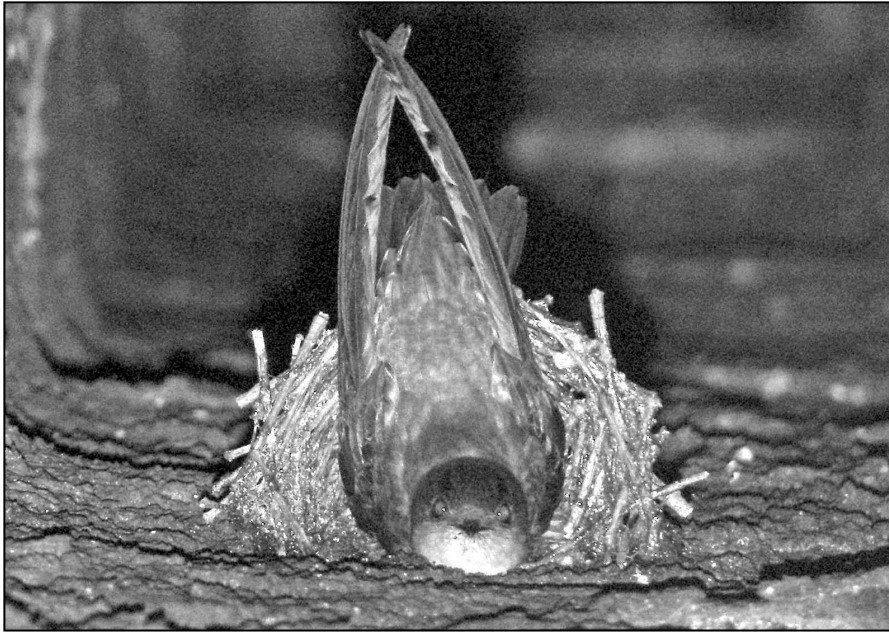


What's Up? *text and photo by Bruce Di Labio*



One of the most exciting things about birding is that there is always something new to learn. After almost 40 years of birding, this summer I had a 'lifer nest' and I didn't have to go too far to find it.

Since moving to our heritage home in 1999, every summer I noticed Chimney Swifts flying over our property during the day. Easily recognized by its characteristic "cigar with wings" profile, the swift is a small, agile and fast flying bird.

This year, during renovations on our 136 year-old home, I had an opportunity to look down our old chimney and to my surprise found a Chimney Swift nest with five white eggs. Over the course of the past few weeks, I have been taking photos of the nest, eggs, young and adult.

The Chimney Swift is a remarkable, clever and industrious bird. Both parents independently build the nest. They break off small twigs in flight while careening through tree

areas and return to the nest with twigs in their bills. The parents then position their twigs and glue them in place with their sticky saliva.

Nests have a distinct half saucer shape. On average, it takes this species 18 days to complete the nest but some can take as long as 30 days.

Swifts are social birds and are typically communal during migration. During late summer, large flocks in the hundreds or even thousands may roost in a single chimney. Back in the early 70s I observed about 300 swifts converge at dusk in a large chimney along Carling Ave. at Holland in Ottawa. This was a regular spectacle during late summer for many years. Check your area for old chimneys or factory chimney stacks. These are prime roosting locations.

The Chimney Swift spends most of its life flying. It eats, drinks and gathers nesting material while in flight. Some even speculate that the Chimney Swift sleeps on the wing!

The swift population increased dramatically with the arrival of European settlers and the proliferation of nesting cavities provided by chimneys. Over the past 20 years however, swift populations have decreased because new chimneys are not suitable nesting sites.

"Yes Virginia, this is a rail"

text and photo by Bruce Di Labio

Seldom seen, but often heard, the Virginia Rail occurs throughout much of the southern part of the province. It occupies wetland areas, particularly cattail marshes.

The expression, 'thin as a rail' is well deserved; their compressed body makes them very agile and quick to manoeuvre through thick vegetation. As a result, these birds are often difficult to see.

To my surprise, this summer my

son Ben and I observed or heard more than 30 Virginia Rails over a two-day period along the Carp River and Constance Creek west of Ottawa.

If you are birding near wetland areas, listen for its distinct gik-gik-gik-gidik-gidik-gidik call. By imitating this call repeatedly, the rail may respond vocally or slowly and quietly work its way up through the vegetation and surprise you by calling at your feet! Be patient!

