

Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*)

Physical Traits

- Swifts are small: The average adult is 4.75" long with a 12" wingspan.
- Each adult weighs around 6oz. - about the same as two quarters.
- Swifts have wide mouths for catching insects while on the wing and short legs with small claws adapted for clinging to vertical surfaces.
- Swifts vocalize with a high-pitched twittering that becomes more pronounced when the birds gather in large flocks.



Behavior

- Swifts fly quickly and erratically with rapid wing beats.
- Swifts forage for insects by flying at both high altitudes and low over bodies of water.
- Due to their leg structure, Vaux's Swift never perch and only cling to vertical surfaces.
- Swifts primarily roost in hollow trees, snags, or chimneys.
- At evening Swifts gather into large flocks ranging in size from a few hundred to many thousands of birds. They will circle above the roost site until the temperature drops or the sun begins to set, at which point they spiral downward into the roost site together.
- During courtship swifts glide with wings in a V shape.
- They migrate in spring and fall, from Mexico to Canada and back.

Nesting Habits

- Swifts are usually monogamous with a pair of swifts occupying one nest. Some cooperative breeding (3 swifts care for young) has been observed in the Vaux's Swift.
- Swifts construct shallow, cup-shaped nests on the inside walls of trees (dead or alive) using twigs and sticky saliva.
- Each female lays 3-6 white eggs that are around 12x18mm in size.

Ecological Role

- An individual Swift can consume up to 20,000 insects a day.
- They are important indicator species for the health of PNW ecosystems.

Keys to Identifying a Vaux's Swift

- Swifts flap their wings from the wrist, unlike many other birds such as swallows, which flap from the elbow joint. As a result, Swifts never fly with their wings held close to the body.
- Vaux's Swift is the smallest of the Swifts. Its closest relatives, the Chimney, White-throated, and Black Swift, are all at least 1-2 inches larger in body size.

Sources

- www.Audubon.org: Online Field Guide to the Birds of North America
- *The Birds of North America* by Evelyn L. Bull and Charles T. Collins
- www.VauxHappening.org