



USING A MIRROR Dr. Dexter reflects light into a Kent Hall air shaft where . . .

Dr. Dexter Compiles Data on Birds' Background, Behavior

Chaetura pelagica is the lengthy, Latin and scientific name of a sooty-grey, five-inch bird usually known as the chimney swift. Its common name is derived from the bird's habit of nesting in chimneys and air shafts.

Since 1944 Dr. Ralph Dexter of the University's biology faculty has been studying the habits of the chimney swift. He has authored seven articles and a half dozen items on these birds for scientific journals.

In June of this year Dr. Dexter, a nationally known authority on the chimney swift, was a featured speaker at a meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society near Huntsville, Ontario. He spoke on a chimney swift that lived three times the normal life span of these birds.

Dr. Dexter banded this bird when it was a nestling and recorded its history for 13 years.

Unlike some people who keep track of the coming and going of

animals, birds, insects, etc., Dr. Dexter never named any of his birds. He commented, "There were far too many to name. I just numbered them with bands. In the 18 years that I've watched the chimney swift migrate to Kent, I've numbered over 1,000 of 'em."

Dr. Dexter keeps data on the birds in a big file drawer which includes such information as the chimney swift's laying of eggs, hatching, migration and yearly trips.

He reports that this year there are 17 pairs of chimney swifts nesting in the air shafts of Kent, Merrill, and Franklin Halls, and the Administration Building.

He commented, "Most of the chimney swifts mate year after year with the same bird, and occupy the same air shaft."

However, the chimney swift that he observed for 13 years had five different mates. He changed mates when his previous mate failed to return the following

year. During the 13 years this bird resided in Kent it nested in three air shafts of the Administration Building.

The chimney swifts nest from Eastern United States to the Rocky Mountains, north to Ontario and south to Florida. They reach Kent during the third week of April and remain until fall when they migrate back to South America's upper Amazon Valley.

The birds are nesting now. The first egg was laid on May 29, according to Dr. Dexter. Nestlings are already in some nests, the first one having appeared on June 24.

Generally, four eggs are laid each spring by the female bird. Egg laying continues for approximately a week, one egg being laid each day or so. The eggs hatch by early summer and by fall juvenile birds are ready for the trip to South America with their parents.

—Mary Ann Rovtar



A CHIMNEY SWIFT can be seen eight-feet down the shaft sitting on a nest...



Of FOUR EGGS. The birds fasten their nests to sides of shafts with saliva.



BIRDS ARE TRAPPED by Dr. Dexter so that he can mark them for easy identification.



NUMBERED IDENTIFICATION BANDS are placed on a leg of each chimney swift. Dr. Dexter also uses white paint to mark each bird distinctively so that it can be easily recognized.