to let you know that the Chimney Swifts nested in our chimney this year."



Photo by Carol Cassetti

South Carolina

A new tower was constructed at Saluda Shoals Park. "The inside has a rough texture for little feet and there are grooves every four or so inches just like bricks. All that remains is for the concrete to harden and the vinyl siding to be put on. Once we have that, we can include the information board and we are done. Already we have had people ask us what the structure is, out in the field."

Jeanette Wells

Here and there 1.2

Elizabeth, IL

Grace Storch “eventually had between 8-12 birds using the chimney every night and would delight in watching them descend, one by one, negotiating the TV antenna to do so. I could hear their chips and chatters in the shaft. This tower is from your plans using the rough grooved plywood. People I show it to are amazed that it’s not a real chimney from the outside appearance.”



Photo by Paul Kyle

Johnson City, TX

This kiosk tower was constructed near the bird blind at Pedernales State Park. Park Manager Bill McDaniel stated, “the tower is a great addition to the park. I am checking it for new arrivals.” Unfortunately, a late fall report revealed that there was “no activity this year.”



Photo by Bill Lindemann

Fredericksburg, TX

Bill Lindemann built his tower in 1988. Swifts have used it every year since it was erected.



Photo by Jeffrey Hitchings

Double Oak, TX

“I have almost finished my tower in just two days. Corner trim, top, and the bottom still to finish. The tower is 16 feet high and 23 inches inside diameter.” Jeffrey Hitchings



Photo by Joyce Rosson

Kansas City, MO

The Lakeside Nature Center now has a tower. Joyce and Bill Rosson were instrumental in the project. Joyce reports: “It is 20 feet tall, 18” x 18” inside, 24” x 24” outside with an extra layer of siding painted to match the building. There is a hidden door under the siding; they just unscrew part of the siding to reveal the door. Chimney Swifts were flying all around the tower before it was completed and entered as soon as it was finished, and nested. They didn’t even have time to install the camera before the swifts took over.”

Holt, MO

Swifts occupied both wooden towers attached to the Holt family barn. One tower hosted a spring roost of 70 to 80 birds. Although nests were constructed in both towers and eggs laid, no swifts fledged from either structure.

Here and there 1.3

Matthews, NC

Dan Howie had “to post that again in 2004, I did not have a single Swift visit my tower. I don’t know what the problem is, but I think this is the third year that I have had the tower up, and still no Swifts. I used 8” X 8” flue pipe on top and it opens up into a 16” X 16” tower. Do you think I need to increase the opening size, or maybe just eliminate the tapered opening all together, and just have the top opened to the full tower dimensions? I see the Swifts in April, about the first, and they are all over the place feeding on insects in the air, but apparently are not attracted to my tower. Any recommendations will be taken very seriously!”

Turner, OR

Mike Hardwick also reported that “our tower was not used this year. It has never been used in the three seasons since it was built. This fall, I enlarged the top opening. Perhaps that will make a difference next spring...”

(ED. Note: Reducing the top opening of towers has proven to be very beneficial for nesting swifts. The amount of sunlight and rain that enters the structure is significantly reduced. However, we now believe that the top opening in any tower should be no smaller than 6” x 12” or approximately 1/2 the size of the inside of the tower shaft. The opening should always be located on the northern edge of the top of the tower)



Photo by Gary Younglove

Fair Oaks Ranch, Texas

Using your approach, I built a tower and lifted it two weeks ago. I would have written sooner but had things to attend to. Needless to say the base needs work and I have remedied that with much stronger angle iron and with the help of my hydraulic jack have been able to replace the temp spacer and temp foundation. Thank you for the plans and the photos of your project. I built mine in three four foot high parts. Still quite heavy. If you want details...reply. In the meantime, I hope to have residents this year. Keep on helping these birds...few know of them and they are such wonderful visitors on a summer day and evening. Gary Younglove



Photo by Lydia Middendorf and Nate McVaugh

Johnson City, TX

An 8-foot tall tower was constructed at the Middendorf Ranch. Swifts unsuccessfully attempted to nest in the 12-foot tall cinderblock tower at this location, and only wasps utilized the smaller structure.



Photo courtesy of Marty Jones

Marty Jones writes: “Check out the our first Chimney Swift tower in Dublin, Ohio.”

Here and there 1.4



Photo by Tom Peterson

Asheville, NC

Tom and Susan Peterson sent pictures from their tower. Tom was up on the roof trimming some branches that were hanging over the tower and peeked inside. "There was one swift sitting on the nest. ... I didn't completely get the swift as I was only guessing as to where to point. The swift didn't budge off the nest while I peeked, took pictures, and finished cutting the branches."

Bellaire, TX

The staff at the Nature Discovery Center in Bellaire reported nearly two dozen swifts roosting in their 12' Kiosk Tower last fall.



Photos by Paul Spearman

Dearborn, MI

Capt. Paul Spearman of the Dearborn Fire Department "discovered a nest of swifts in our chimney that connects to our hose house here at the station. The station was built in 1937 and the tower was used to hang and dry hoses after use. We have seen 8 to 10 birds flying down the chimney but it looks as if only one pair is nesting there. The chimney is approximately 40 – 50 feet high. I have taken some pictures from our ladder truck which is an aerial tower that can raise to approximately 100 feet."



Photo by Paul Kyle

Spicewood, TX

This tower demonstrated that an 8' tower can be successful if properly insulated. To date we have built 8 of these smaller structures, and 5 of them have now been successfully used by Chimney Swifts. These towers combine a ventilated air space with rigid, foil-backed insulation.

Paul and Georgean Kyle

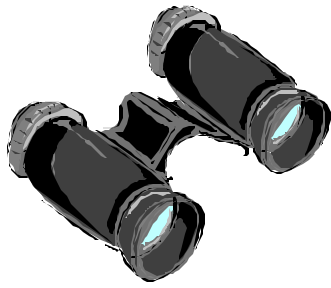
A WORD ABOUT WASPS



Many of the towers we monitor have large wasp's nests attached to the inside of the tops of the towers. While there does not seem to be any conflict between the wasps and the swifts, there is some concern about the possibility of wasps stinging nestling swifts. It may be possible to discourage the wasps from nesting by rubbing the inside top of the tower with a bar of Ivory soap. This method has been effective in discouraging wasps in bluebird nest boxes.

Ed. Note: Our apologies to those Associates who kindly submitted photos to be included in Chaetura that do not appear in this issue. Due to a complete computer crash, some of the submissions sent in before August were lost.



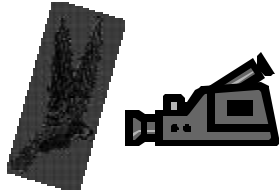


REPORT YOUR SPRING CHIMNEY SWIFT SIGHTINGS

For the fifth year we will be posting and mapping first spring Chimney Swift sightings all across North America. You can follow these sightings as we update the map on the DWA web site. Contact us with your first spring sightings!

Email: DWA@austin.rr.com

Phone: (512) 266-3861



CHIMNEY SWIFT WEB CAM

For the past 5 years we have been using surveillance cameras to monitor and record the Chimney Swift activity in the Observation Towers at the Chaetura Canyon Bird Sanctuary. We have recorded remarkable and previously unknown behavior such as aggressive defense of the nest tower by nesting pairs — against other swifts!

The web cam will provide a live feed in real time beginning May 1st and will be active from dawn until dusk (approximately 7:00 am through 8:00 pm CDT). In the event of thunderstorms in our area, it will be shut down.

Visit the Driftwood Wildlife Association web site at

www.chimneyswifts.org

and “bookmark” the Chimney Swift web cam now!

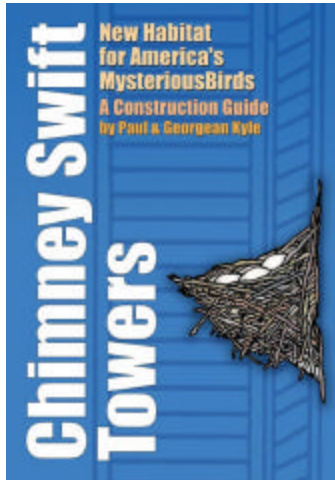
SLIDE PROGRAM AVAILABLE



We have a 50-slide presentation complete with a printed narrative to guide you through your own presentation about Chimney Swifts and the North American Chimney Swift Nest Site Research Project. The program includes close ups of nestling, fledgling and adult Chimney Swifts. There are also slides of several of the tower designs which have proved successful. The program is available for rent or purchase. For more information contact Paul or Georgean Kyle by phone or fax at (512) 266-3861 or by e-mail at DWA@austin.rr.com.

There are plans to create a Power Point presentation in 2005

*The Driftwood Wildlife Association
is pleased to announce the release of two new books about Chimney Swifts
from the Texas A & M University Press*



Chimney Swift Towers

New Habitat for America's Mysterious Birds

Paul D. Kyle and Georgean Z. Kyle

Chimney Swifts, birds that nest and roost in chimneys, have been historically abundant in North America. But by the late 1980s, the number of swifts migrating to North America from the Amazon River Basin had declined.

A growing number of people across North America are now constructing nesting towers and conducting Chimney Swift conservation projects in their own communities. With *Chimney Swift Towers*, concerned bird conservationists have a step-by-step guide to help them create more habitat for these beneficial, insect-eating birds. Chimney Swift experts Paul and Georgean Kyle give directions for building freestanding wooden towers, wooden kiosk towers, masonry towers, and other structures. Included are:

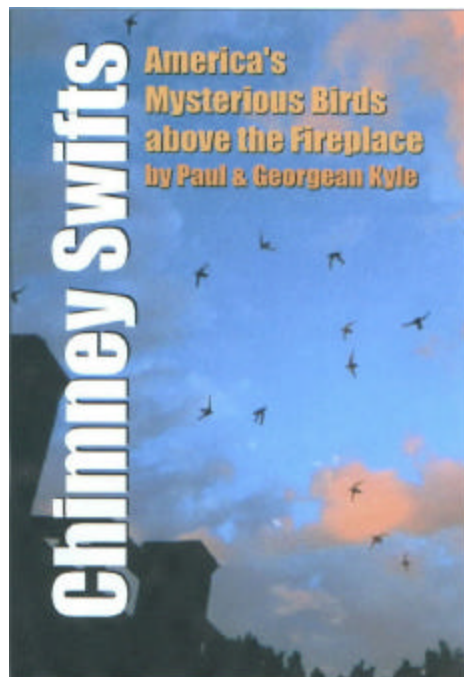
- design basics
- lists of materials needed
- useful diagrams and photographs
- and detailed instructions on site preparation, tower construction, installation, and maintenance

Anyone with basic woodworking or masonry skills and an interest in wildlife conservation will find this publication helpful. That includes do-it-yourselfers, homeowners involved in creating backyard habitat for wildlife, landscape and structural architects, park and wildscape managers, wildlife management area professionals, nature centers, garden centers, scout troops, and other civic organizations in search of community service projects.

Paul D. and Georgean Z. Kyle are project directors of the Driftwood Wildlife Association's North American Chimney Swift Nest Site Research Project, an all-volunteer effort to expand public awareness about the beneficial nature and the plight of Chimney Swifts.

5 3/4x8 1/2. 96 pp. 36 black & white photos. 13 line drawings.

Paper back \$12.00



Chimney Swifts:

America's Mysterious Birds above the Fireplace

Paul D. Kyle and Georgean Z. Kyle

Illustrated by Georgean Z. Kyle

Photography by Paul D. Kyle

From the curious sounds of baby swifts chattering in the chimney to the awe-inspiring sight of birds entering their roost at dusk, like smoke swirling back into the flue, Chimney Swifts have captured the imagination of many generations of North Americans.

These sleek birds with crescent-shaped wings and acrobatic flight patterns migrate to North America from the Amazon River Basin each spring to breed and raise their young. But by the late 1980s, changes in chimney construction and homeowner attitudes had contributed to a major decline in the numbers of Chimney Swifts. Authors Paul and Georgean Kyle have worked ceaselessly in an attempt to alter that trend.

The Kyles' eight-acre homestead has become a world-renowned Chimney Swift sanctuary and research station, with more than a dozen Chimney Swift towers of various designs located throughout their property. The swifts return each spring to many of these towers, where they rear their young and where their home life is observed and recorded in previously undocumented detail.

In *Chimney Swifts*, the Kyles share the knowledge they have gained, providing readers with an unprecedented peek into the secret life of these beneficial, insect-eating birds. With a non-technical narrative, numerous photos, and original drawings, they explore Chimney Swift natural history and provide practical guidelines for homeowners to coexist peacefully with these remarkable spring and summer guests.

What people are saying about this book

"This is a truly outstanding book on a fascinating subject, written by a remarkable husband and wife team who have followed their passions and devoted decades of their lives to the study, conservation, and rehabilitation of Chimney Swifts." —James R. Hill III, founder and executive director, Purple Martin Conservation Association

"With the publication of the Kyles' work we enter a new era of literature, research, and field work on the chimney swift. . . . [This book] will stand as the definitive volume on the species." — Richard B. Fischer, Cornell University

"...thoughtfully entertaining, vitally conservation relevant, and a must read for anyone concerned about conserving America's birds. My congratulations to the authors!" — Merlin D. Tuttle, Bat Conservation International

5 3/4x8 1/2. 152 pp. 41 color and 4 black & white photos. 28 line drawings.

Hard cover \$29.00 / Paper back \$15.00

Missouri Chimney Swift Summit

A unique meeting was held on November 16 at the Discovery Center in Kansas City, Mo. The meeting was initiated by Russell Mende who was introduced to swifts when three birds were found in his daughter's fireplace. Rehabilitator and conservationist Joyce Rosson enlightened him about the birds and their plight. Joe Ryan, director of the new Discovery Center, also shared an interest in swifts. He reminisced watching the migrating birds drop into a huge chimney on an old school that no longer exists.

Joe agreed "to host a Swift Summit at the Discovery Center to bring together people who enjoy or wish to learn more about Chimney Swifts.

The meeting objectives include:

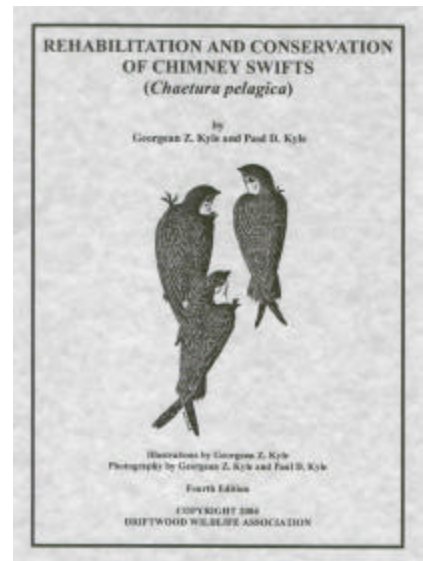
- Discuss swift biology and recent population trends;
- Identify current efforts to assist habitat requirements;
- Identify educational opportunities for individuals and
- Encourage local action by establishing a network of interested people.

The initial guest list includes wildlife professionals, naturalists, educators, park & recreation staff, nature center and interpretive site staff...to become excited about the opportunity to work with others, and with Chimney Swifts, for the betterment of our natural world."

Representatives from across Missouri attended the meeting and were inspired to return home "to spread the word about Chimney Swifts and to construct towers."

/Joyce Rosson

Chimney Swift Rehabilitation Manual Now Available

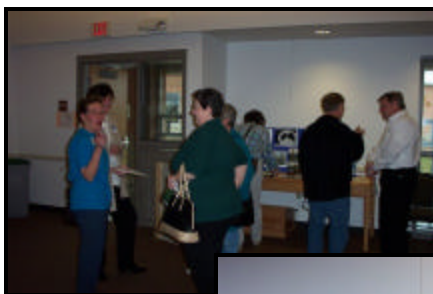


There is nothing like a nest of baby Chimney Swift to bring even the most accomplished licensed wildlife rehabilitators to their knees — caring for Chimney Swifts is difficult.

This latest edition is the result of more than 20 years of research and rehabilitation with one of the least known of our North American breeding migratory birds. In 54 pages it contains information necessary to help the rehabilitator successfully hand-rear Chimney Swifts from the initial acquisition to final release back into the wild population. The easy to understand text is accompanied by 50 photos, drawings, diagrams and tables.

This updated latest edition of *Rehabilitation and Conservation of Chimney Swifts* also contains valuable information on preserving existing habitat and creating new nesting and roosting structures.

The booklet may be downloaded in PDF format from our web site at www.chimneyswifts.org. There is no charge, but a \$10.00 donation to the Driftwood Wildlife Association will help with educational efforts.



A Swift Night Out

A Swift Night Out is a national effort to raise awareness about Chimney and Vaux's Swifts by drawing attention to the spectacle of fall roosts. Thanks to all who participated in the 2004 Swift Night Out count. This event has helped to locate structures that the swifts use during migration and to record the number of individual birds utilizing those structures. It is also an excellent way to introduce folks to Chimney Swifts. Swift watchers from 20 states and from Ontario, Canada participated in locating and monitoring communal roosts. Some associates initiate parties for the evening counts:

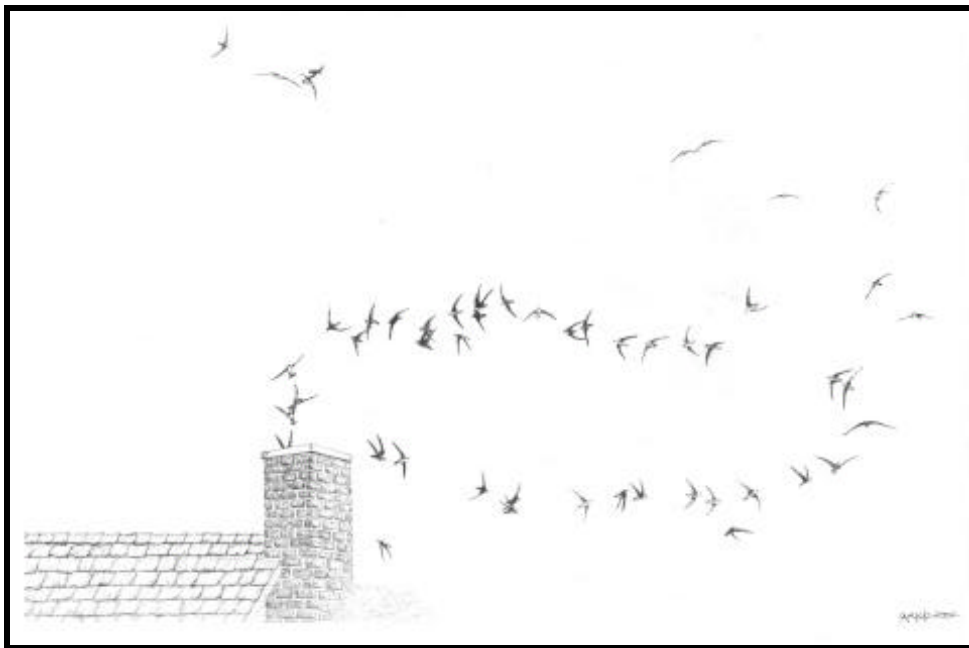
"We look forward to the Swift Night Out and plan to have a party. This is how it goes:

Invite a bunch of friends over and everyone brings a salad and binoculars. We eat early, get into position to count and have fun". Olga and Walter Clifton

"On Sunday evening, September 12, about 45 parents, children, teachers and neighbors gathered at Brentwood Elementary School to participate in Swift Night Out. Brentwood has a giant chimney tower where art teacher Linda Anderson witnessed several Chimney Swifts leaving in the early morning hours when she first arrived at school. Julia and Andy Balinsky were invited to attend the event to talk about swifts; their nesting, roosting and migration habits. We all enjoyed picnic dinners on the lawn before dusk set in. Then everyone excitedly watched and counted as 102 Chimney Swifts circled and flew into the school's chimney for their nightly roost." Julia Balinsky

We sincerely appreciate all of the interest and time spent from the numerous swift watchers across the country, but some parts of the country are still not properly represented — notably Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Ohio and Illinois. If you live in these states or have friends and contacts there, please encourage them to get involved. We need their eyes!

Mark your calendars now. **A Swift Night Out** for 2005 will be held on August 12, 13 and 14 and again on September 9, 10 and 11.



*For a complete list
of sightings and reports, visit
www.chimneyswifts.org
and click on
A Swift Night Out*



TOWER MAINTENANCE

During the summer nesting season, efforts should be made to keep vegetation low around the tower foundation. Tall grasses and other plants that come in contact with the tower can provide “highways” for ants. If a tower is built on legs, a 2” to 3” band of sticky insect barrier such as Tanglefoot should be applied to each leg near the base of the tower. It should be inspected several times during the nesting season for effectiveness. In towers that are in direct ground contact, a dusting of diatomaceous earth or 5% Sevin dust around the outside base of the tower will help keep ants away from the nest. Treatment will need to be reapplied periodically and especially after rainstorms.

In the fall, after the Chimney Swifts are no longer using the tower, the bottom should be cleaned of droppings, eggshells and other material. The nest from each season should also be removed before the swifts return. While Chimney Swifts have been observed reusing old nests, they will not be as strong and secure as a newly constructed nest, and nest building seems to be an important part of pair bonding in Chimney Swifts. When replacing the bottom of a freestanding tower, make certain that it is securely attached.

The outside of towers that are sided with wood will need to be re-painted every few years either before the swifts arrive or after they leave. Covering the top during the winter will extend the life of wooden towers. The inside of cinder block towers need to be re-treated with a latex-based sealer every year.

From Chimney Swifts: America's Mysterious Birds Above the Fireplace by Paul and Georgan Kyle



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS...

“I have noticed a great variance in timing compared to last year, with this years birds already in the roost while the birds last year were just starting to enter at about 8:15. I wonder if this is normal. Also, there was one night of rain last week and no birds were seen at all. Where were they? Do they go in the chimney before it starts raining or do they fly above the clouds until it stops even if it's dark?”
Diane Miller

The time that swifts go to roost can vary depending upon weather conditions. Overcast, cool or rainy evenings can cause them to enter sooner than they would with clear warm evenings. The impetus for going to roost may actually be linked to the ambient light. When you observed no birds on the rainy evening, they were probably already inside the chimney.

“I live in Gibson, GA, about 40 miles southwest of Augusta, GA. My house was built in 1908 and we have a fireplace in every room (6 fireplaces using 3 chimneys). All the fireplaces have been closed off for years, but sometimes we hear squeaky noises coming from inside the chimney. Last night (Sept. 27) we returned home from fishing just before sunset and all of a sudden the sky above our house filled with the most magnificent thing! There were birds, probably a couple hundred, circling our house, chirping and flying around. They were not bats...so, I think they might be Chimney Swifts. What should we do, if anything?”
Barclay Hubbs

What you were seeing were undoubtedly Chimney Swifts. They are congregating now for migration to South America in just

a few weeks. It sounds like you have an ideal situation for Chimney Swift conservation. Since you do not use your chimneys, they are perfect for the swifts. They are unable to perch as songbirds do, but cling to rough vertical surfaces when not in flight. They require deep, dark shafts as a safe place to nest and roost. You are providing them just that. I don't think you need to do anything but enjoy their presence.

“Well, I'll do my best to preserve the small habitat they might have found in my old chimneys.”

“I have a small farm in southern Virginia, where Chimney Swifts return each spring to nest in the open chimney (not lined at all) of the farmhouse and have been doing it for the 25 years I've had the farm.... I also want to build a tower, though I think I would like

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 12)

to construct it of blocks. How would you prevent snakes from climbing it and entering – neatly and efficiently? I've seen black snakes in our area climb brick chimneys, and I'm sure they can climb block. ...I have the idea that because of the rough (course) texture of the blocks, I would not have to worry that the swifts cannot grasp it. Do you agree?"

Warren Turner

On our cinder block towers, we coat the outside with a smooth coat of stucco. We have rat snakes here that like to eat birds and eggs, but we have never had one of them climb a concrete tower with the stucco coating. On the wooden towers, we either use a 24" band of metal flashing around the top or use a smooth siding material to keep the snakes out. Concerning the texture of the blocks, cinder block is rough enough for the swifts to hold onto, but we have had some problems with the nests peeling loose from the walls. Be sure to allow lots of mortar to ooze out between the blocks on the inside. The nest tends to adhere better to the mortar than to the block.

"I am a member of Mississippi Coast Audubon Society and I also work with Audubon Mississippi. We are quite interested in building a tower or two at strategic facilities where we can educate the public about these wonderful birds. I

would appreciate knowing more about the camera system that you employ to monitor and show the birds in the tower." Mark LaSalle

We use several different types of cameras – all have been purchased from a company called Super Circuits (<http://www.supercircuits.com>). They specialize in miniaturized security equipment that is considerably less expensive than companies that sell "wildlife" video equipment. The most economical and versatile camera we have is model #PC74WR. It is black and white, useful in extremely low light and rated for exterior use. Along with the camera you will need a power supply, cable and the proper connectors. You can easily put together a system for under \$200. Make certain that no cables are loose inside a tower as they will be a safety hazard for the birds. One word of caution: DO NOT be tempted to use the infrared cameras that they sell. The frequency of their emitters is visible to the swifts. The light frightens the birds, and they will abandon the tower.

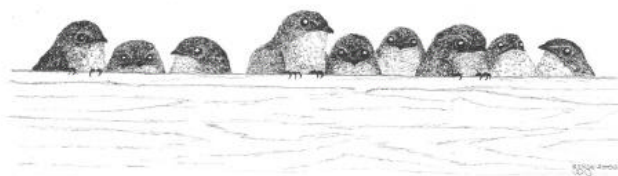
"We live in North Carolina. We purchased a house 10 years old. The chimney is "virgin", has never had a fire in the fireplace. There is no cap on the chimney – ours is the only one open in a neighborhood of over 100 homes. We want to continue to provide the Chimney Swifts a home; yet, we would like

to use the fireplace to burn wood, or gas, preferably without capping the chimney. Can you suggest resources we should contact?"

There should be no problem in your use of the fireplace. Chimney Swifts are in Central America during our winter months, and will not return until April. We would suggest that you have your chimney cleaned in late March to remove the soot and creosote from the chimney walls. This is important for home safety, and it also makes the chimney safer for the swifts during nesting. After the chimney is cleaned, make certain that the damper remains closed until the swifts depart in September. This will prevent the birds from accidentally slipping into the fireplace and your living room.

"Thank you for your reply. We assume it is not possible to install a chimney cap and still provide a home to the Chimney Swifts. The fireplace dealers we visited insisted we install a chimney cap."

A chimney cap is important for a safe wood-burning season as it prevents any sparks from exiting the chimney. However, the cap can be removed during the chimney cleaning in March to allow entry to the swifts during the spring and summer, and then replace the cap before lighting the first fire of winter.



OBSERVATIONS

In April 2004, Joe Kolb was at Minute Maid Park in Houston, TX. "While attending an Astros' game on Friday night (April 30) I noted about 25 swifts flying around within the open-roofed stadium. It appeared that they were in more of a breeding mode than feeding. They stayed together as a flock and generally seemed to be chasing the one(s) in front rather than flying independently or in groups of two or three like I normally see them.

They would fly around the perimeter of the inside of the stadium for a few laps and then disappear, then reappear about 15 minutes later, repeat.

What was most interesting to me was that this continued well after sunset. The game ended about 9:30 or 9:45 (if not later) and this repeated phenomenon continued. I have never seen them fly clearly after dark/sunset.

My theory is that they adapted to the lighted area of the stadium plus the outside of the stadium and thereby have extended their feeding/mating time accordingly.

Charles Dorchester sent a "report for Kenduskeag, Penobscot County, Maine. Fewer Chimney Swifts are returning to our area each year....We never saw more than 5 through late June. It wasn't until Aug. 4 that we saw more than 5 in one day. On that day, we had 8, on Aug. 7, we had 12. They all did a dance (I say they are the ice dancers of the sky) over and through our yard at noon, and then disappeared until the 11th. The 12 returned until Aug. 23, when they disappeared. I observed an interesting happening on Aug. 4, the first day we saw 8. We had a

nesting pair in our chimney (it's an unused chimney we reserve for the swifts). That evening, I saw 4 go to roost. The first two ducked in per usual – so deftly you wonder if you really saw it happen. Then the next two swung round and round the chimney. Finally one made it down. The second had some difficulty, missed the chimney and ticked the roof, but on the second try went down the chimney. We theorized that they were two fledglings."

A post from Steve Cochran from Ohio in mid May stated "last summer, mid July, my double-flue chimney took a direct lightening hit, taking off about 5 feet of brick and flue tile. To have it fixed for future use I had to have a new steel flue liner installed, along with the masonry of course. Although I didn't have a cap on the two flues prior to the 'hit', I went ahead and had a double cap installed, not thinking about the consequences for the Chimney Swifts. This past week, I was mowing and noticed the first few swifts flying in, hovering and circling the chimney. But of course, they had to fly away. My heart sank. They've been with me, so to speak, for almost ten years and typically come out to hunt as I mow the grass, weaving in and out at amazing speeds, sometimes even lightly brushing my ear or hat. It was a little disconcerting at first, but then once you realize how controlled they are I began to view them as 'dolphins of the air', seemingly wanting to acknowledge my presence. ... What I may do is have the chimney cap reinstalled to cover only the new steel flue, that will then make the

flue with the mortared tile available to the swifts."

Another chimney repair report from Nova Scotia: "Earlier this spring I was up on the roof trying to trace down an elusive occasional leak when I was horrified to notice that I could see right through the massive triple chimney. The mortar had fallen out of the top few feet and was all over the roof. I arranged for Masons to come and rebuild it, hopefully before the arrival of any birds but the miserable weather conspired to keep putting things back. The scaffolding didn't go up until several days after I had already seen Chimney Swifts showing an interest. The low temperatures and rain meant that a two or three day job stretched out over 10 days or more. The scaffolding was removed on a Wednesday and the swifts moved back on Thursday and visited all day. At first it was a pair, then a threesome became most common.

On Friday May 21, three Chimney Swifts were here all afternoon, and frequently in and out of the chimney. At 4 PM the group became four and by 5 PM there were 5 birds. For a while it looked as if the five were engaged in a mating ritual, flying in close formation so that they were almost touching and at reckless speeds. You almost expected them to smash into something. The noise level was amazing. At 7:30 the five birds were here and obviously feeding – flying very high in the company of some Tree Swallows. From 8:00 to 8:30 they were obviously feeding, flying as individuals over the brook area and with no noise. No Swifts

were seen here after 8:30 PM, but a couple were seen leaving the chimney early on Saturday morning.

This has been a lesson in how swifts can so easily lose their roosting and nesting sites. I was told that I should have caps or extensions on all the chimneys to keep rain and birds out and protect the mortar. If I had been actually using all three separate flues instead of only one, they would also have demanded that I install steel liners in all three. Fire regulations and insurance demands seem to be depriving the swifts of a lot of usable sites – it must be having quite an effect.”

Robin, an associate in Florida relayed “I thought you might be interested in a “post-hurricane” report regarding our Chimney

Swifts.

Pre-Ivan.....

Monday 9/13....104 birds

Tuesday 9/14.....84 birds

Wednesday 9/15 (Ivan begins to hit during late afternoon) 3 or 4 birds observed entering the chimney in midday. I watched at 7 PM, their usual arrival time, but no birds came. At that time, it was already blowing like mad and raining.

Thursday 9/16 the storm let up about late morning. Suddenly, there was a bird in our fireplace, behind the screen! We were alerted the moment it happened thanks to our jungle lioness (housecat). We then got an up-close and personal look at a Chimney Swift. We discovered that the storm had actually blown open the damper. One of the swifts had apparently flown (or got blown) down rather than up. After some panic on all parts, he found his way up the

chimney and out – and we quickly closed the damper again. That evening...

Post-Ivan...

Thursday 9/16....12 birds

Friday 9/17.....8 birds

Today, Monday 9/20...10 birds

Now about the storm....

We are fine; our house is fine. We had several huge (60 foot) trees blown down. We were well prepared with hurricane shutters on the house, lots of batteries and provisions. It was a scary storm — worse than Opal in '95. It felt like it would never stop. The storm blew for 18 hours and you could feel the house shake during the gusts (ours is brick). There are lots of people without homes, or businesses. I'd say that it will take a few months for our area to recover completely. Unfortunately, in Pensacola, an hour to our west, it will take years.”



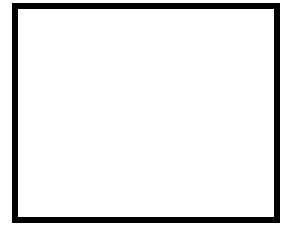
Fledglings on Patrol

by Georgean Z. Kyle

From Chimney Swifts: America's Mysterious Birds above the Fireplace

Chaetura

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Visit our web site at:
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In addition to learning more about the North American
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- ♦ learn about wildlife rehabilitation
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