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(CHIMNEY SWIFT CON'T FROM PAGE 1)

almost uselessness of the tail in flight. But it is evident of some use, for when the bird turns or banks, it is spread out like a tiny fan.

Probably the more important use of the tail is to act as a prop when the bird is clinging to the wall of a chimney or the rocks in a cave. The tail feathers are stiff and spine-like, and give the bird necessary support. This feature, the spine-like tail feathers, Swifts share with Woodpeckers which must have props to help them cling to the trunks of trees.

The feet of Swifts are small and weak placing them with Hummingbirds in the order Apodiformes, or footless birds. That was the folklore of ancient times, and we can almost understand the reason for the belief when we see the Swifts flying above us. Walking, of course, is difficult or impossible, but the birds can push themselves across a level surface. Probably the feet are of some help in clinging to upright walls where the Swifts normally come to rest.

Swifts have small bills but large mouths which open like a cavern way back under the eyes. When the bird flies, the mouth is open wide to gather moths and insects from the air. Even after dark, Swifts can often be seen catching moths fluttering around brigth lights in cities and towns.

The weak little bill is used to gather the twigs for the nest. The Swift will fly to a branch of a tall tree and will test one twig after another till one is found which will break off and which is considered suitable for nesting material. With this, the bird will fly to the chosen nesting place, usually in a chimney or the inside wall of some building. (With the coming of civilization, Swifts have almost abandoned the use of hollow trees and natural caves as nesting sites.) There the twig is fastened to the wall with a sticky saliva which the birds are able to secrete at nesting time. Twig after twig is added till there is a little platform on which the four to six pure white eggs are laid. For nineteen days, both parents incubate the eggs, changing places every

twenty minutes or half hour, day or night. Then the young are in the nest from three to four weeks with both parents sharing the responsibility of feeding them. Baby Swifts are fed much less frequently than many baby birds, the parents making only one fæeding trip in an hour. However, when they go to the nest, they take some 150 to 700 insects for a single feeding. How little we realize the countless numbers of insects which birds take every day!

There is more of interest about the sticky saliva which Swifts secrete. Some Asiatic Swifts develop very large salivary glands at nesting time, and build their nests of little but hardened saliva. Even with the enlarged glands, it takes these Swifts from 33 to 41 days to build each nest. These are the nests which are gathered for the famous bird's nest soup of the Orient.

Chimney Swifts are widely distributed over eastern United States, nesting all the way from (CON'T TO PAGE 16)

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