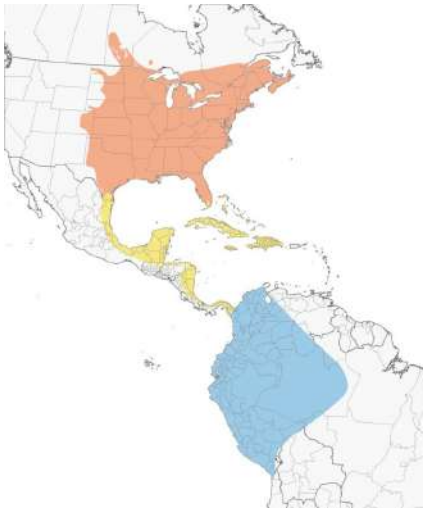
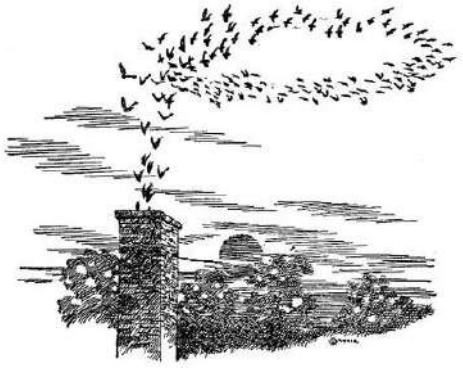
# Chimney Swifts: The Flying Cigar

Chimney swifts are small, darkly-colored birds that spend most of their lives in the air. These birds can be recognized by their cigar-shaped body, curved wings, distinctive chittering call, and bat-like rocking wingbeats. Their long claws are designed for clinging to vertical surfaces, which makes the chimney swift virtually unable to perch. The chimney swift uses glue-like saliva to cement its nest to vertical surfaces. The young can out-grow the nest after only two weeks and sometimes have to cling to the wall even before their eyes are open. They feed primarily on flying insects, preferring to catch their prey while gliding over lakes and rivers. Some individuals from the colony near Decorah may travel as far away as the Mississippi river to get their fill of insects each day.



Chimney swifts have been found to nest in hollow trees, caves, barns, but especially favor disused chimneys. Due to the loss of old chimneys and smokestacks, the once vast groups of chimney swifts have diminished, and now these birds are usually sighted in small groups of up to 40. Considered a long-distance migrant, these swifts arrive in our area sometime around May and generally migrate south in late September, with some individuals staying into October. At some times of the year, thousands of swifts will roost together in larger chimneys, and can be seen diving into them at dusk in spectacular tornado-like flocks.

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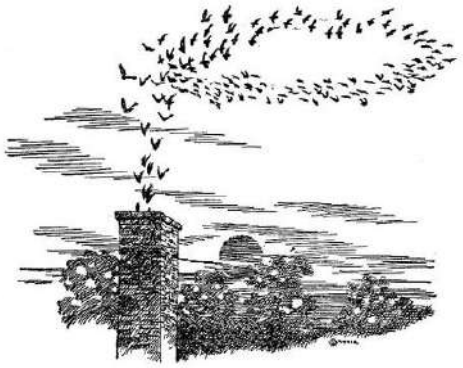
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