

What's a Vaux's? Named after Sir William Vaux, this bird is the smallest and most numerous of the swift species in Washington State. Billy Vaux was English, so it's pronounced VAWKiz.

What's a swift? A family of birds that spend most of their time in the air catching bugs. They look and act much like swallows but are more closely related to Hummingbirds. Their foot structure is such that they can cling, but not perch.

How can I tell a swift from a swallow? Swift wings have evolved differently from most other birds, and when flying they're never folded back towards the body. Swallows can't seem to stop themselves from doing that.

Are swifts swift? Indeed they are, among the fastest of all birds.

Is a Vaux's Swift the same as a Chimney Swift? For now they're considered to be very similar but different species. The Vaux's is found west of the Rockies and the Chimney Swift is east. The Chimney Swifts have really taken to man made chimneys. The Vaux's are slowly being forced to do the same.

Anything special about Vaux's Swifts? How about each one consuming up to 20,000 insects a day? They are an indicator species of the well being of the PNW forest, something like tiny migrating Spotted Owls.

Are they endangered? They most likely are. But as these birds are poorly understood and under studied there are few numbers to draw conclusions from. They prefer to nest in hollow, often broken off trees, which need to be large enough for them to fly inside of. Big old dead or dying trees like this are becoming more and more difficult to find. The birds have recently substituted chimneys for nesting. But good old-fashioned brick chimneys are no longer used in new construction and the existing ones are being torn down or sealed. This is producing a serious nest site shortage.

What's a HAPPENING? The Vaux's Happening is an Audubon and community citizen science project attempting to locate the chimneys in Washington State that are used as group "communal" roosts, during migration. We also want to count how many birds are using which chimneys when.

How many chimneys in the state are known to be swift migration roosts? Audubon has a list of 29 sites known to have been used in the past, but any large, open brick chimney is a suspect.

How many birds will spend the night in one chimney? The Wagner Elementary School chimney in Monroe currently holds the state record of a few thousand. There is a huge chimney at the Chapman School in Portland that has had 40,000. When they all try to stuff themselves in at the same time, it becomes one of nature's most spectacular

events.

Is there a reason for them sleeping in a large group? There is probably a survival benefit to this. They huddle together to conserve body heat so they can slow down their metabolism, maybe enough to hibernate for the night.

Do the swifts spend the night in chimneys in both the spring and fall? Yes, but there should be a lot more seen when they migrate south in the fall.

Why are there more swifts in the fall? A pair of Vaux's Swifts will spend most of the summer raising three to seven young. If they all survive, two could become nine making the return migration in August. There may also be other factors involved.

When are the swifts expected to show up? Going north, the last week of April, and going south the middle to end of August. Vaux's Happening has observers posted in central Oregon and on the north shore of the Columbia River to sound the alarm.

How many people will be involved in the springs Vaux's Happening? The more the better.

What is expected of a citizen volunteer observer? Look for Vaux's Swifts gathering around and then entering a brick chimney in Washington State. There are report forms at www.pilchuck.audubon.org or send a description of your adventure to Larry at lpatters@ix.netcom.com

What chimneys will have swifts? Well that is what we are trying to find out. We hope to have a list of the sites that have had birds in the past, and a short list of some very large structures to be checked at www.pilchuckaudubon.org If nothing else, locate the largest open brick chimney in you neighborhood and go look for the birds.

What time do the swifts come to roost? They should go into the chimneys just after sunset. If you are at your location at least 15 minutes before sunset you are probably ok.

How will we know what time sunset is? Use this website.

<http://www.sunrisesunset.com/usa/Washington.asp>

What are the chances I will actually find Swifts this spring? Pretty good if you are looking in Monroe. If you find them elsewhere it will be a big deal, put a smile on your face, and make you want to brag about it.

What will happen to our reports? The data will go into the Washington State Dept. of Fish and Wildlife database, down to world swift expert Dr Charles Collins at Long Beach State, and into Audubon's records. There are plans for a paper to be written and published on the project.

Will Vaux's Happening continue in the fall and beyond? That's the plan, and that's

what it's going to take to document how much trouble these wonderful little birds are in.

How does one sign up? Send Larry an email. lpatters@ix.netcom.com