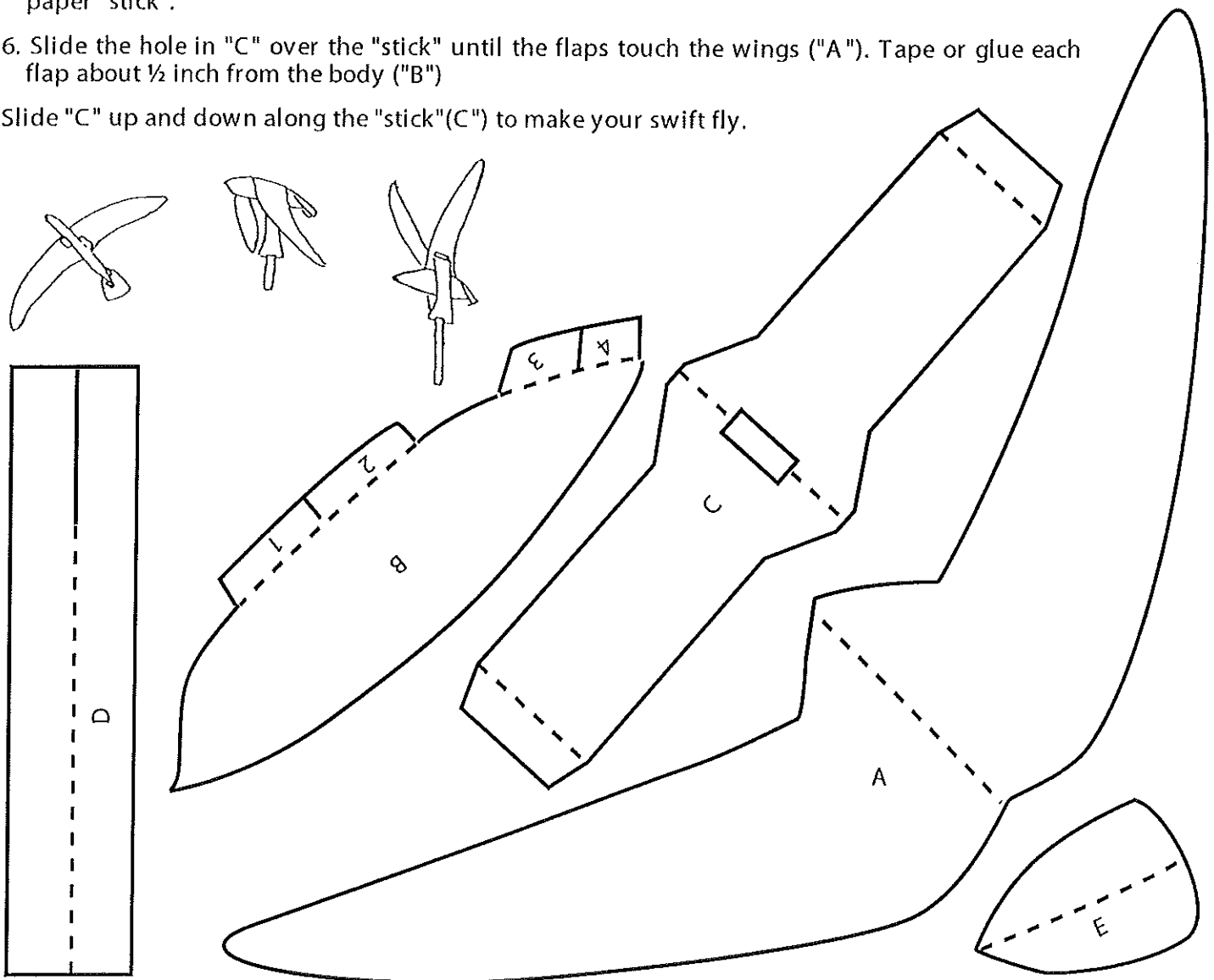
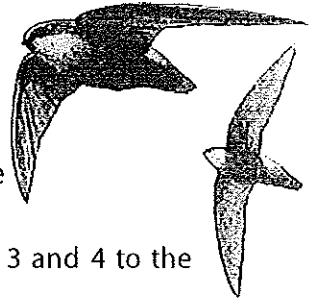


Nature Kids: Make a Flying Chimney Swift!

Chimney Swifts fly all day long, catching insects as they go. At night they like to roost inside old hollow trees or inside (you guessed it!) chimneys. Use this pattern to make your own flying Chimney Swift.

1. Copy the pattern onto card stock or other heavy weight paper.
 2. Cut out each piece carefully along the solid lines. Fold along the dotted lines. Fold flaps 1 & 2 in opposite directions. Fold flaps 3 & 4 in opposite directions.
 3. Line up the dotted line on "A" with the edge of B and tape flaps 1 and 2 to the underside.
 4. Line up the dotted line on "E" with the dotted line on "B" and tape or glue flaps 3 and 4 to the underside of "E".
 5. Slide the slit in "D" over the body "B" and glue in place. Glue the rest of "D" together to make a paper "stick".
 6. Slide the hole in "C" over the "stick" until the flaps touch the wings ("A"). Tape or glue each flap about ½ inch from the body ("B").
- Slide "C" up and down along the "stick"(C") to make your swift fly.

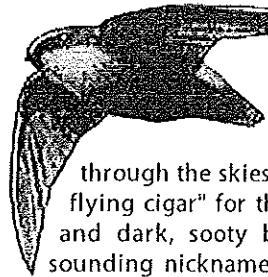


See the **Teacher's Corner** for more information
about these aerial acrobats.

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Teacher's Corner: The Swifts of Summer

Spring Into Summer with Swifts



Start looking to the skies, it is chimney swift season again in Houston! Birders and non-birders alike can easily recognize these amazing aerialists as they fly through the skies. Chimney swifts are nicknamed "the flying cigar" for their 5 1/2 inch long cigar shaped body and dark, sooty brown color. Despite their clumsy sounding nickname, chimney swifts have curved wings that form a boomerang shape, giving these birds an elegance and agility in flight. Chimney Swifts flight is characterized by quick wing flicks and long, graceful sweeping motions over the trees.

Swifts fly all day long! They cannot perch like other birds and only come to rest at night. Chimney Swifts, and their relatives the hummingbirds, belong to the order Apodiformes, from the Greek "apodos" meaning "without feet". Though they really do have feet, their feet are weak and inconspicuous. These birds are specialized to spend their time in flight. A chimney swift may fly as many as 1,000 miles in just one day, and over its lifetime it may fly well over one million miles! As you might guess from the distance they can cover, these birds are migratory.



Chimney Swift
Spring-Summer Range

are here, they feed and make nests, and they reproduce at least once between May and July.

Chimney Swifts feed on flying insects that they catch in mid air. They play an important role in controlling insect populations, including the populations of pest species such as mosquitoes, biting flies, wasps, flying ants, and termites. Each Chimney Swift can eat as much as 1/3 of it's body weight, which is approximately 0.7 oz. (21 g), in insects every day. A single swift can eat 17,500 mosquitoes or 280 termites a day!

Chimney Swifts spend their springs and summers in the United States from Texas to Florida and up into Canada. But they spend their winters in the Amazon in Peru and Brazil. Migrating Chimney Swifts arrive in Houston in March and head south for the winter from late September to early October. While they

When they are not breeding Chimney Swifts may gather in large flocks and roost together in the same place. Migrating Chimney Swifts travel in groups of several hundred individuals! However, when they are ready to breed, each pair of breeding Chimney Swifts needs its own nest site.

Historically Chimney Swifts built their nests in hollow, old-growth trees. As humans moved into their habitats and removed these trees, Chimney Swifts adapted to using man made structures like chimneys for homes. However, with the loss of their favored breeding sites, Chimney Swift populations have declined. Chimney Swifts are now protected by the U.S. Migratory Bird Act, and special towers are being built to provide nest sites in hopes of boosting Chimney Swift population sizes.

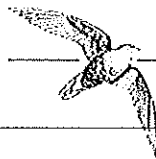
When breeding pairs do find a nest site in a hollow tree, chimney or tower, they build a saucer shaped nest on a vertical surface usually deep down within the hollow shaft. Nesting Chimney Swifts collect dead twigs from trees with their beaks and claws while flying and then cement the twigs together and to the wall of their roost site with their sticky, glue-like saliva!

Chimney Swifts lay 3-7 eggs that must be incubated for 21 days before hatching. The young hatch at very small sizes (some as little as an adult human thumbnail!) and are blind for their first two weeks. Nestlings are completely dependent upon their parents for food for about 30 days, and both parents share the responsibility of feeding the young. Young Chimney Swifts are adventuresome and will climb on and around (and even under) their nests using their claws and their bristly tails to cling to the nest as they move. When they are ready to fly away, they must "walk" all the way up to the top of the chimney or tower!

Spying on Chimney Swifts in Houston

From March through October, keep an eye out for swifts coming and going from their roosts at dusk and dawn. The Whole Foods parking lot in Bellaire is a great place to view large flocks. Also listen for adults chattering back and forth as they fly using rapid and repeated "chip" calls. If you listen carefully at a chimney swift roost, like the Nature Discovery Center's Chimney Swift tower, you might hear chimney swift wings fluttering in the early morning and late evening.

See the "Nature Kids" page for instructions to make your own flying chimney swift!



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For more information about Chimney Swifts and their conservation, contact Paul and Georgan Kyle with Driftwood Wildlife Association, 1206 W 38th, Ste. 1105, Austin, TX 78705, dwa@concentric.net
See also: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/nature/birding/chimneyswift/chimneyswift-index.htm>.