

Chaetura

SUMMER 2008

Driftwood Wildlife Association

Volume 13



Traditional Roost Saved

Chimney Swifts chatter over Houston from March to October every year consuming massive amounts of mosquitoes and other bugs. Old chimney stacks provide essential roosting and nesting habitat for the swifts. But large structures such as the Pershing Middle School boiler stack are being decommissioned on a regular basis all across America. They are not only important migratory way stations for the swifts, but places where increasingly large numbers of non-breeding swifts can find relative safety throughout their stay in the northern hemisphere.

Houston bird watchers knew the Pershing boiler stack was one of these swift roosting sites. During Spring 2007 they noticed that a demolition company was tearing down the old Pershing Middle School building including the swifts' chimney where up to 200 swifts were roosting each night. The birders contacted Houston Audubon Society (HAS) and Texas Parks and Wildlife – Operation Game Thief. TPWD Game Warden Susan Webb informed the school and demolition company that the stack could not be demolished without obtaining a permit from US Fish and Wildlife. Houston Audubon explained details of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to the school and construction company. HISD promptly responded by putting a hold on the demolition until a structural engineer determined that the stack was sound. HISD decided to leave the chimney swifts' home in tact and incorporate it into the new building design.

This victory energized the group of birders to create a citizen science project to monitor the Pershing site regularly during the summer. Now sponsored by Houston Audubon Society and the Nature Discovery Center, the group counted swifts every Tuesday evening from May through October 2007. They found swifts present at Pershing from May until the week of July 24, with a peak of 263 swifts present on June 12 after nesting commenced.

In March 2008 Chimney Swifts returned to Houston's skies and chimneys including the chimney at Pershing Middle School. Birders resumed their citizen science project of weekly swift counts, joined by participants in *Swifts Over Houston*.

(Editors note: For more information about this great project, please visit the Houston Audubon Society web site: www.HoustonAudubon.org)

Pam Smolen

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Pershing Middle School in Houston, TX. Photos courtesy of Don Verser



Report from Travis Audubon's Chaetura Canyon Bird Sanctuary

Chaetura Canyon is an eight acre bird sanctuary owned by the Travis Audubon Society in Central Texas that is managed by Sanctuary Stewards Georgean and Paul Kyle. Research and educational efforts on behalf of Chimney Swifts have been conducted on this property since 1989. Sixteen structures constructed specifically for Chimney Swift nesting and roosting are available for swift habitation. Eight towers are constructed of wood; the other eight are constructed of cinderblock. Twelve structures were utilized by swifts in 2007, six of the wooden and six of the cinderblock.

A total of 42 eggs were produced by the 12 swift pairs. Thirty-seven of those eggs hatched. One 14 day old nestling expired. The remaining 36 nestlings fledged.

Climatic conditions were unseasonably cool and wet. The first six months of the year were the wettest in the history of record keeping for the area. Average yearly rainfall is 32 inches, 46.14 inches fell in 2007.

The first swift arrived on March 24, the last bird was sighted on October 13. Chimney Swifts were present at Chaetura Canyon for 204 days.

CHIMNEY SWIFT PRODUCTIVITY AT CHAETURA CANYON - 2007

Tower	#Eggs Laid	#Eggs Hatch	#Young Fledged
North Observation	6	6	6
South Observation	4	4	4
Prism	4	3	3
West Field	4	3	3
12' Demonstration	2	2	2
South Pool	3	3	3
Garden (Marlene)	4	3	2
Castle	5	3	3
Castle Companion	3	3	3
Castle Gate	2	2	2
S.W. Fence Corner	2	2	2
Driveway	3	3	3
Totals	42	37	36

*For a virtual hike through Chaetura Canyon
go to www.ChimneySwifts.org
and click on the "Chaetura Canyon Bird Sanctuary" link*

Here and there



Photo courtesy of Wendy Remington

Last year Edward Remington built a structure on our property to try and encourage chimney swifts. We have three purple martin houses, a bat house and several bird feeders beside a 3/4 acre pond that is stocked with fish.

Unfortunately, Mr. Remington died in February of this year and to date we have not seen any swifts in his "chimney." However, we will keep watching and hope that someday swifts will discover it.

This shows the chimney swift tower beside our pond. We hope that next season some chimney swifts will find it.

Wendy Remington

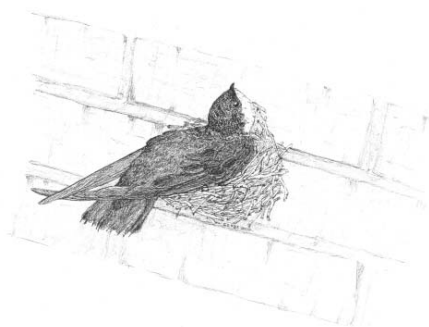


Photo by Mark Armstrong

Seymour, TN

I just finished constructing a chimney swift tower in my yard in Seymour, TN. Seymour is just south of Knoxville in east Tennessee. Following basic plans I found in past issues of *Chaetura* I constructed it of T1-11 with a layer of insulation in the middle and T1-11 on the outside. It is about 14 feet tall with an 18 inch diameter. I'm pretty excited about finally having a tower in my yard. I have often had swifts low over the house especially in early evening and I knew they were looking for a place to go. My chimney is capped but I have a narrow metal flue. Now, I have my fingers crossed and I'm really hopeful they will find my tower.

Mark Armstrong



Photo courtesy of Carl Crews

Here is our effort thus far at Old Hickory Lake. There was the beginning of a nest in one and the lid was covered with droppings.

Carl Crews

Austin, TX

I am happy to report that same 12 swifts we observed in August were still returning to our tower at Great Hills as observed last Friday night 9/7. It was a beautiful clear evening. The swifts must have been hunting far away because the sky was clear of them until just before sunset. They entered the tower just after sunset which was different from August when they played around the tower for a long time before entering and entered over a longer time span. We talked about looking for a scout to build another tower as an eagle project.

Marie Laing

Here and there 1.1



Photo Courtesy of Norma Rubin

Galveston, TX

I finally got around to taking some photos. In one photo, it looks like my jacaranda is covering the opening, but you can see in others that it isn't. Those chimney swifts are still mocking me -- they fly right over and ignore my home for them.

Norma Rubin

Spicewood Springs, TX

Four of the six towers constructed as part of a wildlife management program on the Harte property attracted nesting swifts. Eleven fledglings were produced.

Houston, TX

Chimney Swifts nested in my tower again this year.

Thea Troetscher



Photo courtesy of Trey Kelley

Austin, TX

With the help of park superintendent David Shirley and many volunteer hours by Susan Seabolt the McKinney Falls Chimney Swift Tower is ready for occupancy. The Tower is located in front of the visitor's center of the McKinney Falls State Park.

A bonus to the project was the opportunity to share about the Chimney Swifts with the countless park visitors who could not help but ask "What are ya'll building?"

Trey Kelley

Johnson City, TX

Three years after completion, the tower located near the bird blind at Pedernales Falls State Park attracted a successful nesting pair. The Friends of the Park, Travis Audubon Society, DWA and individuals contributed to the construction of another tower. The structure is located in a very prominent location near the office at the park entrance.

Georgean and Paul Kyle



Photo by Stephen Van Gee

Austin, TX

Well I guess we're ready. I bought your book and built the tower the rest is up to them. I hope they come building a chimney isn't cheap as I'm sure your aware. It's insulated as you described in the directions and I used the hardy on the outside, although it doesn't show in the picture I have put a plastic bag on top to keep everything out until spring/return.

Stephen Van Gee

Johnson City, TX

All three towers at the Middendorf Ranch were occupied. A total of seventeen eggs were laid and fourteen swifts fledged. A new eight foot tall wooden tower is ready for occupancy.

Lydia Middendorf

Here and there 1.2



Photo courtesy of Scott Gole

Montgomery Village, MD

Attached is a photo of a chimney swift tower that was built in Milton M. Kaufmann Park, located in Montgomery Village, Maryland. The tower was built in the spring of 2007 by Charles Burdette of the Montgomery Village Foundation Maintenance Department. Park visitors can read about the tower and chimney swifts in general on information that is posted on a kiosk that was built adjacent to the chimney swift tower.

Scott Gole
Assistant Director of Recreation,
Parks & Culture
Montgomery Village Foundation,
Inc.

Liberty, TX

I just wanted to report that Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge played host to another Chimney Swift family this year. Our artificial Chimney Swift tower had one nest.

Laurie Lomas
Wildlife Biologist
Trinity River National Wildlife
Refuge



Photo courtesy of Russell Mende

Cave Springs, MO

Here is one of the pictures which my daughter took of the chimneys. My first dream would be to redo the brickwork and make them as close to the originals as possible. An alternative idea is to create wooden inserts for them.

There are several chimneys. I think they are about 15 feet tall. They all came to be because of fires that destroyed the buildings. There are 37 acres at Cave Springs.

Russell Mende

Scituate, MA

The chimney I constructed is used every year. Cold spell in spring caused late nesting but they are there.

Clyde Gurney



Photo courtesy of David and Patsy Glen

Wimberley, TX

The Wimberley Birding Society held a Night Out at our "new" Chimney Swift tower located in the Patsy Glenn Refuge in Wimberley on Aug 10, 2007. The weather was perfect. We had 10 WBS members in attendance and saw a grand total of "0" swifts. They just haven't found our lovely tower yet!

Jaci Kroupa

Warsaw, VA

We have built what we think is a very good tower about 50 yards from the house. It is about 15 feet tall, lined with brick (mortar left "sloppy" to give the birds a good surface to cling to). The bottom has screened vents and a clean out door. We put a 20" wide band of aluminum flashing around the outside about 8' up as a snake guard.

The swifts have returned and are circling around our house chimneys looking for their old home. As far as I can tell they have paid no attention to the new tower.

Mercer O'Hara

Here and there 1.3



Photo courtesy of Danny Royster

Greensboro, NC

“My oldest tower has always had a nesting pair each season after putting it up and for the past few falls has been a mass roost! But this year after the swifts began arriving here there has been a number using it as a spring roost. There is not an active nest in this tower and between 60 – 70 swifts are using it as a mass roost.

In the brick tower, the nest is in the top few feet of the structure. I find this interesting for all nests in other towers have been 10 – 12 feet down in the tower.”

Danny Royster



Photos by Gary Younglove

Fair Oaks Ranch, Texas

I want to thank you for introducing me to the Swift experience. I have an unbelievable appreciation for these birds' flying abilities. I have watched them 'dive bomb' the tower on entrance and (as an old Air Force veteran) wondered at the G-Forces needed to stop flight before resting on the side of the tower for the night. It has been a great experience. Thanks again!!

Since I began this thank you email (some time ago) my Swift buddies built a nest, deposited 4 eggs, and hatched 4 youngsters. The process of monitoring them has been exciting. The nest seems so small and, with the youngsters, it seems it will not provide enough room for them as they grow toward adulthood.

Gary Younglove



Photo courtesy of Duane Brown

Altoona, AL

This twelve foot tall tower was completed in April of 2007. Chimney Swifts successfully nested that summer.

The interior is 40 inches square. Textured 1-11 siding was mounted on aluminum studs for the interior surface. Blocks were then laid on the outside of the studs and a three inch veneer of limestone was applied to the exterior.

Duane Brown



Here and there 1.4



Photo by Reginald Rose

Tupelo, MS

This new tower was installed on July 21, 2007. It is located at the Sanctuary Hospice House in Tupelo.

Reginald Rose

Fairmont, WV

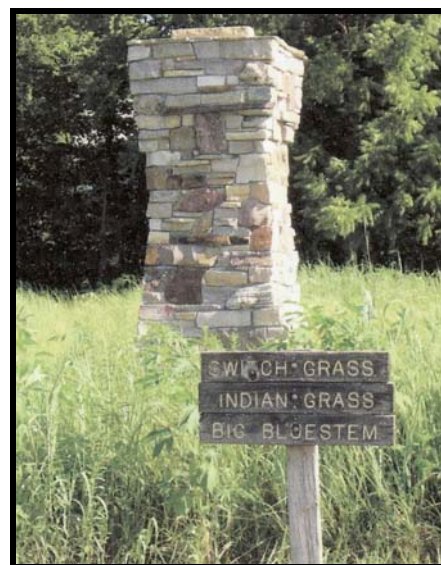
“My tower was occupied again this year. The pair of swifts raised three more flyers.

About a week before the official “Swift Night Out”, I counted 5 entering the tower. The next night 4 went in but the 5th after fluttering down to enter decided not to go in but instead flew off around my home and back again for another flutter down but again no entry. This happened about a dozen times before the swift finally entered.”

Tom Heine



Photos courtesy of Robert Kaldenberg



Winterset, IA

Our project is sponsored by our local Winterset Rotary Club who wrote a grant and received \$1000 to help fund this project. The project eventually includes three towers in the town of Winterset, Iowa. We have completed the stone tower and will work on the other two wood towers this spring. Winterset has been blessed with hundreds if not thousands of Chimney Swifts. Besides roosting in local chimneys the majority of these birds roost in the local middle school chimney built in 1920 which will probably be torn down and replaced with a new school. This fact stimulated our project. It is really a sight to see as early in the spring and late in the fall hundreds go to roost.

The stone mason, who you see in one of the pictures, is Scott Henderson who became interested in helping with the project after reading about it in our local newspaper. He sent for and got your book on construction and studied it extensively. Scott not only volunteered his time and labor but donated the outside stone and got a local supplier to donate the mortar and the concrete block. The design you see is his design and is designed for art and to keep predators out. The tower is built on our local outdoor classroom site which is located next to the elementary school and maintained by the Madison County Conservation Dept. The tower inside is 18 inches square and is 10 ft tall. The foundation is 6 foot square by 8 inches deep with 5 sixteen inch holes, 42 inches deep to keep it from tilting and heaving because of frost and weight. The inside of the chimney is plastered with mortar mixed with fiber and left rough and worked out great. The door at the bottom is steel and was done by a local welder, with holes drilled in it to ID it and for air movement. There is a drain in the bottom of the chimney. We finished in April of 2007 and we did get it occupied and hatched and fledged four swifts. Later on in the summer and fall I counted as many as a dozen birds roosting in the chimney.

Robert Kaldenberg

“A Swift Night Out!”

A SWIFT NIGHT OUT is a continent-wide effort to raise awareness about and encourage interest in Chimney Swifts and Vaux's Swifts. The project was originally inspired by John Connors with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh, North Carolina. In 2001 Paul and Georgean Kyle took John's suggestion and developed the program for the Driftwood Wildlife Association that has become a favorite late summer event for professional and amateur birdwatchers alike.



**This year's
A Swift Night Out
dates are:
August 8, 9, 10
And
September 12, 13, 14**

As summer draws to a close and the swifts have finished raising their young, these fascinating aerial acrobats begin to congregate in communal roosts prior to their migration in the fall. Some roosts may consist of an extended family group of a half a dozen birds or so, but the larger sites can host hundreds or even thousands of swifts! We encourage you to involve your local Audubon chapters, bird clubs, scout groups and neighbors in this exhilarating spectacle.

Here is how it works: Keep your eyes to the skies at dusk in late July and watch for areas where swifts are feeding. Look for a tall shaft, chimney or similar structure to locate where Chimney Swifts (central to east coast) or Vaux's Swift (Pacific coast) go to roost in your area.

This year, on one night over the weekend of August 8, 9, 10, and / or September 12, 13, 14 observe the roost starting about 30 minutes before dusk and estimate the number of swifts that enter. When you have your number, email us at:

DWA@austin.rr.com

That's all there is to it!

We ask that you include the following information:

- * Number of swifts counted
- * Time
- * Date
- * Location
- * Broad description of the site, e.g. school, warehouse, residence, Chimney Swift Tower, etc.
- * Weather conditions may also be reported.

Report your Chimney Swifts to eBird!

In addition to the email reports that you send to us here at the Driftwood Wildlife Association (“**A Swift Night Out**” and “**Spring Sightings**”), we are now encouraging observers to report all their swift sightings, including first sightings of the year and last sightings of the year to eBird (www.ebird.org). Ideally, we encourage you to register all swift reports from throughout the summer, to see how numbers change locally, when young fledge, and when the last bird departs. For directions on how to enter your reports on eBird, go to www.ChimneySwifts.org and click on the “A Swift Night Out!” link.

Why report to eBird?

eBird will automatically store the sightings in a securely backed up permanent archive (up until this point our data were not stored in a database). The data will be organized and combined with thousands of swift observations from birdwatchers around the country, which will make for a much stronger dataset. These will be available for maps and graphs within eBird (visible under the “View and Explore Data” tab) and the raw data will also be available to anyone via the Avian Knowledge Network (www.avianknowledge.net).

What is eBird?

A real-time, online checklist program, eBird has revolutionized the way that the birding community reports and accesses information about birds. Launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, eBird provides rich data sources for basic information on bird abundance and distribution at a variety of spatial and temporal scales.

eBird's goal is to maximize the utility and accessibility of the vast numbers of bird observations made each year by recreational and professional bird watchers. It is amassing one of the largest and fastest growing biodiversity data resources in existence. For example, in 2006, participants reported more than 4.3 million bird observations across North America.

The observations of each participant join those of others in an international network of eBird users. eBird then shares these observations with a global community of educators, land managers, ornithologists, and conservation biologists. These data are becoming the foundation for a better understanding of bird distribution across the western hemisphere and beyond.

As a final note, if you do other birdwatching during the course of the year, please consider reporting those sightings in eBird as well!

Saving Another Chimney Swift Roost

The St. Joseph County (South Bend, Indiana) called this past week. They were involved in saving a big school stack that has a nice-sized chimney swift population each Fall. The school has now been torn down but the Parks Department is landscaping around the base of the stack and putting up signage about the swifts. They asked me to do the slide presentation the evening of the August Swift Night Out count and then they'll bus everyone over to the stack for the "official" count. The homeowners in the area have all gotten involved and I'm just delighted. Wish I had more success stories like that to pass on to you.

Shirley Needham
Rochester, North Central Indiana

Editors' Note: Shirley has been a friend to Chimney Swifts for many years as an experienced rehabilitator and speaker. She makes numerous presentations on behalf of their conservation, and has in many cases donated her speakers fees and honorariums to the Driftwood Wildlife Association. Her generosity assists us with our continent-wide effort which include the costs of publishing this newsletter and maintaining the web site. Thank you, Shirley!

SWALLOWS - MARTINS - SWIFTS WORLDWIDE

*This website encourages communication among professional and amateur alike in the study of all species of swallows, martins and swifts worldwide. Questions and discussions concerning the amount of calcium in swift diets and the calcium required for the formation of eggs has been recurring over the years. The following posts based on the European swift *Apus apus* may help shed light on the uniqueness of the swift family.*

“ The eggs of *Apus apus* [Common Swift] are very thin shelled and following hatching the egg shells wither and shrivel. They are paper thin and we will be measuring the wall thickness of some later this year.

The diet of a swift is probably very low in calcium anyway, the main food items being small flies, spiders and beetles but when aphids are eaten some calcium may be transferred if it is present in the sap that they feed on. Similarly there may be some calcium in pollen beetles and perhaps in flying ants. There is very little calcium in the rainwater that swifts drink. It may be that this general lack of calcium is one reason why young swifts develop so slowly and spend so long in the nest.

This is only one of our lines of investigation at Oxford and will hopefully result in a short paper at some future time.”

George Candelin, Oxford Swift Project

“I was at a meeting of the Cambridgeshire Bird Club on February 09, 2008. Andy Gosler of the Edward Grey Institute (a premier ornithological institute in Oxford, where David Lack, of “Swifts in a Tower” fame, was once a director) was talking about eggs and the reason why so many small birds' eggs have spots. I asked him, where do Swifts get their calcium? - A question that has arisen before on this forum. The answer is most interesting. Although insects contain some calcium, it is not enough to produce eggs in the time available, after returning from Africa. They acquired some skeletons of females pre-breeding, females post breeding, birds in winter quarters and some males and measured bone density. It turns out that the birds with the most depleted bones are post-breeding females - they use skeletal calcium to build their eggs. The sternum is reduced to a translucent membrane. So that is the puzzle solved. It also explains why Swifts cannot quickly produce a second a clutch if the first one fails.”

Dick Newell, Cambridge

<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

Are You a Member of the Driftwood Wildlife Association?

If not, please join our Chimney Swift Conservation efforts!

If you are a Member, please renew ASAP

Visit the web site and click on “Membership” for information and categories of support...

Building Chimney Swift Towers for Wildlife Management

The Briar Patch

Cherry Springs Ranch, straddling Burnet and Blanco counties in Texas, functioned as a standard cow-calf ranching operation for more than a century. Then Ann Edwards and I moved all the cows off in 2002, and began a formal Wildlife Management Plan. “My father Mac pretended for decades,” I tell visitors, “to make money in the cattle business in Central Texas ...” Mac Edwards died in 1972.

Under the highly regulated Wildlife Management Plan process that our Texas Legislature put in place a few sessions ago, you no longer have to let cattle despoil ranch land – you have the opportunity to let the land, and the things that live on it and fly over it, revert to their natural state. And the law says you have to help it along. One thing you can do as part of a Wildlife Management Plan is enhance habitat, including establishing places for birds to nest.

I continue “... We ourselves have gone into the housing business. For Purple Martins, owls, bluebirds, chickadees, titmice ...” And now, Chimney Swifts.

I became a man transfixed the day Ann and I went to Travis Audubon’s Chaetura Canyon Sanctuary for a bluebird box workshop. The bluebird boxes were nice enough and we went home with one of them, but the real jewel was the towers. We went home with the Kyles’ two books.

Over the past several years we have put up six towers.

Please, Mr. Wildlife Management Plan inspector man, don’t throw me in that briar patch!

Bill Edwards



*One of the six Chimney Swift Towers at Cherry Springs Ranch.
Pictured from left to right Georgan Kyle, Ann Edwards and Bill Edwards
Photo by Paul Kyle*

Canadian Update

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) designated both the CHIMNEY SWIFT and COMMON NIGHTHAWK as formally THREATENED, as a result of their long-term and substantial population declines over the past 40 years or so.

Here is the precise wording concerning the above new designations, from the COSEWIC Web Site, press release dated April 2007:

Bird Declines Unexplained

COSEWIC expressed alarm that aerial-feeding, insect-eating birds are disappearing. Both Common Nighthawk and the Chimney Swift were assessed as Threatened. Disturbingly, the cause of these global declines in these, and related birds, is unclear. Sharp declines over 70% in the Red Knot, a migratory shorebird, are also cause for concern - one North American population of this species was deemed Endangered.

Nova Scotia Endangered Species Act: Legally Listed Species as of 2007

The following species at risk are legally protected under the *NS Endangered Species Act*. Included for each species is the year it was listed under the Act, the status category, a brief explanation of why it was listed, and a link to "Additional Information" on recovery efforts. Please note that species are assessed each year and therefore the list of species at risk protected under the act is updated annually. The up to date list of species can also be viewed at *Regulations under the Nova Scotia Endangered Species Act*

Chimney Swift (*Chaetura Pelagica*) – Endangered 2007: The Canadian population of Chimney swift has declined by almost 30 percent in the past 13 years and geographic area these birds occupy has declined about one third over the same period. In Nova Scotia, the number and the sites where chimney swifts are found has also declined. Many aerial insect eating bird species have declined throughout the Americas in the past 30 years. The cause of the declines is not clear but likely involves changes in insect populations due to habitat changes and pesticide use. A decline in chimneys and large hollow trees that are used for nesting and roosting is also a factor. Large kills resulting from hurricanes crossing migration paths has recently been a serious concern.

The definition of the status category of Endangered is a species facing imminent extirpation or extinction.

National Audubon has its new "Birds to Help" pages up, including a one page resource that can be printed out on Chimney Swifts. It can be used as a handout with additional local or other info printed on the back side: www.audubonathome.org/birdstohelp/

The Breeding Bird Survey data shows an average loss per year for Chimney Swifts in the U.S. of -1.64% or 48% over the past 40 years. It is possible that the loss was worse in inner cities, but BBS covers small cities and suburbs very well.

So we do see some pretty strong declines, but unfortunately by having a 50% cut off for the presentation of Common Birds in Decline, Chimney Swift didn't make "the cut". But for sure a 48% decline over 40 years has to be cause for pause!

Rob Fergus, Senior Scientist
Urban Bird Conservation
National Audubon Society

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS...



I am a veterinarian and I work with organic dairy farms. In this type of farming, as you might know, drugs, pesticides or the like are not allowed. They do have problems with bugs (flies and mosquitoes). They utilize herbal applications and other techniques with some results.

My question was if you thought placing chimney like structures as your website recommends (to bring chimney swift families into the farm) would work.

I strongly believe that this could be a very useful way of helping farmers and chimney swifts. It will be also useful to know how far from the barn structure do they need to be and how soon after placing the structure will the birds come to live.

Rosario Delgado-Lecaroz, DVM / Upton, MA

Your proposal would indeed benefit both the swifts and the farmers. Towers can be constructed close to the barn or even attached to it, but no tower should be placed less than ten feet away from another tower. Placing the towers along a fence line may be a good option. Most new towers are occupied within the first year or two after construction. You might consider constructing a tower or two initially and adding additional towers after the first are occupied. The offspring from a previous year will return to nest in the new structures.

I have lived in my house for 30 years. I have had swifts in my chimney every year from April 4th to Oct. 4th. I hope to have them as long as I live here but is there a way to keep the rain out that the swifts will tolerate? I can make it myself if I had a pattern. It rains hard in Florida.

Joe

Basically, if the cap is at least 12" above the chimney top and open on two opposite sides, the swifts will still be able to have access. With such a design, the swifts can fly straight through or drop in. We have seen some really nice looking metal caps that are shaped like the back of a Conestoga wagon. Which ever way you go, you should wait until the swifts have left for the season before modifying the chimney top. Be certain that the metal edges are "rolled" so that the birds will not be injured by sharp edges. Please let us know how this works out.

My sister recently purchased an older home. It appears that chimney swifts are roosting in the chimney of the house and probably have been for many years. She wants to cap the chimney, but I told her to wait until the birds migrate and that when those swifts return next spring, they will have no place to nest. Did I read somewhere that there are people who can put up a free-standing chimney of some sort to offer to the birds upon their return next spring? She has no power tools and is not handy in building such a structure. She does have room on the property for such a structure. Would there be anyone in the Pittsburgh, PA area that she could contact to help her out?

June / Gibsonia, PA

(Continued on page 14)

(Continued from page 13)

There is a very good book available called "Chimney Swift Towers: New Habitat for America's Mysterious Birds". It has step by step instructions and complete material lists for several different styles of Chimney Swift Towers. With this book, any contractor in your area should be able to build a suitable tower. You can find a summary of the book and how to obtain a copy by going the "Books About Chimney Swifts" link on our web site.

I have a question about Chimney Swifts -- we have a late breeding family in our chimney at present (# 2 this season). We are experiencing a severe drought in the Carolinas, with no rain for weeks. I am worrying myself silly about these nestlings, but they seem to be doing fine with feedings about every 15-20 minutes just like clockwork. I hope you can provide some reason for optimism that they will survive the drought. I believe I read once that Chimney Swifts obtain moisture from the insects they eat, and evidently there are lots of flying insects remaining despite the drought.

Mike Mullen / Huntersville, NC

Chimney Swifts actually fare very well when the weather is hot and dry. While they do derive much of the moisture they need from their insect prey, Chimney Swifts will skim lakes, rivers and ponds for water. They will forage several miles from the nesting site for food and water.

As long as swifts have a safe place to build their nest, raise their young and roost at night, they can deal with even the most adverse weather conditions. We appreciate your interest, and hope this information has given you some peace of mind about your Chimney Swifts.

We had 3 Swifts arrive sometime in late March of 2007. They made a nest as they have for the last 20 years and raised a bunch of babies. We have counted as many as 12 over the house after we heard the babies in the chimney. This is less than the 20 or more that we counted some years back. I have noticed that when the temperature gets into the high 90's I do not hear or see them for a while. This afternoon I noticed a few in the sky and saw 5 go down the chimney. Do the swifts leave when the temperature gets high and return when it cools off? Maybe I just haven't seen them since I have not been outside as much with the hot weather. Our area has been above 100 for 14 days and today was just in the 90's. I encourage my neighbors to not cap their chimneys and thank you for what you do for the Swifts.

Joyce and Otto Frei / North Augusta, SC

Thanks very much for sending us your observations on Chimney Swifts. When the weather gets hot, the swifts tend to forage at higher altitudes. During this period, the only time they will be obvious is at dusk just before they go to roost.

Thanks also for your conservation efforts on behalf of the swifts. Talking with neighbors about the birds can make all the difference in the future of these fascinating and beneficial birds. Their numbers have declined by more than 48% over the past few decades, so they need all of the friendly chimneys and towers we can provide for them! Chimney Swifts are one of the few declining avian species where a single individual can make a difference in their conservation.

As part of a regional partnership of state and federal agencies and researchers, I'm working on designing and testing a protocol for large-scale nest monitoring of chimney swifts in urban areas of North America. So far we have plans to evaluate the potential impact of pesticides, the utility of installing small nesting structures, and track changes in population size. At this point it looks like the pilot areas this summer will be in Connecticut, North Carolina, and somewhere in Canada. The Driftwood Association has done a great deal of important work on chimney swifts and we would love to collaborate with you on the design and testing of the protocol.

Briefly, the protocol involves randomly selecting city blocks, censusing the number of available nest structures in that block, and then randomly selecting a number of those available nest structures to monitor. Observers will visit each structure at least twice during the year to determine if swifts are nesting in the structure. One of the things we're not sure about is the best time to visit a structure to determine if nesting is happening. Do you have any suggestions? More specifically, do you have any information on feeding rates and/or entry and exit rates for parents during nesting?

Rua S. Mordecai, Ph.D. / School of Forestry and Natural Resources / University of Georgia
Athens, GA

On average, a pair of Chimney Swifts will begin nest construction one month after they arrive at their selected nesting site. Both adults share in the nest construction and will return with nest sticks very sporadically during daylight hours. On days of high humidity or rain, nest sticks will not snap from the tree tips and no construction will occur. About a week after nest construction was initiated, eggs are deposited every other day. The pair will continue to add sticks to the nest during this period. As soon as incubation begins, the adults will trade time on the nest alternating on average between 60 and 90 minutes. The returning adult will usually arrive with an additional nest stick. When the nestlings begin to hatch (18 to 20 days after incubation was initiated), nest construction ceases and the feeding intervals for the nestlings range from 20 to 30 minutes. During "blooms" of flying insect prey, the parents may return with food as frequently as every five minutes or less. Evening is usually the best time to monitor a structure. Conduct surveys for an hour beginning 30 minutes before sunset.

I have a particular question regarding the roosting behavior of Chimney Swifts on their wintering grounds in South America. Here's the question: We know that swifts use chimneys (and towers) to nest and roost in Canada and the USA, however, what are they using in South America for roosting? Are they using trees in the South American forests, chimneys in developed areas, or both?

Mike Quigley / Manitoba, Canada

Very little is known about the behavior of Chimney Swifts when they are "wintering" in South America. In fact, not even the extent of their southern range during the North American winter months is known. However, swifts do utilize hollow trees there. Bird bands recovered from swifts that were smoked from hollow trees for food by indigenous people of Peru resulted in the discovery of their "wintering grounds". A large commercial chimney in Manaus, Brazil was also discovered to be used by swifts. It would seem that swifts in both Americas utilize similar structures.



OBSERVATIONS: Chimney Swifts

In my work in the Big Thicket National Preserve the past two seasons we have observed remarkable concentrations of nesting (well, I assume they are nesting although I don't have the ability to check the cavities to actually see the nests) swifts in cypress-tupelo swamps. These trees (and American Beech which is also present) have a high frequency of hollow trunks. Hurricane Rita snapped off the crowns of many cypresses and tupelos while the trees themselves well rooted in spongy ground that gives, still are alive and standing. The snapped-off crowns give access to the hollow interior of the trunk, making a nice natural "chimney". I have repeatedly seen swifts in courtship display over the area, entering cavities with twigs, and other signs that nesting was indeed occurring in this natural environment. Whether the hurricane is totally responsible for this "windfall" for swifts I doubt, because other Ivory-bill Woodpecker searches in areas not hurricane damaged have reported the same thing (a spin-off benefit of intense field activity in a habitat little visited by birders otherwise).

John C. Arvin / Gulf Coast Bird Observatory / Lake Jackson, TX

For some reason there are still large numbers of swifts roosting in the old incinerator stack at Pershing Middle School despite the mid June date. Tonight Pam Smolen used a scope to count 263 swifts flying into the stack. This compares to recent counts of 220 on 05 June and 206 on 25 May so the numbers are apparently increasing when all swifts should be nesting. Not sure what to make of this except this is a wonderful place for swifts.

The demolition of the old school has been completed and for now the trees have been spared. Hopefully some or all of the large oaks and cedar elms can be incorporated into a bird friendly green space.

Don Verser / Houston, Texas

Roosting flocks of Chimney Swifts were once common only during spring and fall migration (primarily fall). The late spring and early summer roosts are apparently a relatively new phenomena -- say within the past 20 years or so. Over the past decade, we have documented non-breeding roosts that are present throughout the summer in two of our Chimney Swift towers. These roosts tend to inflate in size as the nesting season comes to a close.

We do know that both parents incubate, brood, feed the young and stay with the nest over night, so these roosts are not congregations of male parent swifts. We have also observed pair-bonding behavior among multiple swifts in the roosts in our towers. We are certain that they mixed-gender gatherings. We have also documented successful breeding by first year birds and birds as old as nine years.

The most common hypothesis is that due to decreasing nesting sites, these flocks are composed of swifts that could breed if they were able to find a suitable site. It may also be possible that swifts evicted from their chimney nesting sites by intolerant home owners will seek out these non-breeding groups.

This is the second season we have "hosted" chimney swifts in the chimney of our 1950s ranch home. We first heard the birds enter the chimney April 19, 2007, and the offspring have been begging for food for approx. the last 2 weeks. It won't be long before they learn to fly and gather insects themselves. My husband compares the sound of their loud chittering with the sound of the co-hosts on "The View" all talking at the same time. At night, they carry on a soft conversation that's more pleasant to the ears. We are enjoying the absence of mosquitoes, flies etc., not to mention knowing that we are helping an endangered bird to keep the species alive.

The Hollars Family / Nashville, TN

(Continued on page 17)

Today (July 19), while talking to a friend in the Home Depot parking lot in mid-town, I noticed two Mississippi Kites swooping around at tree top level over the street just to our west. I also noted a Chimney Swift frenetically flying in the same air space. I realized the kites were in pursuit of the swift and called the chase to Bert's attention. As we watched, one adult and one immature kite were diving on the swift and swirling almost right over our heads. The circles got tighter and the swift was being cut off at every turn; suddenly from above and behind us another adult Mississippi Kite came out of nowhere and snatched the hapless swift out of the air. The three kites circled a few more times with the skilled catcher seemingly showing off the prey and then all three departed back to a tree line to the east.

I've seen Mississippi Kites snatch young Black-necked Stilts off the ground plus mice and lizards from the ground and trees but this was my first for the taking a flying bird, although I've seen them chase a few swallows. Bert then told me he had seen one, years ago, in the same location, take a swift and another birder I know had reported that one took a Cow Bird from the ground in their back yard in Little Rock, AR. You just never know what will be revealed when you pay attention...

Jeff R. Wilson / Bartlett, TN

On 10/13 I observed 24 (Chimney) swifts silently feeding over Buffalo Bayou in west Harris County. This is my personal latest record for this species. In addition, I had a Northern Cardinal singing on 10/14. My earliest record. They generally start territorial singing in my 'hood by December. Response to "warming"; aberrant behavior; "happiness"? Go figure.

Dennis Shepler / SE Houston / Harris County, TX

Just yesterday (06 June) I happened to find a swift nest underground. While walking along Brays Bayou here in Houston I saw a swift fly by and disappear into an open shaft that is flush with the ground. I think its old metal cover may have rusted away and fallen in. When I walked over and looked in I could hear the swifts but they did not fly out. There was a nest about 5 feet below grade containing 3 eggs and the two swifts were just below the nest.

Don Verser / Houston, TX

An idea is to pursue the inclusion of wildlife habitat (especially the scarce opportunities for urban wildlife habitat) in the rating system of the U.S. Green Building Council. They have a rating system that gives building projects credits for including a variety of environmentally conscious features. This can be a very serious issue. A friend of mine was involved in the design of the new downtown library in Minneapolis, and it became politically imperative that they get a high green rating on the project. If swift habitat could in some way be worth points in this system it would be a good thing. A friend, Tom Reasoner, suggested it to me; he is an architect associated with the University of South Dakota here in Vermillion.

Mark Wetmore / Vermillion, SD

OBSERVATIONS: Vaux's Swifts

We have a nest in the chimney, in Portland, Oregon. The babies are noisy of course. We have been careful not to disturb the nest, but my wife wants to have it screened off so they can't come back next year. Is there any way to insulate the sound so they are not so noisy?

Lew Pollan

The sounds you are hearing are the babies begging for food when their parents return from collecting the flying insect pests that they feed to their young. Normally by the time the babies become really loud, they are just a week or so away from fledging. They will still return to the chimney for a while, but after their first flight or two, they no longer make the loud sounds that have drawn your attention to them.

What works very well to dampen the sound is to close the damper and pack the fire place with fiberglass building insulation. There are some more specific suggestions on our web site under the "Is There Chattering in Your Chimney?" link.

Swift invasion: We live in the Ojai Valley in Ventura County California. The birds arrived on Thursday evening 9/20. We have lived here for over 20 years and have never seen anything like this. There are several thousand birds. We sat and watched them for over 2 hours as they swarmed and swooped our 3 brick chimneys (1918 construction). We were away for the weekend and last night 9/23 when we returned we saw them again. We do not know if this is a new group or the same ones. We are seeing them at dusk, and they seem to be settling down for the night in our chimneys. (What a mess as many have gotten into the house).

Jim & Cathi Nye
Ventura CA

I am from the Pilchuck Audubon Society in Washington State and we are very interested in the Chimney Swift tower you built. No, we do not have Chimney Swifts in Washington but we do have Vaux's Swifts and we are about to lose another tower in Monroe Washington used by about 10,000 Vaux's Swifts during their September migration. I do not know if the two species have the same requirements and am trying to explore this further. Also we are interested to know if your tower is working and if so, the numbers of birds who have used it. Our birds are in trouble because the destruction of our old growth forests is causing the loss of Yellow Cedar snags for them to use.

Susie Schaefer Vice President
Pilchuck Audubon Society

Thank you for your interest in swift conservation. There are many similarities in both of our North American Chaetura swifts: solitary nesters, communal roosters, both use chimneys as nest sites to name a few. However, our knowledge about Vaux's Swifts is limited to what we have read, and we have never had the opportunity to study them in the wild.

We have built nearly 100 Chimney Swift towers of several different designs over the past 20+ years. In most cases, towers that are in place when the swifts return in spring migration are used the 1st year. Only one pair will nest, but there can be dozens or hundreds using a tower as a roost in spring and fall migration.

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Dr. Evelyn Bull did research on Vaux's Swifts using structures similar to our towers and had good results. Her work is about the only experimentation that has been done with supplemental housing for Vaux's Swifts, but there is every reason to believe that our current designs would be just as useful to Vaux's as they have been for Chimney Swifts.

Although it is possible to successfully construct towers for nesting pairs and small roosts, the reconstruction of large chimneys that can accommodate thousands of migrating birds is problematic. The continuing loss of the industrial and school chimneys that swifts in the thousands utilize during migration leaves a void in the conservation efforts of both species. As large roosting sites are lost, swifts begin to congregate in smaller structures, like the three chimneys at the Nye residence (previous letter). If dampers are open, birds find themselves inside a structure with no way out. If too many birds enter a small structure, many can die because of suffocation. Hopefully, at least some of the traditional roosting structures will be allowed to stand.

CHIMNEY TIME-SHARING REPORTS

A few years ago, I stopped burning wood in my fireplace and started using gas logs. The man who cleaned the chimney, knowing I wouldn't be using it anymore since the gas logs are vent less, put a screen over the top. I had forgotten all about that until I read an article on your web site informing me that blocked chimneys seem to be on the increase and are having an adverse effect on the Chimney Swift population.

I removed the screen in April just after I sighted the first Chimney Swift. Almost immediately I noticed some Swifts going in at dusk. My wife says she has heard them in there, but I don't believe they are nesting there. I haven't noticed much activity lately, so I think the ones I saw going in were just using it for a roost when they first arrived. I hope they will start nesting in the chimney, if not this year, maybe in future years. I had planned to build a tower this summer, but I'm 70 years old and opening the chimney was much easier for me. I have been fascinated by Chimney Swifts all my life.

Jim Williams / Elizabethton, TN

Last night we heard a screeching sound in our old fireplace that was closed up. After opening it up we discovered that a chimney swift nest had fallen to the bottom. We scooped the 4 babies up from the bottom and put them in a box for the night. In the morning we built a ledge for them and put them back in the chimney. We have been doing many cams on other bird boxes but we never thought to look down in the old chimney. Mom and dad came back to feed the babies after about 2 hours. All the chicks appear to be healthy and fine after the fall.

Mike Postolian

We live in a really old house on a historic piece of property, Dellbrook Manor, near Front Royal, VA (at least a century old with a stone chimney that is probably 200 years old). The first time we came into contact with the birds, we assumed it was yet another inconvenience. You know, the occasional skunk, mouse, bird, etc. But, we have now come to respect these birds and it is amazing to think they travel from Peru to here every year. We thought early on about fixing the cap to our chimney, but hey, what's it hurt to let them nest, right? SO, they have returned for yet another noisy summer! At least this year we were smart and blocked the opening at the fireplace with some heavy cardboard over the top of the wire guard so that the light hopefully is only seen from above for these birds.

I saw the video clips on your Web Cam link. In fact, when I turned up the sound on my computer, the birds in my chimney started up! It was funny.

Trudy Peterson, Shenandoah Valley, Front Royal, VA

Your site and outstanding photography have been a wonderful discovery today! We have a wide array of bird species in our suburban NW area but we've never had chimney swift 'tenants'. I'm delighted they found safe harbor in our chimney. I've read that they often return to the same site each year and hope that will be the case next year.

The vacancy sign must be working; I also had Anna's hummingbirds year-round for the first time. Hummingbirds at the feeders in the snow were amazing. Thank you again for putting out good information and promoting wildlife conservation.

Lisa Lorden

Two days ago I heard a strange chattering in my chimney just around dusk. The next evening I was outside to investigate further and saw birds flying down in my chimney. My first thought was, "Oh no, now I have to pay someone to clean my chimney out." Well, as is the norm for me, I called upon Google to learn everything that I can about my new tenants. Was I ever please to find out that these are great birds to have around! I've been an avid bird watcher for most of my life, and in fact, have had a purple martin gourd rack up for over ten years now and have failed to attract martins. I do, however let tree swallows have a gourd and enjoy watching them rear their young. I also have a bat house erected and enjoy watching my bats take flight at dusk. What a welcomed gift to be given Chimney Swifts out of the blue! I'm so excited that I just had to write and thank you for your web site and all of the information that you provide. I've marked my calendar for the Swift Night Out too! Looks like my next project will be to erect a tower to allow for more swift fun in my yard!

Sharon Reihart
Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania

For the past three or four years, Chimney Swifts have been nesting and raising their young in our living room chimney. We leave the flu closed and were first alerted to their presence when our dog, a chow-shepherd mix, began sitting in front of the glass doors with his head to one side, listening to the chirping and chattering going on in there. We kidded that it was a new kind of picture less TV.

We believe they have fledged and are not returning to the nest at night, nor are their parents any longer feeding them as we don't hear their combined (there are about five or six of the babies) excitement any more. We have enjoyed watching them try their wings and fly together in the early evening, soaring and dipping and staying pretty much in our area - we have an acre of land with a lot of trees - they chirp to each other as they fly in a group and are great fun to watch.

Earlier we saw the parents a couple of times returning to the chimney nest. Not long ago we had the chimney seal coated and told the young man about our summer guests. His response was that he could put a cap on the chimney (the only one of three that doesn't have one already), but we said no, since our guests had come such a long way to be with us for a couple of months, it would be a shame to lose their sweet presence. We consider ourselves lucky to have been chosen.

Elaine F. Owsley / Dexter, Michigan

I have just checked out your Chimney Swift website, and noticed that you would like to know when the birds were first seen (in the Spring). Well, it is Summer and we've noticed a lot of chirping coming from our chimney. I wasn't sure if it was bats or birds because it sounded so odd and I had seen bats in the area. I called an organization called Critter Getters who told me that the noise was probably Chimney Swifts and just to go out in the evening and watch to see what flies in or out. It was the birds! This is a first for us. I've never even heard of them. They are really

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quite fascinating. I am not sure how many are in the chimney, but it sounds like a lot. We will have to sit out and count them one of these evenings.

Teri Olson / Aloha, OR

I wanted to thank you for the information you have available on your web site. I moved in to my house in Savannah GA three years ago and was taken by surprise when the birds appeared in what had obviously been a nesting place for quite some time. I finally looked on the internet to find what had invaded the chimney. Not knowing anything about these birds, I was glad to learn it is normal for them to be there and amazed at the noise they can make especially as the babies get older. I wanted to cap my chimney to keep them out once they left but never got around to it.

Now I appreciate my noisy housemates. They are a great part of my summers. My cats used to knock down the screen and sit in the fireplace staring up looking for the birds. Now they do not pay any attention what so ever to the noise.

Judy

I want to thank you for such a wonderful and informative website. About the last two days we've been hearing birds in our chimney. Not a welcome thought that we'd have to have it cleaned before using this winter, but a wonderful sound that I didn't mind having around.

It all started about 7am one morning with something flapping around in my fireplace. I have cast iron inserts and the damper was open just a bit allowing the bird to get in. He was covered in ash and exhausted. I placed him in a bird cage I had until I could determine the bird's health in case I had to take it to a rescue center. A short trip to the library and I knew what I had. A short search on the web and I found your site. I was able to determine it was a juvenile, close to the pictures of the 21 day old birds. The rescue information is what was most helpful, as I wasn't sure what to do with him. I opened the damper all the way and put him in as far as I could get. No problem. No biting or anything. They seem to be a very pleasant bird that I won't mind having around if they choose to come back year after year.

I'm sure it left my cockatiel with questions though....

Warren Linke / Bat Cave, NC

A new book, “Hand-Rearing Birds” edited by Laurie J. Gage, DVM and Rebecca S. Duerr, DVM was published in 2007 by Blackwell Publishing. “The book first covers standard hand-rearing methods and equipment, while the second provides individual chapters devoted to many major avian species. This book will be an invaluable reference for shelter veterinarians, zoo veterinarians, avian veterinarians, aviculturists, bird enthusiasts, and conservationists alike.” We are proud to have been invited to provide the chapter on Swift care.

Georgian and Paul Kyle



2007 ANNUAL REPORT

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

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Georgan Kyle.....Secretary

Paul Kyle.....Treasurer

Editors for *Chaetura*
Georgan and Paul 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.

Education

Our two web sites were well-visited again in 2007 with more than 20,000 visits, and continue to be 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.



*Paul Kyle making one of six weekend presentations on Chimney Swifts at the 2007 Hummingbird Migration Celebration at Strawberry Plains Audubon Center in Holly Springs, Mississippi.
Photo by Georgan Kyle*

In addition to several presentations away from Austin, we continue to work with the Education Committee of the Travis Audubon Society at Chaetura Canyon to provide workshops on a variety of conservation and habitat issues. For more information, please visit the TAS web site at www.TravisAudubon.org

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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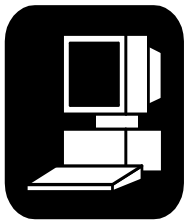
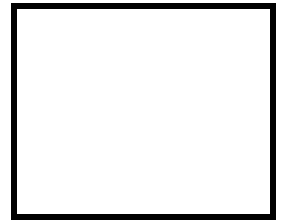


In Memory...

We are sad to announce the loss
of the following long-time
friends and members:

*Dessa Crawford
Patsy Glenn
Bettie Janda
George Winfield*

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Visit our web site at:
www.ChimneySwifts.org

In addition to learning more about the North American Chimney Swift Nest Site Research Project, you can:

- ◇ track the spring movements of Chimney Swifts
- ◇ learn about wildlife rehabilitation
- ◇ download past issues of **Chaetura**
- ◇ order publications from Driftwood

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

Chaetura

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