

SPRING FLOCKING OF CHIMNEY SWIFTS *Chaetura pelagica*
(Linnaeus) AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY

By PAULINE JAMES

In Ithaca, New York, the first chimney swift of 1948 was reported on April 21. From that date they were observed regularly but did not appear in large flocks until May. On May 4 between 1000 and 1200 were seen entering the large chimney on Roberts Hall at 8:45 PM ESDT.¹ This chimney is six feet six inches by three feet six inches (inside dimensions), with walls about eighteen inches thick and more than sixty feet high. On May 6 about 1000 swifts circled the chimney for more than 20 minutes. Then about 8:30 P.M. the entire flock with the exception of about a dozen left that chimney and disappeared over the Veterinary College one block away. (It is possible that this was due to a bright light left shining on the roof by the night watchman.) On May 7 the weather was cold and rainy; the temperature was 52° Fahrenheit; a strong wind was blowing from the southwest; and the sky was completely overcast. The swifts were back at the Roberts Hall chimney circling actively at 5:00 P.M. They were again observed just before 7:00 P.M.; by 7:05 P.M. the entire flock had entered the chimney.

The swifts continued to use the Roberts Hall chimney and the flock had built up to about 3000 (estimated) by May 10 which seemed to be the peak. We had not been able to band any of them due to unavoidable circumstances, up to this date.

On May 11 we² were ready to band and that evening watched the birds circle the chimney for more than 30 minutes. About 8:40 P.M. for no apparent reason all except 50 to 60 suddenly disappeared toward the northwest. However, we covered the chimney with a large canvas held in place by a number of 2 x 4's. The next morning it was raining and so many birds were flying around overhead that we banded only 24 of the ones in the chimney before we uncovered it hoping to let the others in and trusting that they would all come back since this was the only chimney from which we could band.

On the evening of May 12 the entire flock went into the Roberts Hall chimney between 8:25 and 8:35 P.M.; so we again covered it. The morning of May 13 was cloudy with a little rain and owing to early classes we did not start banding operations until 10:00 A.M. It was 10:30 A.M. before the actual banding began and we estimated at least 1000 birds circling and flying around the building. The rain increased and intermittent hard showers lasted all day. We banded 1539 swifts and trapped five that had been previously banded, leaving about 200 in the chimney owing to a combination of darkness, rain, and our inability to get them out. We did not recapture any of the 24 swifts that we had banded the day before (May 12).

On May 17 a flock of more than 1000 swifts were reported entering the chimney at 8:20 P.M. May 18 was cold and rainy. Several

¹All times referred to above are Eastern Daylight Saving Time

²The writer would like to acknowledge the assistance of Robert W. Dickerman, Brina Kessel, Irwin Lane and other students without whose aid the project would have been impossible.

hundred were seen entering at noon. At 4:15 P.M. large flocks were circling and wheeling above the building but no swifts were in sight at 6:15 P.M. At 6:20 P.M. the chimney was checked from the opening in the sub-basement and the entire flock immediately flew out. It was still raining lightly and the main flock did not fly far from the building. By 7:15 P.M. the last swift had again entered the chimney and we covered it at 10:00 P.M.

May 19 was clear and sunny. In addition to banding 2516 swifts, we trapped 41 repeats—40 having been banded on May 13 and one on May 12 and 11 birds that had been previously banded elsewhere. Approximately 50 birds that would not come out were left in the chimney.

The swifts continued using Roberts Hall chimney but owing to final examinations banding operations had to be dropped for a few weeks.

On May 29 a flock of not more than 1200 went into the Veterinary College between 9:00 and 9:15 P.M.; and a somewhat smaller flock again entered the same chimney on May 30. On June 3 one small flock of swifts went into the Veterinary College chimney and another small flock into the west chimney of Bailey Hall one block north of the Veterinary College and about one half block north of Roberts Hall. On June 4 it rained shortly before dark and the swifts went in at very irregular intervals.

From this date (June 4) until June 15 every conceivable means, including 1000 watt flood-lights, were used to try to keep the swifts out of the Veterinary College chimney from where trapping is impossible. Finally on June 15, everything else having failed, workmen covered the chimney, which is used for ventilation, with hardware cloth. That night (June 15) the birds began circling the chimney soon after 8:30 P.M. (The flock had dwindled to about 300 birds by this date.) They circled and dived at the opening continually keeping up their chattering until 9:20 P.M. when they gradually became silent but continued trying to get into the chimney. Standing just across the street from the building, one could hear their wings strike the hardware cloth but apparently there were no casualties. They kept this up until 9:45 P.M. when the last ones finally disappeared. Although watching at close range with 7 x 50 binoculars, it was so dark that their flight could not be followed. The next hour and a half were spent in searching all likely chimneys on the Agricultural College campus with flashlights but no trace of the swifts could be found.

The next evening at 9:00 P.M. a small flock of about 20 birds was seen at the same chimney again trying to enter. The same thing was reported the next night. The writer left Ithaca on June 16 and thus was unable to follow their activities. However, no further swift flocks were reported on the campus. Particular effort had been made to band these small late season flocks of swifts to determine whether they were late migrants or whether they were from the flocks banded earlier in the season.

This spring the large flocks of swifts seemed to occur after cool rainy days; and although this may well be coincidence, it has been

observed here repeatedly in the past. It was also noticed that the early small flocks tend to roost in the Veterinary College small chimney while the later large flocks use the large chimney on Roberts Hall. Still later in the season as the size of the flocks decreases, the birds again roost in the smaller chimneys of the Veterinary College and of Bailey Hall.

SUMMARY

A total of 4079 chimney swifts were banded on the campus of Cornell University at Ithaca, New York, in the spring of 1948. Of this number 41 were retaken one week from the day of banding and five were reported captured and released in the Ithaca area within three weeks of their banding. Then on August 17, 1948, one was found dead on a Game Club Preserve seven miles from Deux Rivers, Quebec, Canada. Sixteen of the birds that were trapped had been banded elsewhere previously. The list below gives the localities and the dates of their original capture:

Memphis, Tennessee	(1)	October	1947	by Ben B. Coffey, Jr.
Nashville, Tennessee	(1)	September	1939	by Mrs. F. C. Laskey
Knoxville, Tennessee	(1)	September	1941	by Mrs. F. C. Laskey
"	(1)	September	1944	by Dr. Henry Meyer
Macon, Georgia	(1)	September	1941	by R. J. Fleetwood
"	(4)	September	1946	by R. J. Fleetwood
Kingston, Ontario	(1)	May	1945	by R. J. Bowman
"	(6)	May	1947	by R. J. Bowman

Of these 16 swifts, all of the ones originally banded in the South were captured there in the fall of the year while all of the birds banded in Canada were taken originally in the spring.

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RETURNS FROM BANDED BIRDS

BY MAY THACHER COOKE

In checking over returns before filing, many interesting recovery records have been brought to light, in fact they have grown to be so bewilderingly abundant that it becomes necessary to be more and more critical in selecting those that seem worthy of publication.

As in previous lists, an asterisk preceding the band number indicates that the bird was known to be a bird-of-the-year when banded.

BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS (*Diomedea nigripes*)

*38-724831, banded at Midway Island, Pacific Ocean, June 25, 1944, by R. C. Harlow, was caught and released on Cortez Bank near San Pedro, California, on July 5, 1945.

LAYSAN ALBATROSS (*Diomedea immutabilis*)

36-814971, banded at Midway Island, Pacific Ocean, July 1937, by Fred C. Hadden, was reported at the same place December 1944 as mated, egg laid but egg was spoiled, January 30, 1945; bird not seen after March.

LEACH'S PETREL (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*)

34-144001, banded at Greater Duck Island, Maine, July 24, 1934, by H. P. Baily, was caught in nest burrow and released August 6, 1942, by Joseph M. Cadbury.