

Chaetura

SUMMER 2007

Driftwood Wildlife Association

Volume 12



Canada Cares...

The entire breeding range of Chimney Swifts is restricted to North America, and the majority of that range is in the Eastern USA. Based on the North American Breeding Bird Survey, Chimney Swift numbers have been steadily declining since the 1960's. While the decline is widely acknowledged, Chimney Swifts are still barely on the radar of most bird conservationists. Meanwhile, our neighbors to the north have come to recognize the gravity of the decline of the world-wide population of Chimney Swifts.

In 2005 representatives of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) contacted the Driftwood Wildlife Association. We were asked to provide any data available on the productivity and survivability of nesting Chimney Swifts. The banding data we have collected from the towers at the Chaetura Canyon Bird Sanctuary over the past 20 years was apparently useful, and this year the committee made a decision regarding the status of the Chimney Swift in Canada. The recommendation presented was to list Chimney Swifts as "Threatened". However, it must be emphasized that this is a status recommendation only and it must be approved by the Canadian Minister of the Environment. The process can take from one to two years and the Minister can go against the COSEWIC's proposed status following a socio-economic study on the impacts of such a designation for the species. This is truly a "good news / bad news" scenario. Good because it will draw more attention to the plight of Chimney Swifts / bad because the species has declined significantly enough to warrant such a designation.

On the "up" side is the formation of the Manitoba Chimney Swift Initiative. Headed by Mike Quigley, this project has two phases. Phase One will monitor Chimney Swifts by identifying potential nesting and roosting sites to help obtain a better estimate of the Manitoba population.

Phase two will involve the building and placement of nesting and roosting towers. Volunteers are needed to monitor nesting and roosting sites and compile critical information. Volunteers do not need to possess any prior birding skills. Interested individuals should contact:

Mike Quigley,
MCSI Coordinator
at

mikequigley@winnipeg.ca



© Photo by Greg W. Lasley

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A New Era for Chaetura Canyon: A Bird Sanctuary And Chimney Swift Observatory

Since 1972 we have been acquiring property in a small canyon west of Austin, Texas and have worked diligently to preserve and restore the native habitat. In addition, research centered on the conservation of Chimney Swifts has been pursued since the mid 1980's. Numerous nesting towers for the benefit and study of Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) have been constructed. The eight acre refuge has been named Chaetura Canyon.

We are proud to announce that on December 28, 2006 an agreement was signed with Travis Audubon Society (TAS) making Chaetura Canyon a bird sanctuary to be protected by the society in perpetuity. We will continue to live on the property to the end of our lives. Our mission is to preserve, in perpetuity, a small piece of natural habitat within a rapidly urbanizing area of Central Texas while providing a safe place for native species of birds to forage, raise their young and rest during migration. Chimney Swifts will obviously continue to be our prime focus, and Chaetura Canyon will remain a premier Chimney Swift Observatory for all of North America. Research and educational efforts will continue to be conducted by the Driftwood Wildlife Association in partnership with TAS. We welcome your continued support!

For more information regarding the property transfer, go to the TAS web site: www.travisaudubon.org. The February 2007 issue (Volume 56, No. 2) of Signal Smoke, the TAS newsletter, features the property transfer. A special fund has been established by TAS for management of this new and unique nature preserve.

Georgean and Paul Kyle

Report from Chaetura Canyon

Chimney Swifts research began at Chaetura Canyon with the construction of two large wooden towers. To date, sixteen structures are available for swift habitation. Eight towers are constructed of wood; the other eight are constructed of cinderblock. Three structures are monitored with miniature video cameras. In 2006, twelve structures were utilized by swifts, six of the wooden and six of the cinderblock.

The first swift arrived on March 31, entered the South Tower and roosted overnight just below last years nest location. A second bird arrived the next day. By May 13, six eggs were in the nest, but that evening, only one swift was in residence. No incubation was initiated by the single bird. Five days later, two swifts were observed in the tower. The following morning only one egg remained in the nest, the others were on the tower floor. The pair produced four eggs which all hatched and fledged. A roost of two to thirteen birds remained in this tower until October 18.

On April 1, fourteen swifts chose the North Tower as overnight accommodations. The roost grew over the month to 177 individuals. The mated pair finally began nest construction on May 3 but were having some difficulty on selecting a "perfect" spot. On May 7 they focused on one location for the nest and began to actively defend the tower in the evening as roosting birds arrived. By May 15 the pair had total privacy. They produced five eggs; one

fell over the edge; the remaining four hatched and fledged. An overnight roost again began to congregate after the fledging and grew to a total of 322. The last swifts migrated on Oct. 18.

The Castle, the largest cinderblock tower on the property, was not utilized for nesting. A roost of non-breeding swifts occupied the structure nightly from May 27 through October 18.

Five cinderblock towers span a fence line. Four of those structures hosted nesting pairs, two for the very first time.

The Prism pair arrived together on April 2. Four additional birds were roosting with them by the end of the month. No interior surveillance is possible in this tower. Consequently we have no insight into what occurred during the breeding season. When the tower bottom was removed in late winter, we discovered five un-hatched eggs (shell intact), four broken eggs (shell broken but still attached at one edge), five hatched eggs (ten shell "halves" with clean hatching edges) and two dead hatchlings. This is a total of sixteen eggs with a fledging of only three swifts.

Productivity for the swifts at Chaetura Canyon remained consistent with previous years total fledglings produced. However, the number of eggs laid to achieve the 35 fledglings was extraordinary. Chimney Swifts were present at Chaetura Canyon for 202 days 2006.



CHIMNEY SWIFT PRODUCTIVITY AT CHAETURA CANYON--- 2006

| Tower | # Eggs Laid | # Eggs Hatch | # Young Fledged |
|-------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|
| North Observation | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| South Observation | 10 | 4 | 4 |
| Prism | 16 | 5 | 3 |
| West Field | 6 | 4 | 4 |
| 12' Demonstration | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| South Pool | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Marlene in Garden | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| Fence Tower #1 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| Fence Tower #2 | 8 | 6 | 3 |
| Fence Tower #4 | 10 | 4 | 4 |
| Fence Tower #5 | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| Totals | 75 | 45 | 35 |

Here and there



Photo courtesy of Carol Cassetti

Columbia, SC

Carol Cassetti reports that "Gregory Morrison received his Eagle Scout Badge for this Chimney Swift Tower Project. His Scout Leader is Stan Rogan. Honeywell supplied the materials, and Stan's Scout Troup did a great job of building it. Honeywell is now Shaw Industries - and the 500 acre wildlife habitat is along the Saluda River - there is room for more towers in the future."



Photo by Don Hurdt

North Prairie, MN

"I built a chimney and put it up a little over a year ago. I attached chicken wire onto wood corners and a layer of cement over the chicken wire. I made it so there is an air space on all sides to keep it cool inside and have hardware cloth on the bottom to keep out predators. I covered the outside with leftover pieces of building steel, not all is the same color. Hopefully the birds won't mind. It is twelve feet tall and weighs a ton. I had to have my dad come and raise it with his tractor and loader." *Don Hurdt*



Photo courtesy of Kelby Ouchley

Farmerville, LA

"We have recently erected an 18 foot tall chimney swift tower at Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge near Monroe, Louisiana. Our visitor center is in the background." *Kelby Ouchley*
Refuge Manager

Dripping Springs, TX

"The camera inside the tower at Dripping Springs Elementary has been getting lots of attention at the school. A monitor is in the school library. Although we haven't seen any swifts yet, I still remain hopeful." *Jamie Honeycutt*

Swifts did move into the tower last year, produced seven eggs and six swifts fledged. P&G Kyle



Here and there 1.1



Photo Courtesy of Elizabeth Wilson

New Castle, PA

“We just completed our twin castle Chimney Swift towers in Lawrence County. The photo does not have the finished look of the landscaping around it and the informational kiosk that will be on the front of it.”
Elizabeth Wilson

Cedar Creek, TX

Jim Roecker reported: “Unfortunately, the swifts were unsuccessful this year. A small green snake found a way to get into the tower. I blocked the entry point too late for the birds to nest. Hopefully they will return next year.”



Photo by Joe and Laura Jelemensky

Austin, TX

Joe and Laura Jelemensky wrote: “Just wanted to let you know that we got our tower up. We put it near the edge of our septic field since that is the most open area that we have. I was able to save the cost of the T-1 11 because a friend gave me some leftovers from a workshop he built a couple of years ago. They were not full sheets but I was able to piece together the nest chamber quite nicely. I used stucco Hardi-panel for the outside. Still needs to be painted but here is a picture of it.”



Photo by Dave Kollen

Austin, TX

Dave Kollen constructed a new swift tower. He “... opted for 5 foot, 2 and 3/8 inch diameter steel fence posts for legs and used hardware specifically designed to mount the posts into a corner made of 2X4s (two feet of the post are inside the tower). Interior dimensions are 16"X16". The finish is lap-n-gap cedar siding.”

Clarington , OH

“I recently built a chimney swift tower. It's 16" sq. x 12' tall., and is located in Monroe county Ohio about two miles west of Clarington on Cochran Hill road.” *Ed Pletcher*



Here and there 1.2



Photo by Lydia Middendorf

Johnson City, TX

Lydia Middendorf and Nate McVaugh reported another successful nesting season. The cinderblock castle tower pair produced seven eggs. Six eggs hatched and all six hatchlings fledged. The eight foot tall wooden tower pair laid four eggs, two hatched and fledged. Their newest addition to the swift accommodations is a cinderblock tower constructed in memory of Lydia's mother. This large and unique structure attracted a pair of swifts. All six eggs that were laid hatched and the young all fledged. The tower also attracted interesting invertebrates. An assassin bug and a scorpion were found dead on the tower floor and a Black Widow spider was repairing her web low in the structure.



Photo courtesy of Robert Bassler

Purcellville, VA

Robert Bassler reported that "The Chimney Swift tower at Dominion High School is finished. The science department is going to try to put a camera in the tower to monitor nesting." Nicole Hamilton stated that this is "the first Chimney Swift tower in Loudoun County Virginia! We plan to do at least 2 more in the near term - one at Rust Sanctuary and one at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship."

Elizabeth, IL

Grace Storch wrote: "I put up a false chimney on my new house in 2001 with swifts using it right away. I now have a new shed which also has a false chimney and I hope the swifts will use that one too."



Photo courtesy of David and Patsy Glen

Wimberley, TX

Patsy and David Glenn and the Wimberley Birding Society were instrumental in the addition of a Chimney Swift tower with a kiosk to the Wimberley Bird Refuge.

Westerville, OH

"Several years ago my neighbor's chimney cap blew off in a storm. Swifts immediately moved in and last summer his flock had grown to around 20. Last fall he finally found a ladder big enough to reach the top of his brick chimney and he replaced the cap. An issue of *Bird Watchers Digest* had tower plans so I decided to build one in my back yard to see if I could get my neighbor's birds.

I wanted to send you an update on the new tower. A pair of swifts have taken up residence and are just now starting to build a nest. It appears about half complete. Last night I watched as both male and female circled our house and took turns strafing a dead branch with many twigs on our willow tree. They would swoop by and try to break off a twig in mid-flight ... it created an hour of entertainment."

Peter King, Ohio DNR

Here and there 1.3



Photo by Kathy Cowart

Oakhurst, TX

Kathy Cowart is “waiting on the swifts”. She reports: “My dear friend Andy Slater did the tower and got the idea to make it look like a fireplace. My husband took on the job of doing the stone work. He’d never done this before and took some advice from a friend, and ended up doing a wonderful job!”



Photo by Kathy Cowart



Photo courtesy of Jeff Jones

Dublin, OH

“I have made a chimney swift tower for my Boy Scout Eagle project. Thank you for your guidance on the design of the tower. It was installed in the summer of 2004. No birds have taken up residence in the tower yet, but we are hopeful that some will find this tower in the future. Here is a photo of me and the tower. It is located in Dublin, Ohio and paid for by the city.” *Jeff Jones*



Photo courtesy of M.E. Lewis

Homer, LA

Fred and Mary Ellen (M.E.) Lewis constructed a tower attached to a building created to look like an old filling station. Swifts appreciated the cozy accommodations.

Perkins, QC

“I am in Perkins, Quebec, Canada which is about 10 to 15 miles north of the capital Ottawa, Canada. My swift tower has been up since the spring of 2005.” *Yves Lauzon*



This and all past issues of

Chaetura

are available online at

www.chimneyswifts.org

Here and there 1.4

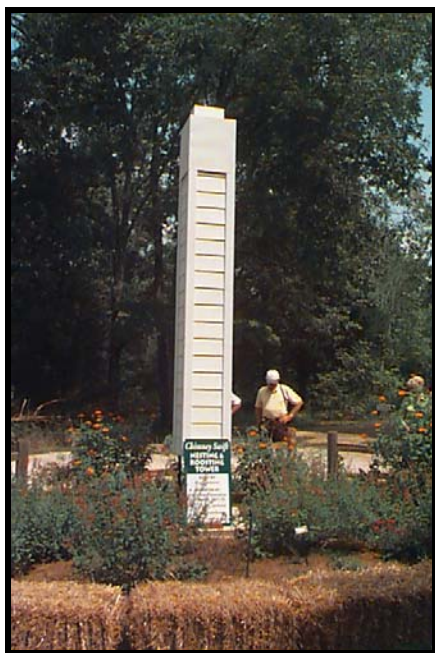


Photo by Paul Kyle

Holly Springs, MS

A garden of plants for butterflies and hummingbirds surrounds this tower at the Strawberry Plains Audubon Center. A clandestine pair of swifts claimed the tower, raised a brood of two young and remained through September.

Sag Harbor, NY

"After many years of meaning to do it, we have finally constructed 2 swift towers on the East End of Long Island New York. The first one is at the South Fork Natural History Society, and the second one is attached to my house in Sag Harbor. The swift population here has dwindled in recent years and we hope to bring them back.". *Jean Held*



Photo by Bernadette Noll

Austin, TX

"Ken Anderson has created and installed a beautiful Swift Tower on the grounds of Austin Discovery School. The tower is in the field near the garden." *Bernadette Noll*

Austin, TX

A kiosk tower was constructed at the Great Hills neighborhood park in 2001. Swifts were in the area every summer but did not enter the tower until 2006. A pair successfully fledged three young. Six birds continued to roost in the tower until migration in September. A native plant garden was created around the structure by neighbors. When the tower was cleaned in late winter, a large pellet was discovered. It was most likely from an owl that used the tall structure as a hunting platform. No feathers were found in the pellet.

Makanda, IL

"I've had a nest tower for about six years. The swifts usually have 2 nestlings each year. Last year the pair raised 4 young." *Cathie Hutcheson*



Photo Courtesy of Joyce Rosson

Kansas City, MO

Joyce Rosson "... accompanied two friends to Powell Gardens with an offer to build a tower! Alan Branden, the director chose the kiosk design and a perfect spot was located. Gene Hilburn constructed the tower. Powell Gardens encompasses hundreds of acres of natural grasses, flowers and trees."

San Marcos, TX

From Frances McNair: "My son gave me a wonderful Christmas gift of a Chimney Swift tower. It is 12 feet tall and stands on our two and a half acre property at Willow Creek Estates on the edge of the city of San Marcos."

Kansas City, MO

The chimney swift tower at the Lakeside Nature Center is equipped with a camera. A monitor inside the center allows visitors to observe the nesting activities without disturbance to the birds. Five new fledglings were the stars of the show.

Here and there 1.5



Photo courtesy of Bob Kerr

Monroeville, PA

"I just completed construction of a large tower on property near my house - The tower is 19" square inside and 12' high inside - about 15' total height." *Bob Kerr*

Hendersonville, TN

"We built and put up three towers last year. We are located a little north of Nashville." *Carl Crew, Resource Manager, Old Hickory Lake Nashville District Corps of Engineers*

Stillwater, OK

"I was part of a team that built and installed a Chimney Swift tower in Stillwater, Oklahoma adjacent to a community wetlands project." *Johnson Bridgwater*



Photo by Tom Murphey

Cannon Falls, MN

"I observe Chimney Swifts flying over the downtown area of Cannon Falls, MN. There are a number of old building showing chimneys so I suspect some may nest there each year. I have also constructed a tower at my place. We live about 3 miles north east of downtown Cannon Falls. No swifts yet at my tower. I constructed the tower mostly to your plans. The sun collar is 6 by 12 and is 9 inches tall. The top section is 24 inches of aluminum for a predator guard. I purchased it as white on one side and brown on the other. I use it on all my bluebird houses with the brown facing out. Anxiously awaiting my first swifts." *Tom Murphy, Murphy's Goldfinch Gardens*

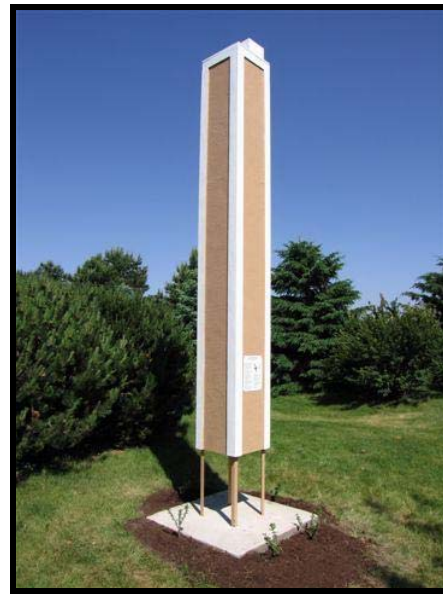


Photo by Mark Wetmore

Vermillion, SD

Mark Wetmore has donated another swift nesting tower. It was constructed by John and Jim Lee. The new tower is located on the grounds of the W. H. Over museum building and will be a nice addition to the gardens. Mark discussed the swifts with an architect friend, explaining that swifts are "... really important birds (think West Nile suppressors). They're kin to hummingbirds actually, with stiff wings and rotating shoulder sockets that give them tremendous maneuverability and speed. I wish architects and builders could get tuned in to thinking about incorporating nesting habitat for them when other things are built."

***Have you built a Chimney Swift Tower?
If so, send us a photo and a brief story for
"Here and There"***

Here and there 1.6

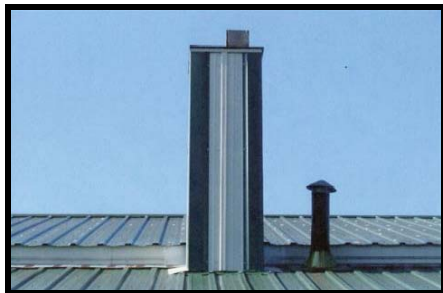


Photo by Paula Brewer

Rolla, MO

“We built the interior of rough sawn oak with horizontal grooves. We felt the natural wood might be better than treated plywood panels and we have saw mills near us. The dimensions were done according to the plans in your books. We had insulation installed around the outside of the interior boards and the exterior is sheet metal that goes with the building where it is attached. The lower sections are under a shed, which would keep the interior cool in the hot summer.

We had swifts flying around the area, but I never did see them enter the Chimney Swift tower. We lived in a home for 23 years and had Chimney Swifts nesting every Summer and had communal roosting in the Fall. We enjoyed the Chimney Swifts so much and when we move into a house with no chimney we immediately wanted to build a tower to bring Swifts to our new home.” *Another Chimney Swift Lover, Paula Brewer*



Photo by Joyce Rosson

Holt, MO

Joyce and Bill Rosson have surveillance cameras in their two wooden towers. The towers are 16 feet tall and 24” by 24” on the outside. Each year they witness something new.

The West Tower: In May, the tower had a nesting pair and an overnight roost. A predator gained access to the inside overnight and killed at least one bird. Bill took preventative measures to protect the tower, but the following morning the nest was broken on one side and the single egg inside was gone. Bill then installed an electric wire around both towers that can be turned on after dark and off before sunrise. No further predation occurred. The swift pair repaired their nest, and produced five eggs. Joyce “was amazed that the swift couple would stay every time that the nest was bothered, especially

when some of the swifts that roosted at night were killed! Swifts roosted in the tower all spring and summer. Five baby swifts were raised and fledged!

Another odd thing happened. When the babies were about a week old, one fell from the nest. (I had been watching on the TV monitor and only counted four). I went out to check and there was a baby hanging on the inside of the access door. I had noticed that morning as I watched the monitor that a parent would feed the babies in the nest, then fly down to the bottom of the tower for a minute. Apparently the parents had been feeding the baby that had fallen as well as the four in the nest. The baby was unharmed and I put it back in the nest and he did stay there.”

The North Tower: “Five babies were born and raised in the tower and all fledged. The swift pair produced a second clutch of three eggs, but only two hatched. When the new babies were about two weeks old, five swifts came into the nest area along with the parents. The parents did not chase them out (no other birds had been allowed that close to the nest before). The five hung by the nest, one actually sat on the nest and another hung below the nest. The parents acted like nothing was wrong. These extra swifts came and went from the nest area for days. They were apparently the older siblings to the two new nestlings.”

Here and there 1.7



Photo by Mozart Dedeaux

Moss Point, MS

Mozart Dedeaux, the Education Coordinator of the Pascagoula River Audubon Center completed work on their Chimney Swift Tower in late March of this year. He also mounted a camera in the top so that the swifts could be monitored. On May 19 Mozart reported: "We have observed the two birds diving into the opening, and at least one always has something in its bill. They stay down towards the bottom for about 10-15 minutes and then fly back out. Seems like we may have some nest building going on. We are extremely excited!!"



Blue Springs, MO

The Burr Oaks Conservation Nature Center has a new tower. Joyce Rosson reports "It is in a garden where there are LOTS of bird feeders and you can view it and the other birds from inside their 'bird room'. The room has huge windows and info on the tower and swifts and info on other songbirds."



Photo by Joyce Rosson

Chimney Swift Nest Sites Within Cleveland Metroparks

Threatened Species Nesting Site Construction

Modeled after the North American Chimney Swift Nest Site Research Project: a joint effort of the Driftwood Wildlife Association and The Nongame Urban Program of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

GOAL

To monitor existing nest and roost sites and to develop and test smaller, more manageable towers. Cameras have been placed in two towers so that progress can be monitored and findings used for educational and interpretive programming.



Garfield Park Nature Center
Tower



Strongsville Wildlife Area
Tower



Canalway Center Tower



Chimney Swift nest seen looking up
from base of tower
(Strongsville Wildlife Area site)

Cleveland, OH

At the request of Bob Hinkle, Kate Pierce with Cleveland Metroparks emailed this report of the towers in their park system.

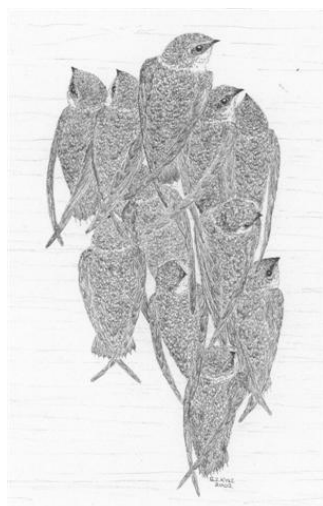
Here and there 1.8



Photo by Harry Meyer

Yellville, AR

“This tower was inspired by your site and designed using your guidelines. The girl in the photos is my daughter Ida whose 3rd grade class helped with the construction. The tower is located at the Fred Berry Conservation Education Center just outside of Yellville Arkansas on Crooked Creek.”
Harry Meyer



Building Chimney Swift Towers for Wildlife Management



As wild areas continue to disappear to make room for new development, there are some far-thinking individuals across North America who are saving space for our native wildlife. In many cases these property owners can be rewarded for their efforts in the form of tax relief if they follow some specific guidelines.

One of the key elements of these guidelines is the improvement of existing wildlife habitat. Traditionally this has been accomplished by planting vegetation that provides food and shelter, restoring wetlands and managing invasive and non-native plants. An additional approach is to add new habitat by installing nest boxes and bird houses for cavity-nesting species such as Wood Ducks, bluebirds and Purple Martins.

The quintessential cavity nester is the Chimney Swift, and land managers are beginning to take notice. In Central Texas a growing number of property owners are erecting Chimney Swift towers as part of their management plans. These rural towers are helping swifts find new nesting sites closer to their historic habitat while helping the land owners obtain the tax relief that makes their efforts financially feasible.

When building Chimney Swift towers in rural areas, it is advisable to use a foundation with larger surface dimensions to insure that native grasses do not come in contact with the tower and provide “highways” for ants to gain access to the nesting chamber.

Land management programs will vary from state to state. To learn more about the tax advantages of providing habitat for Chimney Swifts and other native wildlife, contact your local taxing authority and state wildlife agencies.



A “Wildlife Management Chimney Swift Tower” with 5’ wide foundation



ROOST TALES

“I have participated in counting swifts entering chimneys, but until this morning had not seen them come back out. I passed one of their chimneys in Baltimore this morning (September 17) at 10:20 and they were swarming out. I would have thought they would leave much earlier. Can you tell me anything about their wake-up habits?”

Nancy Meier

The morning habits of roosting Chimney Swifts are extremely variable in the late summer and fall. On most mornings they are out at sunrise. However, we have observed them staying in the roost until after noon on many occasions. Every once in a while the birds in our roost will stay inside all day only to go out for an hour or so at dusk and then return. The reason for this behavior is unknown, and until very recently undocumented. It does not seem to be related to the weather conditions or the availability of food. Thanks very much for your observations. P&G Kyle.

“There were only 8 swifts roosting this year at the Streetsville United Church in Ontario, last year there were 55. I don't think the hot weather had anything to do with it here, because we have a river on one side of town and a creek on the other side for them to get water. The chimney is double brick at the church so they shouldn't get too hot. I think the bad weather they had in migration was the problem.” *Bill Evans*

“I noticed a large flock of birds I later found out to be chimney swifts, roosting in a chimney across the street from where I work. I went on-line and found out a little bit about Chimney Swifts and also your website. I did a count sitting on the roof only about 30' or 40' from the chimney itself. I'm just amazed how so many birds could get into a relatively small space in so short a time. And they dive so quickly into the chimney!

Here are the notes I recorded for the evening:

7:15pm--All set, no birds in the air

7:25pm--first 3 birds in the air

7:27pm--Birds starting to congregate in the air

7:40pm--Birds flying in disorganized circles above the chimney. Sometimes flying clockwise, sometimes counterclockwise.

7:42pm--First bird to roost

7:45pm--Brief lull in roosting, about 15 seconds. Did something spook them?

7:55pm--"Twittering" largely over. Most of the birds are in the chimney.

7:57pm--Last few birds in the air

8:01pm--Last bird to roost.

Number counted: 1218

Observations. The birds were fairly easy to count for the first 2 minutes or so. I soon learned, if you can count the birds individually, there aren't a lot of birds. But this is a large flock and soon there were an overwhelming number of birds roosting at the same time. In my case, I counted by "fives" during the peak roosting times, as many as five per second. I recorded my counts into my notebook in manageable numbers, generally every 5 to 15 birds during the beginning and end of the roosting period, and 20 to 50 during the peak times. I added the totals later. It was a phenomenal evening and took lots of concentration.” *James McCloskey Reidsville, NC*

IS IT A SWIFT OR A SWALLOW?

When pioneers began their expansion westward across North America, they were no doubt fascinated by the swallow-like birds that inhabited their chimneys. Naturally the birds were widely referred to as “Chimney Swallows” because of their similarities to the better known Barn Swallows that typically nested under the eaves and (of course) in barns. Even today this archaic name is often mistakenly used for Chimney Swifts — but swifts are not swallows. While swifts and swallows feed on similar prey and share a similar style of flight, they are not closely related. In fact, swifts are more closely related to hummingbirds.

We get many calls and emails about the “...swifts nesting on the porch right over my door...”, and most commonly they turn out to be Barn Swallows. So, what are some of the differences other than scientific taxonomy?

- Swallows use mud in their nests / Swifts use only sticks and saliva
- Swallow nests are usually in the open / Swift nests are usually in a shaft, chimney or tower (but not always)
- Swallows perch in the open / Swifts cling usually in unseen locations
- Swallows have long, sweeping wing strokes / Swifts have flickering wing strokes
- Barn Swallows have forked tails that are often visible in flight / Chimney Swifts look like flying cigars



SWALLOWS - MARTINS - SWIFTS WORLDWIDE

Swallows, Martins & Swifts Worldwide is a whole-world Yahoo site dedicated to discussing and disseminating information on Apodidae and Hirundinidae worldwide. Aimed at specialist and amateur alike, the site's language is English.

You may record observations, describe interesting behavioral features, ask questions, advise readers about publications, and submit photographs and texts via "Files" or "Photos".

Write your contribution in English. Articles and messages in languages other than English may be posted, provided a summary in English is also attached.

Swallows, Martins & Swifts Worldwide works with other major ornithological web-based organizations to improve and disseminate knowledge about Swifts and Hirundines.

<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/Swallows-Martins-Swifts-Worldwide/>

**A link to Swallows-Martins-Swifts-Worldwide can be found on our web site at
www.chimneyswifts.org**

A Conservation Plan for Multiple Towers

Chimney Swifts are very social birds except when it comes to nesting. A large tower may attract multitudes of swifts, but there will only be one active nest per structure per year. For multiple nests multiple towers are required. Our research indicates that nest sites should be at least 10' apart.

A good conservation plan for the use of multiple towers is to follow the evolution of Chaetura Canyon where much of the research on tower design has taken place. We began with two large towers to accommodate two nesting pairs and a roost or migratory flock. A single large tower would also be sufficient. Once the original towers were adopted by swifts, smaller "satellite" towers were added as space and time allowed.

Chimney Swifts typically return to a successful nest site year after year with the same mate – and so do their offspring. The year-old birds will seek out nesting sites of their own, and their search begins in the familiar area of their nursery tower. Newly constructed towers in the area are quite often appropriated the first spring after they are erected.

With multiple towers, the full range of aerial acrobatics can be observed as the swifts interact with each other. Individuals will tumble from above and stall over a neighbor's tower for a glimpse of the nest, eggs and young within; playful chases and "kiting" behavior may be seen as well as the trademark courtship "V" with wings held up by gliding mated pairs. When the young swifts fledge the real fun begins as they explore the world outside their nursery towers. Soon there will be "tagging" of both inanimate objects and startled perching songbirds. And of course, the cheerful chipping and chattering that is so commonly associated with frolicking Chimney Swifts is also prominent.



Well, well, well!

"We have a chimney swift nest in an unused open well. Five eggs were laid and hatched about 3 weeks ago. Unfortunately, 1 baby fell into the water and drowned. After some recent heavy rains the water level took over the nest. But, the remaining four babies moved to the sides of the well and seem to be doing fine. We are located in Warren, Texas which is about 40 miles north of Beaumont, Texas."

JL Townsend

Cory Croft stated: "We have two free standing towers that have been in place for a number of years. Both towers have successfully fledged chicks for at least the last two years. The

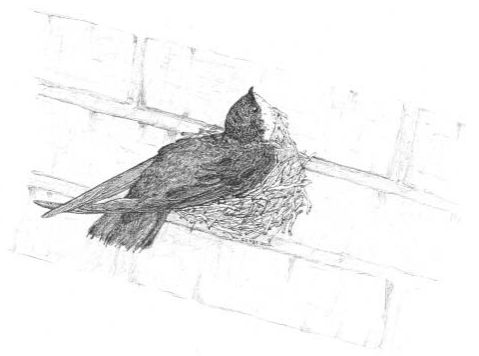


Photo by Cory Croft

Preserve at Callaway Gardens is located in Pine Mountain, GA, in the west central portion of the state. Also, we have many old home sites on the property dating back to the mid 1800's-early 1900's. Each of these home sites has a well. Last year, after nesting season was over, I happened to look into one of these wells and there was a chimney swift nest. I have no idea if it was successful or even how old it was. Has this been

documented in the past? It was certainly a first for me."

Chimney Swifts have been documented nesting in wells, and it is probably more common than we know. Most people would not think to look for birds nesting in such places! P&G Kyle





SPRING CHIMNEY SWIFT SIGHTINGS ARE IN!

The migration paths of Chimney Swifts
are not fully understood.

Reports of swift sightings to our web site
are helpful in determining possible routes taken by the species.

Go to www.chimneyswifts.org

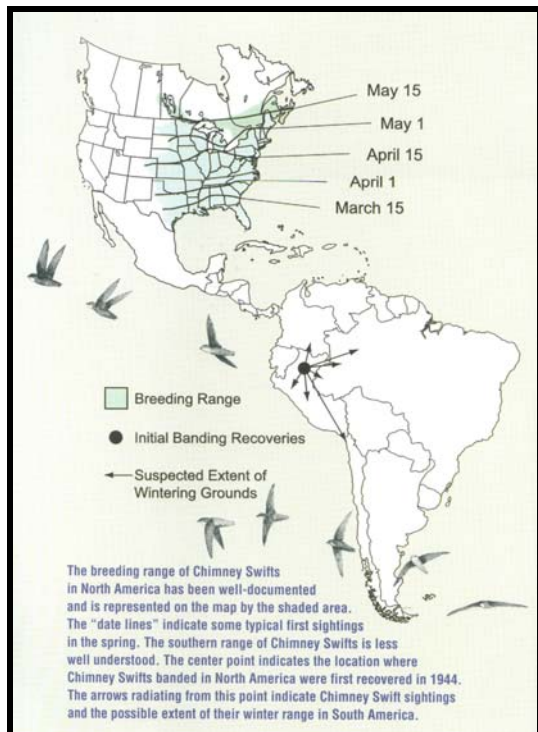
And click on the
“Spring Sightings” link
to see the results of this year’s reporting

First Report: February 22 (possible Vaux’s Swift)

Number of States and Provinces Reporting: 39

Total Number of Reports: 385

If you live in a non-reporting state or province,
we want to hear from you!



CHIMNEY SWIFTS on YouTube!

We are in the process of upgrading our software and camera systems on the Chimney Swift web cam. To fill the void, we will be posting video clips of previous nesting seasons in the Observation Towers at Travis Audubon’s Chaetura Canyon Bird Sanctuary on YouTube. Titles of clips posted include:

Chimney Swifts Kissy Face / Chimney Swifts Mating / Chimney Swifts First Egg
With many more to come!

To view the clips go to the original Chimney Swift Web Cam link at

www.chimneyswifts.org

or

www.youtube.com/driftwoodwildlife

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 last year's 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 Ontario, Canada participated in locating and monitoring communal roosts.

"I am sending this e-mail on behalf of my family. Tonight we had the absolute honor and awe to watch hundreds of Chimney Swifts chitter, swirl and descend into an old chimney.

We were at Wakulla Springs State Park in Wakulla Co. Florida and the chimney is part of a running, historic hotel from the 1930's. The park ranger told us what the birds were and told us to go up to the lodge and watch the show. From 8:15 pm until 8:40 pm we watched and listened while what we estimated to be 300+ Swifts (per the park ranger) flew in a perfect hurricane spiral above our heads before plunging one-by-one (sometimes three-by-three) into the narrow chimney.

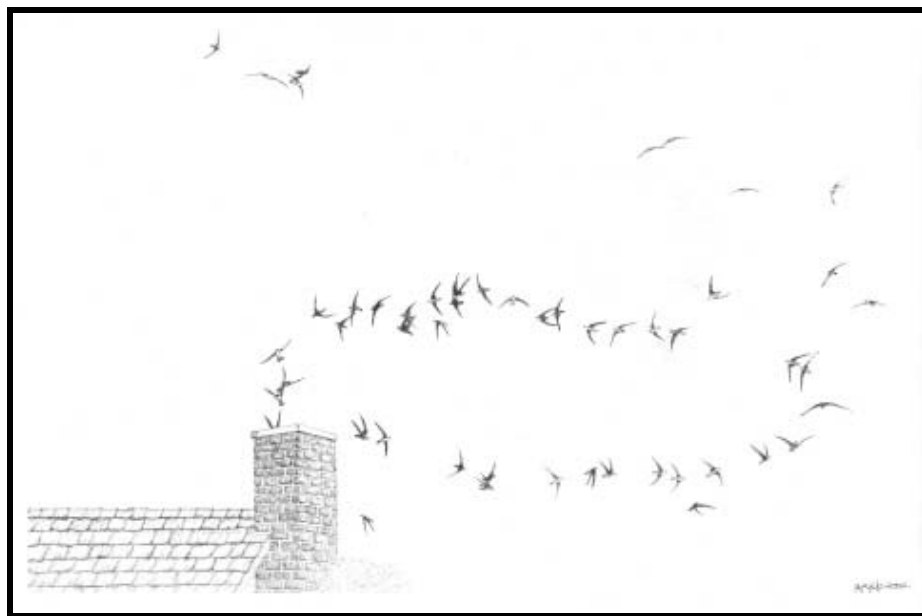
My two children, husband and myself were oohing and ahing as if we were watching a fireworks display on the fourth of July. A small crowd of restaurant and Inn patrons gathered to see "what the fuss was about".

I just had to write to share this experience with you and your organization as I can see that it is clearly a passion for you. My son, a boy scout, saw the Swift house construction on your website and thought that might be a great Eagle project when the time comes.

Thank you for posting such great information about this species. We will look further into what we can do to help promote awareness of these amazing little birds to our friends and neighbors here in Tallahassee." *Peggy Wright*

Mark your calendars now!
A Swift Night Out 2007
will be held on
August 10, 11 and 12
and again on
September 7, 8 and 9.

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



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS...



We are going to build a chimney swift tower on our place in the country in Rolla, Mo. We do not want to use treated wood or chemically glued wood. So our thought was to use a normal chimney tile interior and a wooden exterior. Yet we have to wonder if the chimney tiles make a suitable substrate for a nest. Can you please help us with the chemical wood and tile dilemma? *Terry and Paula Brewer*

The first Chimney Swift Tower (built by Althea Sherman) was lined with rough-sawn lumber nailed horizontally to the inside of the structure. Although the cost would be more and the construction more difficult, this would make an excellent tower and an alternative to the products you are trying to avoid. In spite of the fact that many Chimney Swifts nest in chimneys built of the clay flue tiles, they are less than ideal. Until the walls of the tiles have aged considerably, they are too smooth for the swifts to easily grasp or attach their nests. Typically they attach their nests to the extruding mortar at the joints. If you do not plan to use wood on the inside, we would highly recommend brick or cinder block. In either case, be certain to leave the inside as rough as possible -- allowing the mortar to ooze into the interior. P&G Kyle

I am a developer in Dayton, OH converting warehouses into loft condos and am currently working on a really cool project called the Merc. I also just love Chimney Swifts and am thinking about incorporating a swift tower into the design of the three buildings we are working on. It would be constructed out of brick and my question is...what, in your opinion, would be the optimum dimensions on such a structure? It would most likely go on top of an elevator penthouse (new) which is on the roof of a 6 story building. *Matt Stoermer*

Incorporating new habitat for swifts into new construction is possibly one of the best ways to conserve this rapidly dwindling species. Each pair needs its own site in which to nest, and the smallest dimensions for a nesting structure should be 14 1/2" by 14 1/2" (inside) and 8 feet tall. Larger structures are needed to create roosts for swifts. The numbers of roosting swifts can create an impressive spectacle during spring and fall migrations. A tower measuring 24" by 24" (inside) by 20 feet tall will accommodate at least several hundred swifts. For specific information on tower construction, you might find the book "Chimney Swift Towers: New Habitat for America's Mysterious Birds" helpful. P&G Kyle

We want to make some of our towers into pieces of art. This would be done by attaching to or enhancing the exterior with some form of material to artistically enhance them. Is there any evidence that this would affect the birds use of the tower, or scare them away for example? Since we will commission artists to do this, we may need to provide some guidelines or limits on what kind of materials they can use. For example, if they want to line the exterior with mirrors, or with wind driven moving objects. Either or both could scare the birds, thus no use of the tower. We would appreciate information or guidance on this aspect of construction. We are excited about this project, and looking forward to getting some towers in place before spring. *Carol Reed, Blue Springs Parks and Recreation*

You are right on target with your concerns. Highly reflective materials or moving parts would be problematic. Also avoid large areas of dark colors that would cause the towers to overheat and nothing should extend above the top of the tower. It would be wise to leave the top 24" free of any appliquéd materials to prevent predators from climbing the tower and gaining access to the interior. P&G Kyle

I'm fascinated with the Chimney Swifts. Today a group of them kept flying around my dog and me while we walked around a quarry. *Andy Cox*

There are a several of items about their flight that may be of interest to you:

- *It is believed that some species of swifts achieve their unusual flight pattern because they "power" on the up-stroke as well as the down-stroke of their wings.*
- *Chimney Swifts are considered to be related to hummingbirds because of their relatively short, massive upper wing bone (humerus). This is what gives the swifts their flickering, bat-like flight.*
- *Like hummingbirds, Chimney Swifts are capable of flying straight up and down (as well as backwards for short periods of time) -- an ability that enables them to fly up and down inside chimneys and similar structures where they nest and roost.*
- *The supposition that Chimney Swifts flap their wings alternately was disproved by stroboscopic photography in the middle of the last century. However, the illusion is still impressive...P&G Kyle*

I wonder if you could tell me how long into the night the Chimney Swift flies to catch bugs, and do they consume as many mosquitoes as the Purple Martin is purported to consume. The reason I ask is that my township is beginning to spray for mosquitoes in our area and I don't like the idea of some chemical that is odorless in the air. How would I know if I am inhaling it. I would prefer to ask my township if we could build some Chimney Swift habitats to keep the mosquito population down. I don't know if they would consider it, but I will ask anyway. I think it is more environmentally safe. I hope you can help me build my case. *Jean Mader*

Chimney Swifts commonly feed until just after dusk when the mosquitoes are becoming most active. They actually eat many more mosquitoes than Purple Martins do. The diet of Chimney Swifts consists primarily of flying insects that are less than 1/4" in size, while martins feed on considerably larger prey even as large as dragonflies. Quoting from our book "Chimney Swifts: America's Mysterious Birds above the Fireplace": "...every day, Chimney Swifts eat nearly one third their own weight in flying insects such as mosquitoes, biting flies and termites. A nest of five noisy Chimney Swift nestlings will be fed as many as twelve thousand insects daily..." P&G Kyle

The Adams Nature Center in North Sioux City, SD, is doing a big expansion and the expanded visitor center is going to be styled as an old farm house, including a chimney. Jody Moats, the naturalist there, is willing to pursue making the chimney swift-friendly.... it could be a swift-friendly structure for the summer, even if it's a working chimney during the rest of the year. It would be more than realistic that way and educational in being able to explain what the chipping din was when the nestlings raise a ruckus for awhile before they fledge. Birds going in & out of the chimney could be the first item on nature walks. Do you have any suggestions you could send her to share with the new center's designers and builders? Thanks. *Mark Wetmore*

As long as the chimney is masonry inside and not covered, it will be "Swift Friendly". However, there are a couple of things that could make it better. First, the mortar joints on the inside should be exaggerated or "sloppy" rather than raked clean. This will give the birds more and better places to attach their nest. Second, if it is decided that the chimney must have some kind of cap, it will need to be of a special design to still allow entry for the swifts. It can be closed on top and on two sides as long as two opposite sides are left open and provide an opening of at least 12" x 12". This will allow the swifts to fly straight through and / or drop into the chimney. P&G Kyle

We have an old chimney in our backyard that was originally used in a greenhouse environment but has not been used for an unknown number of years. Chimney swifts have been using it for as long as I have owned the property. It is 27-1/2 inches square outside, 21 inches square inside and approximately 30 ft. high. It is free standing with an opening at ground level (in addition to the top). I have a question though. Last year I counted approximately 140

(Continued on page 20)

(Continued from page 19)

birds entering the chimney in the evening. This year, I have only counted 7 birds entering the chimney. However, this year, I think there are young ones in the chimney as I see a bird (perhaps different ones) entering the chimney periodically through out the day. They stay for about a minute and then leave. Is this a normal observation or is there perhaps something amiss?! Steve Coladonato, Bloomsburg, PA

There will be only one nest per year in any structure regardless of the size, so you are probably seeing the parents coming and going with food for the young. Some parent swifts will allow a roost of non-breeding birds to stay during the nesting period, but others will chase off the flock. As the summer comes to an end, you will hopefully see the numbers of roosting birds begin to increase. P&G Kyle

I'm planning on 4 towers for next spring. Is that over doing it? We did have a couple of pairs other than the ones that claimed our chimney, trying to find a nesting site last spring. Usually you find these Swifts over the city. I'm 13 miles from the nearest town so they must do a lot of searching for a nest site. My wife said she does not want to come back as a Chimney Swift. She thinks they have a tough life looking for a place to land. Martins: that is her choice. Just musing! Vincent Loeckle

In our experience 85% of the towers we erected attracted Chimney Swifts the first year they were installed if the construction was completed before the birds returned in the spring. Several others stood empty for three years before being occupied. To date only three of the more than 50 towers we have put up have not attracted swifts.

Purple Martins now rely almost entirely on manmade houses to raise their nestlings. They have greatly benefited from conservation efforts across their breeding range as have the bluebirds. Chimney Swifts also rely on man-made structures for nesting since there are very few large, hollow trees and many chimneys are being capped. By building multiple towers, you will be providing essential new habitat for Chimney Swifts. Hopefully, in the near future, folks like you will improve the life of the swifts as much as other construction efforts have improved the plight of martins and bluebirds. P&G Kyle

I'm from the Baltimore Bird Club, and coordinated our swift watch activities for Fall 2006. We had a big surprise this year, and I was hoping you might be able to explain it. For 20+ years, our primary chimneys were the Mill Center/Bookbindery (located near each other) where in the fall we would generally get 4,000-7,000 swifts roosting. We had appropriate numbers in the spring, but this fall only 3 swifts entered!!! Fortunately, we discovered a major sight (the Conservatory) about a half mile away (as the swift flies) where 4,680 swifts entered, but we were stunned that they did not enter our usual chimneys. We did not have reports in earlier years about using the Conservatory, so we are baffled. Any explanation you can think of? We do not think they closed the Mill Center or Bookbindery chimneys, but we are investigating. Joan Cwi

Thanks for your report, and we are sorry that you had such a disappointing count at your traditional sites. One reason swifts will leave a roost is if a predator locates and preys on the swifts. In smaller structures these can be terrestrial predators such as raccoons or snakes. In larger structures (such as the Mill Center / Book bindery) avian predators such as hawks, falcons and owls have been documented taking swifts. We have also observed birds moving from one roost to another for no apparent reason. Actually very little is known about the dynamics of Chimney Swift roosts. P&G Kyle

Our local school administration is tearing down a 15 foot chimney. We were notified by neighbors recently that there are over 100 chimney swifts that use the tower. The school system is very interested in cooperating with us and the local Audubon society and I think they are also willing to build a new tower. My questions are....

- What if they tear down the old tower before building a new one? Should they build the new tower first?
- Could the swifts still be nesting? How many broods do they have? (We are in northern Indiana)
- What are the protection laws with the US FWS in this case?

Ronda J. DeCaire, City of Elkhart, Elkhart Environmental Center

The tower should definitely be built before the old site is demolished. Otherwise the birds will have no suitable place to roost at night. There have been occasions when a roosting site was demolished that the displaced birds attempted to crowd into a site that was too small and they suffocated. Chimney Swifts are unable to perch like songbirds -- they cling to rough, vertical, interior surfaces. They need deep, hollow shafts where they can nest and cling over night.

In Indiana, the swifts have probably just begun to nest. However, even if there are many birds roosting in the site there will be only one active nest. It will be more than a month after the first egg hatches before the young are able to fly out and care for themselves. They occasionally have two broods per year, but one is more common. Chimney Swifts are protected by federal law under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is a violation of federal law to knowingly disturb or destroy the birds, their nests, their eggs or their young. The fines are high and pertain to each individual animal -- not just the site. Most states have laws that mirror the federal statutes. If a new roosting tower could be built and the demolition of the old site be postponed until winter, after the birds have migrated to South America, all legal and humane problems could be avoided. P&G Kyle

I wonder if you can help me save a great Chimney Swift roosting chimney. We belong to a church in Bloomington, Indiana with a building constructed in 1900. It has a large, high brick chimney that has long been a favored roosting site for Chimney Swifts, especially in the fall. We have a property committee chairman who is concerned about swifts clogging the chimney and causing carbon monoxide to enter the building as well as preventing the furnace from operating properly. He wants to put a screen at the top of the chimney. We do not currently have a screen between the chimney and the furnace ductwork. We certainly do need to prevent the swifts from entering the furnace. I have tried to convince the powers that be that the swifts do no harm and that we are protecting God's creatures by providing a roosting site. Could you send/suggest literature that would show (from a more knowledgeable source than myself) that the swift will do no harm in our chimney? *Bob Dodd*

Chimney Swifts are in serious decline due to a lack of suitable habitat -- originally large hollow trees and now open chimneys. Large roosts such as the one at your church are critical migratory staging areas for these extremely beneficial insect-eating birds. Because Chimney Swifts are migratory, they are not here in the winter when the furnace will be needed. If the chimney is cleaned each year when the furnace is serviced, there should be no problems associated with the swifts. After all, they have obviously been using it for some time with no detrimental effects. There is a wealth of information about Chimney Swifts on our web site at www.chimneyswifts.org. Another tool in your conservation effort might be the Chapman School Vaux's Swift roost in Portland, or Vaux's Swifts are the west coast cousins of Chimney Swifts. The students, teachers and parents not only tolerate the swifts, but embrace them -- all 40,000 of them. Here are a couple of links that you might find interesting and helpful: www.audubonportland.org/science/swift_watch; www.pulseplanet.com/archive/May05/3439.html. You can also see the Chapman School roost by going to www.youtube.com and searching for "Chimney Swifts". P&G Kyle

Thanks so much for your message about Chimney Swifts in our church chimney. I am sure it will help convince the folks here to reconsider capping the chimney. In fact I have already gotten them to put the project on hold as I convinced them that we will not see any swifts until next spring so why rush. I also gave them copies of the four-page flier from your web site. We certainly entertained a sizable group of swifts this fall - surely over 1000 on one evening. Let's hope that will continue to happen every fall. *Bob*

OBSERVATIONS: Chimney Swifts

My husband and I have been spending evenings watching the flock of swifts fly around our home. I have to admit usually this time of year in Florida we are unable to venture into our yard without being eaten alive by mosquitoes, no bites this year. My husband and I are teachers, this will be something to add to our lessons on conservation and natural habitats etc. *Debbie*

At Harlingen this morning (Oct. 22, 2006) after frontal passage and with a brisk, cool north wind with overcast conditions a flock of about 100 Chimney Swifts hung more or less stationary facing into the wind and apparently feeding. ... These birds were not migrating. I assume that there must be a communal roost somewhere in the vicinity. The neighborhood has a healthy population of nesting swifts, a relatively new phenomenon in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas in the last decade. A few years ago I saw a similar concentration over Harlingen during early November which also appeared to be foraging and not migrating. *John Arvin, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory*

This morning some folks that attended the Ivory-billed Woodpecker volunteer orientation spent the morning in the Jack Gore Baygall of the Big Thicket National Preserve. We were mostly looking at habitat, but several bird observations were interesting. One is that for the last three times I have been in this wonderful area Chimney Swifts have been quite common over the cypress-tupelo swamps, but not over other habitats. The birds' behavior and the numerous hollow cypresses make me highly suspicious that the swifts are nesting in the tree hollows. I have never seen Chimney Swifts using natural tree cavities for nesting sites (as they all did before the coming of European settlers to North America) and I have not actually witnessed birds entering or leaving tree cavities, but I strongly believe they are using them. *John C. Arvin, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory*



Photo by Dan Kaiser

I was directed to your web site today, wonderful! Very informative, full of useful information. Thanks! I have been observing "my" swifts for three years and have tried to photograph them in flight, a monumental task. They are such erratic flyers the only hope of catching them is when they enter the chimney. I attach my best effort to date. Note the worn wing tips and swollen throat. This chimney is small and I'm sure the worn feathers are caused from repeated trips in and out of the narrow chimney. The swollen throat I assume is due to captured insects to feed the young. *Dan Kaiser, Columbus, IN*

Thanks very much for sharing your in-flight shot of the Chimney Swift. It is remarkable for several reasons. First of all the clarity -- great job! The posture is amazing, since they only hold this position for the blink of an eye -- tail spread wide to brake, head down rather than straight ahead and the feet starting to extend from the body. The distended throat most likely does contain insects for the young, and this is the only shot where we have ever seen this in-flight. The worn tips of the primaries are also remarkable. We would be interested to know the exact dimensions of the chimney they are using. It must be less than 12" as that is the approximate wing span of swifts. P&G Kyle

Thank you for the interesting analysis of the photo. As for the chimney, it is 2 bricks wide. A standard brick is 8" long, so with a 1/2" mortar it is 16 1/2" on a side. Each brick is 4" wide. I was able to measure the inside opening. It is 9 1/2" square. *Dan*

OBSERVATIONS: Vaux's Swifts

I live near San Jose, CA, and I have birds nesting in my chimney which resemble the descriptions of Chimney Swifts. Since it appears that this is not a normal area for them to be found, I am wondering if their appearance here has been previously noted or if my identification is mistaken. *Fay Knight*

If you are west of the Rocky Mountains, you most likely have the slightly smaller Vaux's Swifts rather than Chimney Swifts. They are a different species, but have very similar habits. Both species are extremely beneficial due to the large numbers of small flying insect pests that they and their young consume. Both species are also in decline due to loss of natural habit (large hollow trees) and now open chimneys, as many home owners place screens on top to exclude the birds. P&G Kyle

Very cool project! (I read the article in Bird Watcher's Digest.) I'm interested in the Vaux's swift. I'm hoping to check out chimneys that have nesting Vaux's this spring. They're known to occasionally nest in chimneys, but as far as I know no one has really studied this. Are they known to use your towers? *Mike Donahue, Seattle*

Research has been done on the Vaux's Swifts by Evelyn Bull and Charlie Collins who co-authored the species account for the Birds of North America series. Dr. Bull was one of our first Research Associates. She installed and documented the use of an early design of large nest boxes similar to what we describe in our books. Chimney Swifts and Vaux's Swifts are very similar in their nesting behavior and habitat requirements. Good luck in your research! P&G Kyle

I am writing to report a remarkable sighting of Chimney Swifts in Santa Barbara, California. Last evening, around 6:30PM I went out on my back yard deck to check the weather and enjoy the view at the end of the day. As I looked out over the ocean I looked up and noticed several small birds circling overhead. We live at about 250 foot altitude about a mile (as the swift flies) from the beach, so we're used to having many different birds flying around our area. The several soon increased in numbers to what must have been more than a thousand. By now I had called to my wife to come and see what was going on. Their circle, which had encompassed most of the top of our hill, soon tightened and suddenly they began to funnel into my neighbors chimney. It literally looked like the funnel cloud of a tornado that was drawing them in. They just kept pouring into that chimney as my wife and I watched in amazement. They poured in over the course of several minutes as their airborne numbers dwindled down with fewer and fewer remaining outside of the chimney. At this point I considered where they must be going and tried, to no avail, to call my neighbor.

This afternoon I was able to get through to my now exhausted neighbors. They came home around 9:30PM last night, only to find out that their beautiful Spanish style home now housed hundreds, maybe a thousand chimney swifts. She indicated that only today had they managed to locate and get all of the birds out. She and a cleaning service had spent all day cleaning up after her visitors.

In my internet research, I have seen mention of swifts in small numbers in California, but this was a truly remarkable number of birds and an even more remarkable scene. At least my wife and I got to enjoy the sight. My unfortunate neighbors were less enthusiastic. *Rob Wilkinson, Carpinteria, CA*

CHIMNEY TIME-SHARING REPORTS

Just thought you'd be interested to know that we have discovered a chimney swift nest in our chimney. We had a wildlife expert come out yesterday because we thought we had baby raccoons in our chimney - but he discovered that it was a chimney swift nest. They are making a considerable amount of noise on occasion - my mother-in-law was over last night and she said I should consider it as them serenading me. *Christi Maki, Holland, MI*

I am so glad that Chimney Swifts nest in my chimney. I live in southeast Dallas and have had them for several years. Our house is an old one that was built with a coal burning fireplace - no damper. Every year I have had the young fall down into the opening and also adults get into the house. I always catch them and put them back out. Last year I decided, since we never use it anyway, to close the opening into the living room. I also placed metal on the "floor" up in the chimney, so nests etc would not fall down. I worried that there would not be the draft up the chimney and they might abandon the site. But, they nested last year. *Mary E. Robertson*

My husband and I bought our home 8 years ago and the first year could not figure out what was in the chimney. Then once I was outside at dusk and watched the swifts enter the chimney. We've had babies ever year and it is fun to hear them chatter. Once in awhile we hear a clunk on the damper area and wonder if someone has fallen! We consulted a chimney sweep and he said they would not harm the chimney. We had the gas disconnected and sealed the fireplace, removed the gas logs and replaced the whole thing with an electric fireplace -- safer for us and the birds. Thought you would like to hear our story. We feel sort of like grandparents to our birds.

Connie Stilson

... I haven't "heard" the swifts for a couple of days now, so I guess they (the four babies) must have survived the fall in our chimney and have taken flight. After reading about other folks' experiences with the chimney swifts in their homes/garages, etc, I will never cap our chimney! I had wanted to cap it in 2004. We lost the Mother Swift and all of her three babies that year after we had direct hits from Hurricanes Charley, Frances and Jean. It really breaks my heart to see any of them lost. But after their successful return last and this year, I will not take away their returning nesting site. This is the first year we have had four babies! *Sharon R Coleman*

We live in the small town of Still Pond, MD located on Maryland's Eastern Shore and have a nest of very loud swift babies in our chimney. Our first thoughts were to rid them from their roost, but after reading your information we are allowing them to stay. We moved here in 1998 and had swifts roosting in our chimney, in the evening we noticed them descending into our chimney in great numbers. But we hadn't seen them since and never to our knowledge had any nesting in the chimney. The house was built in 1905 and the chimney is over 40' tall, The nest is located just above the fireplace opening on the first floor, probably about 35 feet down the chimney. We are just amazed that the babies will find their way out. *Allison Ditmars (proud swift watcher)*

Swifts have been occupants of the chimney of our 75 year old home for as long as I can remember. Friends and neighbors have recently been gathering to watch as they leave each morning and arrive each night. We have counted as many as 200 entering. *Alan and Marlene McNair*

We have a nest of Chimney Swifts in our chimney. They have been there for approximately 2 1/2 to 3 weeks (minimum). I have read some info online and by all accounts they should either be gone by now or very soon. I am concerned that perhaps there is something wrong with them or with our chimney (stopping them from being able to get out). When I look up the flue I can see the nest on the soot ledge and the babies appear to be about 3-4 inches tall

and feathered. How do I know if they are in trouble? We love having them there but are just concerned with their health. What should I do?? *Tracy Coulter, Charlotte NC*

From your description of the situation, it sounds like everything is fine with your Chimney Swifts. The nesting process is really quite long for these small birds. It takes them about two weeks to build a nest, they will then lay an egg every other day and begin incubating only when the next to last egg is laid (5 is not uncommon). They then incubate for 21 days before the first egg hatches. It is a long 28 to 30 days after a baby hatches before it takes its first flight from the chimney.

It is important – especially when the babies get close to being old enough to fly – that they are not disturbed. If you frighten them, they could accidentally leave the chimney before they are really ready to fly on their own. Chimney Swifts are in serious decline due to loss of habitat -- first large hollow trees, and now open chimneys. By allowing them to use yours, you are making a difference in the future of these remarkable birds. P&G Kyle

I have Chimney Swifts in my chimney and have been informed to install screening to protect my home. I want to locate a replacement home for the birds before I do. Please advise. *Tom Rongstad, Pensacola, FL*

Chimney Swifts do not present a threat to your home. They are generally only there during the warm time of the year and migrate to South America in the fall. There are no known diseases that can be attributed to Chimney Swifts that present any problems for humans. In fact, you are probably in more danger processing raw chicken in your kitchen than having a nest of Chimney Swifts in your chimney. Chimney Swifts feed only on small flying insect pests (mosquitoes, gnats, flies, etc), so they are extremely beneficial. Unfortunately, their numbers are down by about 50% since the mid 1960s due to loss of habitat: primarily open masonry chimneys. Proper annual chimney maintenance and keeping the damper closed while the swifts are in residence are all you need to do to peacefully coexist with Chimney Swifts. P&G Kyle

I just moved to an old (circa 1900) house in Southern Pines, NC, which has two chimneys, one for the furnace and one a non-working chimney in the center of the house, where apparently, there used to be a fireplace. My neighbor called me this evening to tell me that there were hundreds of tiny birds circling over my roof that "seemed to be disappearing" into my chimney. I ran outside to look and sure enough, they appeared to be disappearing right down the chimney!!! Amazing. *Suzanne Coleman, Southern Pines, NC*

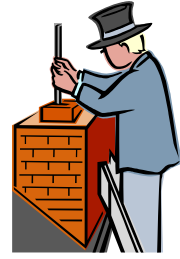


Photo by Rick Mann

I found your site this morning and wanted to give you an update on swifts here in Davie, FL. (Ft. Lauderdale area). I have had an entire family, or maybe even more!, coming back to my chimney every year now for three years. They arrived back about 2 weeks ago and have been chattering every morning and evening. This morning, I opened our pantry and found one clinging to my cereal box! During the hurricanes last season, the wind must have opened the bottom chimney damper and out he came during the night. *Rick Mann, Davie, Florida*

Our thanks to all who willingly time share their chimneys with Chimney Swifts. Although we advocate the construction of as many alternative nesting towers as possible, existing masonry chimneys provide vital nesting habitat for swifts. Proper maintenance of those chimneys is important for both the homeowner and for nesting swifts. When hiring a chimney sweep to perform maintenance, be sure to select a professional from the National Chimney Sweeping Guild. To locate a professional chimney sweep, go to: www.csia.org or www.ncsg.org. P&G Kyle

CHIMNEY SWEEPS CORNER



Paul Hemple is a professional chimney sweep and owner of Brushes and Brooms Chimney Sweep in Brighton, IL, member of the National Chimney Sweeping Guild and a strong advocate of Chimney Swift conservation. Paul graciously assists in answering inquiries about chimneys sent to the DWA website.

I need to put a rain cap on my chimney, but I would like to continue to allow swifts to nest in the chimney. All the caps that I have come across so far are designed to keep rain and wildlife out of the chimney. Are you aware of any products that keep rain out and let birds in? *Debra Price*

There is no cap that I am aware of that fits both of your requirements. The advice I give customers...either take the cap off in the spring, or make the legs tall enough that the swifts will fly under the top part of the cap. Most covers that attach to the chimney top or band around the brick (not clamp to the tile itself) can be ordered with taller legs so there is more room for the swifts to fly in. They're designed to accommodate flues with taller tiles sticking up, but if the tile is low they will leave extra room for the swifts. A space twelve inches tall would be ideal for the swifts. Paul H.

Dear Paul Hemple

I have read about your efforts to help chimney swifts by promoting swift-friendly sweeping policies within the NCSG (and to local homeowners).

I am having a very difficult time finding a bird-friendly chimney sweep company in Maryland. I have recently moved and have hopefully inherited some new chimney swift tenants. (I am not absolutely certain if I can offer them safe housing as I have a wood-burning stove insert).

I have been fascinated with chimney swifts ever since the late 70's when my husband and I lived across from a communal roost in a church bell-tower in Washington, DC. After we moved, we became uninformed chimney swift tenement-owners for 20 years: our dilapidated farmhouse had two (somewhat dangerous) chimneys used only by wildlife. As I watched "my" swifts arrive every May and raise their families, I was unaware of how much trouble they were in. Although I hope to build one or more towers on my new farm, I know that the survival of the chimney swift depends much more on changes in the practices of the average chimney owner. *Felicia Lovelett*

I'm sorry but I don't know of any particular company out your way that would be swift friendly for sure. I'm just not familiar with everyone in the Guild and exactly what territory they service. Might I suggest that you simply state your concern when you schedule an appointment because after all, you're the customer and you hire them to do what you want done. Anyone with any business sense will do what you ask regardless of their general mode of operation.

Two other things come to mind. First is that as long as you have your chimney serviced either before the swifts arrive or after they have left it shouldn't make any difference how the sweep feels about them. It just won't be an issue, and this may be the simplest way for you to have control of the situation. I understand and appreciate you wanting to deal with a swift friendly company, but if that's not possible, this approach should work in the short run.

And secondly if you have a wood burning insert that is properly installed, your chimney won't be good swift habitat. Most wood burning inserts should have an insulated stainless steel liner from the top of the stove all the way to the top of the chimney for safety and performance reasons. Stainless steel liners and prefab stainless chimneys are death traps to all animals and should be capped and screened. If you still have an open masonry chimney at the top, you may want to have a qualified chimney sweep evaluate the system to be sure you don't have some serious safety concerns. You may have a second or third flue in your chimney that is good for swifts, and a good sweep will be able to give you the details.

I hope you have a swift family at your new house, and some quality habitat to share with them. Paul H.

Paul shared the following information about a new tower:

... "it's a really nice swift tower built by Jim Brewer out in Virginia. Jim is a past president of NCSG, and one of the largest sweep operations in the country. His intention is to build swift towers all over his area as part of what his company leaves behind for the community. His first one done looks great, and he's excited and waiting to see if he gets a family this year.



Photos by Jim Brewer

"Our masonry team had a free day so I had them build a swift tower. We did the foundation a few months ago but today was the first day they have been without work since then. Next time we have a free day (or two) we are going to cover it with Cultured Stone. The tower is 32 x 32 OD, 16 x 16 ID and 12 feet tall." *Jim Brewer*

And yet another tower built by chimney sweeps:

"I am writing to tell you about our new Chimney Swift tower. The tower is located in Plainfield, IN, just southwest of Indianapolis at the Chimney Safety Institute of America Technology Center, home of the CSIA and the National Chimney Sweep Guild. Funded and built by volunteer members of the National Chimney Sweep Guild, our swift tower is a testament to the concern that National Chimney Sweep Guild members have for the future of our fine feathered friends. I'm looking forward to spring when we'll have swifts coming in to make their new homes. Thank you for all you do to support swifts in North America."

Melissa Heeke
Director of Communications & Marketing
National Chimney Sweep Guild

An Excerpt from Texas A & M University Press's
Chimney Swifts: America's Mysterious Birds above the Fireplace
By Paul and George Kyle

**The Social Life
of the Chimney Swift
in North America**

Chimney Swifts follow the warming spring temperatures and emergence of flying insects northward. These "feathered meteors" remain airborne during daylight hours and only abandon the sky when darkness approaches. Swifts roost each night inside chimneys, airshafts, hollow trees and sites constructed specifically for their use. Communal roosts consisting of a few individuals to thousands of swifts will form inside structures deemed suitable by the birds. Some migrants sneak in for only a night's stay at the equivalent of an avian bed and breakfast before continuing their journey home. Other occupants are summer residents; birds which have bred or were hatched in the area in past years and whose northward journey has ended. In any spring roost swift numbers fluctuate as travelers mingle with resident birds.

Chimney Swifts maintain a very strong bond to their nest site. Mated swifts will usually return to the same nesting shafts faithfully year after year. If one adult fails to return, the survivor courts a new mate and continues to occupy the site. Offspring also return to their area of origin. They will secure mates and nest in close proximity to their parents if suitable structures are available.

Courtship

Pair bonding is apparent soon after the swifts return to their nesting sites. After observing the dedication that is displayed between

mated Chimney Swifts for so many years, we find it easy to imagine that the bond between mated swifts is held year round and that their display each spring simply renews the commitment. Aerial courtship is depicted as synchronous flying -- one bird behind the other. The birds fly at an ever-increasing speed, each gravity-defying twist and turn matched identically and instantaneously. These maneuvers are punctuated by their exuberant chattering vocalizations. The two birds careen through the sky -- zigging and zagging like a rabbit being chased by a fox, only faster and with the added dimension of altitude changes thrown in for good measure. After these manic maneuvers, the pair will slow to a graceful glide; the trailing bird will snap its wings up into a "V" position while continuing to soar. The bond is secured when the leading bird responds with a matching "V" as they sail on chattering excitedly to each other. By marking some birds and then carefully observing the birds in flight, Richard Fischer was able to ascertain that the lead bird is usually a female.

Additional swifts may join in the chase. Three birds flying may indicate a rivalry for a mate or may signify in-flight training for a younger bird in the finer arts of amoré. As many as a dozen birds occasionally jet across the sky, each behind the other, resembling a multi-sectional Japanese kite. Inevitably the speed will increase to such a frenetic pace that individuals veer from the formation like children thrown from the tail of a "crack-the-whip" game, leaving

only the most committed birds to the pursuit and only the mated pair to "V".

Back at the nest site, the betrothed pair continues their courtship in a calmer, more intimate fashion. They roost side by side. They will occasionally touch bill to bill and gently "fence" with each other. Both birds preen each other's head with the recipient of the favor closing its eyes and leaning toward its mate. At rest, one bird will often cover its partner's back with a wing: a swift embrace.

Once the pair bond is secure, mated swifts begin to actively defend their nest site. Only one pair of swifts will construct a nest in any chimney, no matter how large the structure may be. The residents will display their displeasure toward an intruding bird by snapping their wings. This is accomplished by the bird grasping the wall of the chimney with its feet, extending its legs as far as possible thus pushing the body away from the wall. Both wings are brought up slowly and stiffly over its back. Then the bird pushes off of the wall with its feet and claps the wings together as it falls to a lower position on the wall. This maneuver has been dubbed "wing clapping" by some researchers and compared to the sound of a "distant clap of thunder" by others. It is often preceded by a very sharp repetitive "ticking" call. The wing clap is usually followed by an excited burst of chippering. Both resident birds may join in the activity. If the bold intruder fails to respond to this obvious expression of displeasure, one of the defenders

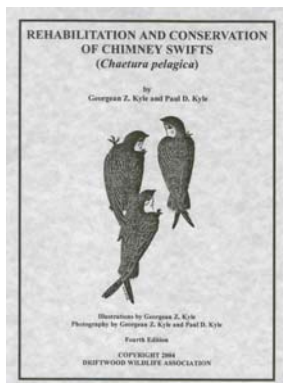
may physically remove the unwelcome visitor. A defending bird will fly toward the roosting interloper; grab its back or wings with its feet, then fly backward literally pulling the intruder from the wall. Occasionally, they will fall to the floor together and engage in a brief wrestling match. Eventually one bird surrenders and exits the chimney (presumably the intruder) with the other bird in close pursuit.

Some suitable nesting chimneys also house overnight roosting swifts throughout the summer. The phenomenon of summer roosts has become a very common occurrence. Long after migrating birds have dispersed to their breeding areas, nocturnal roosts continue. Since each pair of breeding birds remain in their individual chimney at night, it is probable that the congregations of swifts that are found in summer roosts are birds, which were unable to locate a mate or nesting site of their own. Consequently, a pair of swifts nesting in a chimney that also maintains an overnight roost must develop an understanding with their cohorts. The pair will initially attempt a defense of their home but that becomes impractical when 20 to 100 birds share the accommodations. Stratification develops which allows the breeding birds to construct a nest in the preferred nesting area occupying the lower third of the chimney. The roosting birds congregate initially at about the middle section and may move higher as the nest is completed and eggs are deposited. Only one nest is constructed in any shaft, regardless of the number of occupants....



Great Books about Chimney Swifts

by *Georgene and Paul Kyle*



Rehabilitation and Conservation of Chimney Swifts

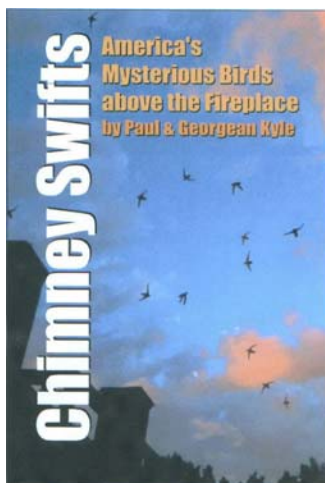
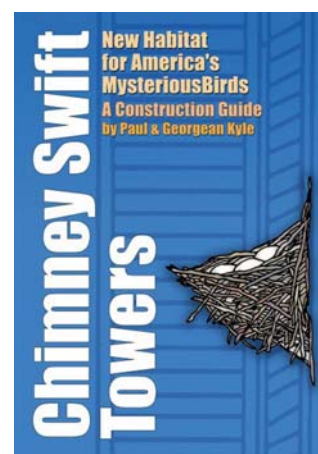
This 53 page detailed care guide for licensed wildlife rehabilitators is based on 20 years of experience with more than 1000 swifts.

Topics covered include initial care, diet, age specific housing and more. More than 50 illustrations and photos are included.

Chimney Swift Towers: New Habitat for America's Mysterious Birds

If you have ever thought about building a Chimney Swift Tower, reading this 96 page book should be your first step.

This construction guide provides step by step instructions and complete material lists for some of the most successful designs to date.



Chimney Swifts: America's Mysterious Birds above the Fireplace

There has never been a more comprehensive book written about Chimney Swifts. This is a very personal story about one of the least-known North American breeding birds. Nearly each of the 152 pages contains at least one color photo or hand-drawn sketch.

If you have ever wondered what actually is going on in your chimney during the summer months, this beautiful and informational book will solve the mysteries!

Read more about these fine publications and order online at
www.chimneyswifts.org

All proceeds benefit Chimney Swift Conservation through the Driftwood Wildlife Association

2006 ANNUAL REPORT

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in the areas of
wildlife rehabilitation,
and avian natural history.*

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Editors for *Chaetura*
Paul and Georgian Kyle

Research and Rehabilitation

Although DWA is no longer involved in “hands-on” wildlife rehabilitation, our various publications continue to be useful to rehabilitators throughout North America. A list of these may be found on the “Publications” page of our web site.

Work was completed on our contribution to an upcoming book to be published by the University of California at Davis about hand-rearing baby birds. It is scheduled to be available in late summer of 2007, and contains 488 pages with 182 images. Our chapter is about Chimney Swifts, and runs more than 40 pages.

Education

Our two web sites were well-visited again in 2006, and are our most efficient way of disseminating educational information. In addition to the useful material posted on the sites, we also offer several PDF downloads and an order form for hard copies of conservation and rehabilitation publications.

Presentations were made to several regional birding groups and conventions: Highland Lakes Birding and Wildflower Society, Marble Falls, TX; the North American Bluebird Society, San Antonio, TX; Migration Celebration, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Lake Jackson, TX; the 7th Annual Hummingbird Migration Celebration at National Audubon’s Strawberry Plains Sanctuary, Holly Springs, MS; T e x a s Bluebird Society, Bastrop, TX.

Two workshops were conducted at Chaetura Canyon in cooperation with the Education Committee of the Travis Audubon Society (TAS). The Chimney Swift Tower Workshop in the Spring and the third annual Nest Box Workshop was held in the Fall. Both workshops concluded with a tour of the Chaetura Canyon Bird Sanctuary to observe conservation projects and habitat restoration on the property.

Conservation and Restoration

Thanks to generous donations and the sale of Georgian Kyle’s limited edition prints, we were able to retire the debt on the property purchased in 2004. We continue to work with the Travis Audubon Society and private land owners in the area to conserve this small canyon.

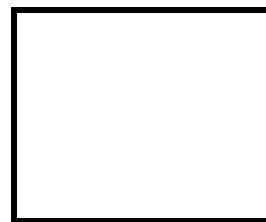
With Appreciation

We wish to express our thanks to the many members, supporters and contributors who have helped make the Driftwood Wildlife Association a nationally recognized conservation organization. We welcome your comments on past and current projects as well as suggestions for the future.

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- ♦ learn about wildlife rehabilitation
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- ♦ order publications from Driftwood

Send your e-mail to **DWA@austin.rr.com**



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Chaetura

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