



howard county  
**BIRD CLUB**  
50th ANNIVERSARY • 1972 – 2022

# MEMBERS' MEMORIES

## Joanne Solem

### Chimney Swifts Nesting at Centennial Park

On the cloudy, drizzly morning of July 14, 1990, Jane (Farrell) Coskren and I were birding Centennial Park. When we reached the concession building near the south entrance, I stopped to check the Howard County Bird Club's information board attached to the building. As I stood there, I became aware that a bird had flown over my head into the large, open area beneath the roof. From the noise that ensued, it was apparent that young birds had just been fed. Looking into the dark space, I could see a nest attached to the wall, but with the low light level it wasn't possible to tell whether there were any nestlings present in what was likely a swift's nest. We backed off and waited for another feeding trip. After about five minutes, a Chimney Swift hurtled into the space, stayed 20 – 30 seconds amid much twittering, and flew out. We stayed long enough to watch the adults make several additional feeding trips.

Later that same morning we mentioned the swifts' nest to Nancy Magnusson who checked the location about 1:30 p.m. At that time, she could see there were five birds clinging to the wall.

The following day, July 15, at 11:00 a.m., my husband, Bob, and I stopped for another look. At this time, the light was much better. We could see the five swifts clinging to the wall (one was stretching its wings and moving around within a small area.) The nearby nest was attached to the wall about a foot below the roof rafters near a pipe. Adults continued to make feeding trips.

Swifts had used that same location for nesting during the summer of 1987. That year, on July 5, Bill Eckert and I co-led a walk at the park to observe the county bird—the American Goldfinch. The group stopped briefly at the concession building during which time Mildred Fitez drew my attention to birds flying in and out of the roofed area, perhaps feeding young. The design of the building provided a large open area beneath the roof accessible from two sides. Without artificial light, it was not possible to tell what was in the space. The following evening, July 6, Jane Coskren and I went to the park equipped with a lantern. By chance, John and Eileen Clegg were in the parking lot so they joined us. We saw two adult Chimney Swifts clinging to a wall near a nest that contained at least one young bird. When we threw a beam of light on them, one or more of the birds emitted a high-pitched continuous sound like a scream, unlike their usual chittering. Eventually, the two adults flew out making the more usual vocalizations. The nest was near a corner several feet below the point at which the roof intersected the wall.

It is quite possible that swifts may have used the same location for nesting continuously since 1987, but I made no observations during the 1987 and 1988 seasons. Maintenance crews must have discovered the birds' use of the space, though I don't know the year. It was obvious the swifts' continued nesting was doomed when the building was altered to enclose the space.

This is the only county nest of a Chimney Swift I have observed that was not in a chimney.