



TRIANGLE WILDLIFE REHABILITATION CLINIC

JULY - FOCUS ON CHIMNEY SWIFTS

SWIFTS ARE A THREATENED SPECIES

- Chimney Swifts are declining in number due to loss of habitat, in both the US where they raise young and in South America where they winter, and humans capping or demolishing masonry chimneys
- Swifts are on the threatened species list
- Swifts are protected by the US federal government, as well as many state governments
- It is illegal to remove an active nest or the babies from your chimney or any other structure
- It is illegal to attempt to raise these birds, or any US migratory bird, without a state and federal permit



Benefits Of Swifts At Your Home:

Swifts eat more than 1000 mosquito-sized insects a day; these include termites, flies, flying ants, and mosquitoes.

Swifts are the green method of insect control ... eating one third (1/3) of their body weight in biting insects

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT CHIMNEY SWIFTS



- Eat and drink in flight
- Nest in large hollow trees (if available), open wells, silos, barns, smoke stacks, chimneys
- Both sexes identical in appearance
- Have strong slightly curved toenails used to cling to rough vertical surfaces and tail feathers with strong spiky-tipped feather shafts that help support vertical body weight
- Swifts are unable to perch or stand up right
- Have one to two broods a year
- Both parents share in the incubation of eggs and rearing of young
- Nests are attached to interior vertical chimney surface and made out of small twigs, snapped off branches during flight, and held together by the bird's saliva
- Only one nesting pair to a chimney
- Sometimes second year birds will help with feed
- At the end of breeding season, flocks of hundreds or thousands congregate at suitable roost sites in large structures like silos or industrial smoke stacks as they prepare to migrate south
- Chimney Swifts migrate from Peru to the US in spring and back to Peru in fall every year
- Swifts arrive in March and nesting usually begins in April
- By the first of November most of the swifts have left the US

How To Reduce Noise

Some people find the chatter of Chimney swift babies delightful, while others do not. When the babies are fed, they chatter. Do not let this deter you from having the birds in your chimney. There are things you can do to cut down on the noise.

- Shut the damper flue plate; this reduces noise.
- If you do not have a damper plate, cut a piece of cardboard or a piece of wall insulation slightly larger than the chimney opening above fire area and fit up into the chimney. You can use two small green saplings to wedge cardboard in place by making an X with the green sticks (from front corner on one side to back corner on the other side) under the cardboard, holding it in place. Stuff newspaper into any holes around edge of cardboard.



Noisy? Chimney Swifts

Make Your Chimney Safe For Nesting Swifts

Always close the damper or flue door before March to prevent birds from coming into fireplace

Even though most of the swifts are gone toward the end of October, to be safe do not use your fireplace until the first of November

During periods of heavy rain, swift nests can fall and babies can get trapped in the firebox. Adults coming down the chimney to feed the babies also may become trapped in the firebox if the damper is left open.



No Chimney, But You Want Swifts In Your Yard

You can build a chimney swift tower. **Please follow the directions carefully**; some people have improvised and inadvertently killed the birds. Never put ledges in your tower! The book *Chimney Swift Towers: New Habitat for America's Mysterious Birds*, [Paul D. Kyle](#) author, is available online and gives detailed instructions and a materials listing for constructing a swift nesting tower.

<http://www.amazon.com/Chimney-Swift-Towers-Mysterious-Environment/dp/1585443727>.



Half-saucer shaped nest

If You Do Not Want Swifts In Your Chimney

If you have an active nest in the chimney, it is illegal to remove the nest or the young and you have to wait until the first of November to make any changes.

Once the birds have left in late October or early November, you can have someone cap your chimney

Capping the chimney prevents the birds from being able to

Every effort should be made to reunite young that fall from the nest so parents can continue to care for them.

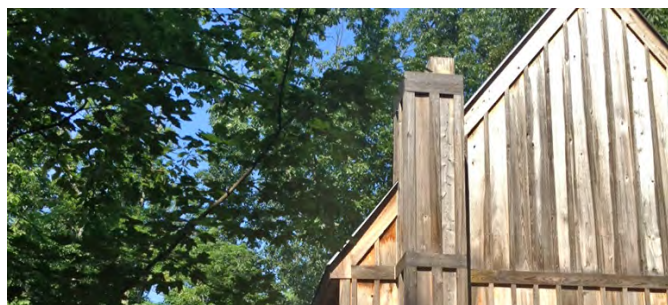
Chimney Swifts are very hard to raise. Even seasoned rehabilitators sometimes have difficulty raising the young until they can be released successfully.

Chimney swifts must to be hand fed every 30 minutes, 14 hours a day. They never eat food from a bowl and have to be hand fed until the moment of release.

The presence of a nest does NOT cause a fire hazard, NOR does it spread disease

A swift nest is a half-saucer shaped structure made from twigs attached with birds saliva to the inside vertical chimney wall.

Swifts must cling to vertical rough surfaces—they cannot perch and cannot take off and fly from a flat horizontal surface.



REPLACING CHIMNEY SWIFT YOUNG BACK IN THE CHIMNEY

Do not feed or give water to baby birds as this may be detrimental to their survival!

If babies are cold then put babies and nest in cardboard box and put box on a heating pad on the lowest possible setting. Replace babies in chimney as soon as they are warm. This step is not necessary if swifts have just fallen and have not gotten cold.

It is important to remember that when it comes to replacing swifts in the chimney every situation is unique. There are factors, such as chimney height and swift age, that must be considered before any attempts are made to replace fallen swifts. Below are some of the questions to consider prior to replacing baby birds.

1. Is the house one or more stories tall? Chimney height and swift age determines the procedure to replace them.
2. Does the fireplace have a damper (flue) plate just above where the fire is built? One has to bend down and look up to see this plate—it is not visible standing in front of the fireplace. This is the metal plate with a small adjustable door and opening (~5" x 8") to control amount of airflow during a fire. Many very old houses do NOT have a damper plate.
3. Do the babies have their eyes open? Do they look mostly feathered but have 'spikey' quills on the head? Where are the tips of the wing feathers compared to the tail?
 - a. When swift eyes open they are 2 weeks old and at first glance look feathered. The head does not have feathers at this age—only the spikey quills sticking up. Swifts hold their eyes closed when scared or suddenly exposed to bright light. If there are feathers on the head, the eyes have opened.
 - b. The tips of the wing feathers will only be about the length of the tail when the eyes open.

I. Procedure for one story house: This works regardless of how young the babies are.

1. If no damper plate in fireplace, go to procedure II, B below.
2. Open the damper door completely.
3. Find or purchase a small wicker basket, about 4 to 5" across, with low sides, 1-2 inches, and place through damper opening and on top of the damper plate to one side of the opening.
4. Gently place each baby into the basket through the damper opening.
5. When all young are in the basket, push the basket far to one side of the top of the metal plate so that it rests against the upright chimney wall and is wedged in a corner.
6. Parents will continue to feed and care for the young on the damper in a one-story house.
7. Close the damper door completely.
8. If noise is a problem, one can go to any construction site and pick up a piece of scrap insulation to wedge in the fireplace opening up under the damper plate. This can be held in place with two green twigs, slightly longer than the fireplace opening is wide from corner to corner, placed in an "X" shape under the insulation. The twigs are held in place by wedging with tension.

II . Procedure for two or more story house: Age of young is key in this.

A. If eyes are open:

1. Open damper door completely.
2. Gently pick up each baby and reach up and through the damper door to the upright side chimney wall (about 1 inches away). Lay bird's chin and upper breast against the upright wall and let it walk off hand and cling to the side—support bird until it has a good grip.
3. Young with their eyes open can climb back to the upper part of the chimney to be cared for by the adults.
4. If no damper in the fireplace, go to procedure B below.

B. If eyes are closed:

1. Close damper door to prevent the adults from coming into the fireplace looking for young.
2. Find or purchase a small wicker basket like that noted above that has a handle across the top. Find a length of rope that will extend down the chimney about 1/6th of the way from top, come up and over the chimney top, and extend to the roofline with at least a foot extra length. Have a brick or large rock available for tying rope to rock or brick at the roof.
3. From house rooftop, tie the rope to the basket handle securely; gently place each of the babies in the basket; carefully carry basket, rope, and brick or rock to chimney of house.
4. Lower the basket with babies in it down a corner of the chimney about 1/6th of the total chimney height.
5. Holding rope so that nest will not fall, let other end of rope drop to roofline, step on rope to hold stable, and tie end securely to the brick or rock.