

BIRD BANDING NEWS

Conducted by Wm. I. Lyon

THE FUN OF BANDING CHIMNEY SWIFTS

BY CONSTANCE AND E. A. EVERETT

The Rector of the Episcopal Church, otherwise known as "Parson" Brandon, reported having discovered a flight of Chimney Swifts entering the church chimney; we proceeded to go after them.

A trap was built like that described in Bird Banding Circular Number 19, excepting that the birds were discharged through one opening only, and the carpenters having forgotten to line it, afterward used the dark building paper as an outside cover instead. However, we found no birds injured by the wire mesh. A scaffold was built around the chimney to the top, about sixty feet above the ground, then the trap was hoisted up and fastened to this scaffold for the night.

A few minutes before daylight, on the morning of September 8, 1926, Ralph and Rolland Lorenz, Eagle Scouts, climbing the scaffold, quietly placed the trap "on location" on the chimney top and attached the gunny sack in position to receive the birds. Nearing the top, the scouts could hear the muffled beating of wings, and twitterings of the moving birds within the chimney. This ceased as the trap closed over the chimney top, and all was quiet for a few moments; then, the sounds beginning again, there was a sudden rush of birds through the trap into the receiving bag.

When this bag was filled, one scout slipped his hand through its entrance and covered the bottom of the discharge pipe to stop the flow of birds. (There should be a valve at this point to be operated from the outside.) The bag, with its quota of birds, was removed by a second scout while another was placed in position by a third scout. As the sack of birds was lowered to the ground by the first scout, the other end of the rope was bringing up empties to the top.

At the foot of the scaffold, the birds were received by the Parson and a fourth scout, passed to another scout inside a six-foot house trap, which was used as a receiving cage, and the whole covered with a large tarpaulin which darkened the cage and kept the birds quiet.

In less than five minutes, with but one casualty, one hundred sixty-four Chimney Swifts were inside of that cage, clinging to its walls of wire mesh like a swarm of bees, except that though densely massed, they were clinging to the wire and not to each other. A few were at all times on the wing, as they changed from one group to another, bewildered, perhaps, but not in the least frightened. Most of them, however, promptly alighted and tucked their heads under the wings and tails of those birds above them, until the inner walls of the cage took on the appearance of being shingled with birds.

The scout within the house trap began gently to separate individual birds from the mass, placing a few at a time in an ordinary receiving cage, and in an

old minnow bucket in lieu of another, passing them to the banders outside. One scout handled the receiving traps from the house trap to the banders, another opened the bands, and still another made the records. Miss Constance and the Parson, a fourth scout and E. A., in pairs, did the banding; one of us holding the bird and stretching out the short fat leg, while the other partner fastened the band in place. The stubby, grublike legs made banding very difficult, yet, in less than an hour, all the birds were again at liberty.

These swifts were very quiet, and apparently comfortable at all stages of the game. When held in the hands they would snuggle between the fingers confidently; and when held against the clothes they would wriggle under the folds of the garments and contentedly go to sleep. We laid some of them on the steps, after banding them, and they remained as placed, except that occasionally one would sleepily open an eye as though inquiring what all the fuss was about. At one time we had a row across the steps, formed by placing the first bird then pushing him forward with the second when it was laid down and so on with the third and others, as a child pushes a string or train of dominoes. When finally the first bird was pushed over the end, it dropped nearly to the ground before catching itself to fly away. When we tossed the banded birds in the air, they generally fell some several feet before opening their wings to zoom into the upper air.

We were so interested and excited over handling so many and to us, new, birds in so short a time, that we completely overlooked our cameras, and therefore planned our picture taking for the next day.

On the following morning, everyone was there, bright and early, but after a long wait, with no birds forthcoming, we began to wonder, feeling certain that the birds were there, for at least fifty had left the chimney the morning before, after we had removed the trap thinking all were gone. Also, the Parson had seen a great many return to the chimney the night before.

Using a reflector for lighting, we could see that there were some birds in the chimney, so we built a light fire at the base—no birds. We then weighted a cord and let it down the flue, tied a crumpled newspaper to it and dragged it up to the top—still no birds. Nothing we could think of would start them and there was nothing to do but wait. As the outer air warmed up under the rising sun, suddenly the birds started. However, there were but a few, and only one wore yesterday's band, for alas, we had come in the eleventh hour of the last day of migration; no other swifts having been seen there or elsewhere about, since. We wondered, too, if swifts migrate at night, as we believe that many more entered the chimney the night before than came out in the morning.

Since there were so few birds, we took the time to enjoy playing with them. Miss Constance and the boys tried wearing them either singly as a brooch, or collectively as a breast plate; and always the birds snuggled down as though perfectly willing to join the game, provided their naps were not interfered with. Finally some passing school girls were adorned with live breast pins to take home for show, while several birds, clinging to Constance's coat rode many blocks in the car, and, scolding, had to be dragged off to their liberty.

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