

CHIMNEYS AND WILDLIFE

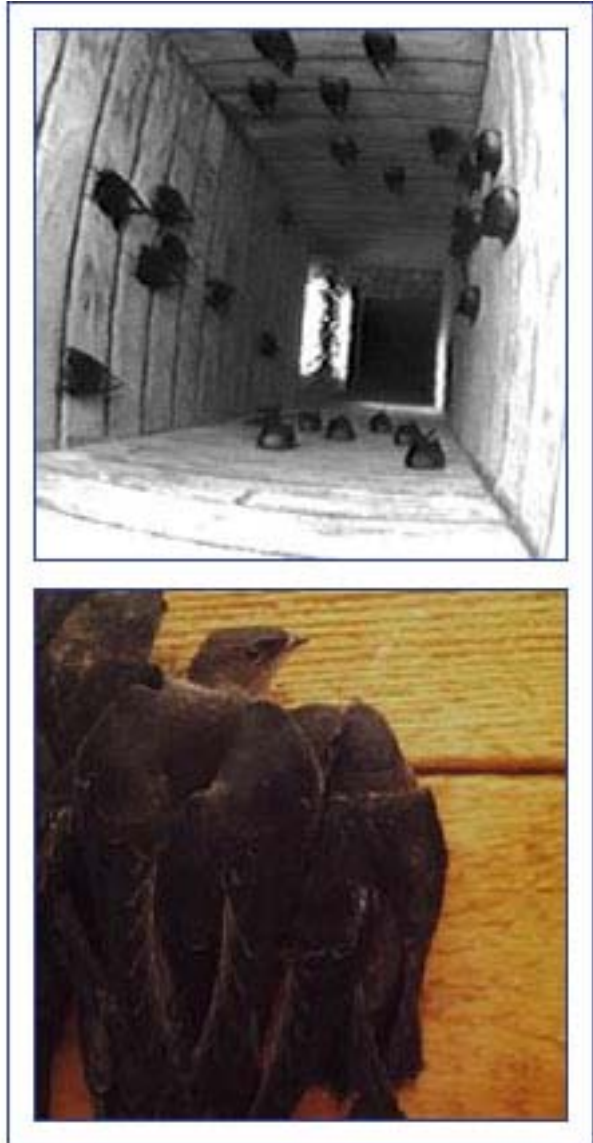
Chimney Swifts

As American pioneers moved westward across the continent, they cleared forests and removed Chimney Swifts' natural habitat. The adaptation by Swifts to make use of man-made structures is a result of this deforestation and the loss of the large hollow trees that were their natural roosting and nesting sites.

Unable to perch or stand upright as songbirds do, Chimney Swifts are uniquely equipped to roost clinging to vertical surfaces. Their small but strong feet are tipped with four sharp claws which act as grappling hooks to hold them firmly to their roost. Their tail feather shafts extend as stiff exposed spines to provide additional support for their vertical lifestyle. Though they will occasionally roost in the open, the insectivorous Swifts prefer the safety of an enclosed area such as a chimney, airshaft, or abandoned building.

Swifts spend all of their daylight hours on the wing and come to rest only at evening. They feed exclusively on flying insects. Some swifts gather in communal roosts in airshafts or large chimneys, often whirling in a huge circle as they funnel down for the night.

Chimney Swifts winter in the Amazon Basin of Peru and return to North America to breed around mid-march, just as wood fire season is ending. **Swifts are protected by federal law under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act: it is illegal to remove or disturb the birds, their nests, eggs, or young during the breeding season.** To learn more about the Chimney Swift conservation challenge, please see www.chimneyswifts.org.



© Paul and Georgan Kyle,
Driftwood Wildlife Association