



With sticks and saliva, resourceful chimney swifts build homes for their broods.

Home Above the Hearth

An open chimney can provide valuable habitat for a family of swifts

by ARNA COHEN

Anticipating the arrival of houseguests this past spring, Robin and Robert Horne had their chimney cleaned. It's not something one would ordinarily do for company, but after all, these visitors would be sleeping in the flue.

For the past 10 years, chimney swifts have been making an annual appearance at the couple's Fort Walton Beach, Fla., home. A flock arrives from South America on April 1, give or take a day or two, and a pair immediately sets up housekeeping, using twigs to build a saucer-shaped nest that they glue to the chimney wall with their saliva.

Once the three to five nestlings hatch, their demands for food can get loud, but only for a few weeks until they fledge, says Robin, who describes the cacophony as "music to

our ears." The youngsters then join their parents in sustained flight, swooping and diving in search of mosquitoes, gnats, termites, biting flies, and other insects; the family consumes thousands a day before they return at dusk to roost.

With a breeding range that includes U.S. states east of the Rockies and parts of southern Canada, swifts have been using chimneys since colonial times, when old growth forests—the site of their preferred nesting spots inside hollow trees—were first cleared for farmland and housing. Small, strong feet enable them to cling effortlessly to the masonry, and bare spines on the tips of their short tail feathers help the birds brace themselves on the vertical surface.

Populations have decreased by more

than half over the last four decades, from nearly 7.9 million in 1966 to 3.49 million in 2006, and some experts blame the loss of these manmade habitats as one factor in the decline. Metal liners used in modern flues deprive the birds of a rough surface to cling to, and chimney caps that keep out raccoons and rain deny access to swifts.

SHELTERING SWIFTS

When homeowners aren't willing to share their chimneys with wildlife such as raccoons, they often have caps installed as an alternative to removing or killing the animals, says The HSUS's John Griffin. As director of Humane Wildlife Services, a program that implements humane resolutions to wildlife conflicts, Griffin supports chimney caps as a nonlethal way to prevent problems. But for chimney swifts' sake, he wishes he didn't have to. "If you can tolerate a raccoon in there, fantastic," he says, noting that the temporary squatters don't cause any damage to the structure.

In lieu of a cap, you can guard against water damage to your chimney by installing a cover with open sides that measure at least 12 inches. Metal-lined chimneys, however, should always be capped, as birds and animals can fall to the bottom, unable to climb out.

If your insurance company requires a chimney cap to prevent sparks from setting fire to the roof, check for permission to remove the cap in the spring before the swifts' breeding season and replace it in the fall after they've flown south.

For other considerations when turning the space above your hearth into a chimney swift home, the Driftwood Wildlife Association offers these tips.

- ▶ Have the chimney professionally cleaned every spring before the birds arrive to remove creosote residue, which can present a fire hazard as well as prevent the nest from adhering to the chimney wall.
- ▶ Have old nests removed during annual cleaning. On the rare occasions when swifts reuse previous years' nests, the structures can collapse under the weight of a new brood.

Winter of Content

Not every wild animal skips town or goes underground when the big chill sets in. Many remain active even as natural food sources dwindle, water freezes, and refuge becomes scarce.

For creatures in densely populated areas, coiffed yards and a scarcity of native plants can add to winter woes. "Habitat fragmentation is getting worse and worse, and there aren't enough places for animals to find food and shelter except if you're in a wildlife corridor, like where there is a park," says Walkersville, Md., master gardener and wildlife-friendly landscaper Jim Gallion.

Help sew that habitat back together by following these tips for going a little wild close to home.

► **PLANT A TASTY SHELTER** Native plants that seed in the fall or produce winter berries offer a diversity of food, while evergreens create safe harbor. Native grasses, sedges, and legumes supply important cover and foraging material.

► **SIPS AND DIPS** Supplemental feeding stations and heated water features can benefit animals during deep freezes or snowstorms. Dog dishes with heating elements are cheap, easy to maintain, and popular with the winged set, says Gallion: "You fill it about [halfway] with water, and the birds come. They think it's like a little sauna. They all crowd around jumping in, drinking, and taking turns."

► **DISORDERLY CONDUCT** Don't tear down what nature intended, advises Denver landscape designer and master gardener Steve Aegerter, whose yard is a registered wildlife habitat through The HSUS's Urban Wildlife Sanctuary Program. Fall's leafy blankets serve as mulch and supply food and refuge for small animals, while ornamental grasses become protected feeding stations. Dead plant stalks



and seedheads provide food in winter and nesting materials in spring. The variety is beautiful to look at, says Aegerter.

Dead trees offer shelter for small mammals and birds, while logs and compost heaps create niches for hibernating reptiles, amphibians, and beneficial insects. Gallion acquires logs from a yard-waste recycling plant to benefit frogs and other small critters and enrich the soil.

► **CREATE STRUCTURE** Augment natural shelters with wood, rock, and brush piles in corners of your property, close to food sources. Brush piles are "like one big giant tower of life" hosting a range of species, Gallion says. A firewood pile with crisscrossed logs gives additional cover.

► **FIND MORE TIPS** and apply for The HSUS's Urban Wildlife Sanctuary Program at humanesociety.org/sanctuary.

► Don't have chimneys cleaned during the 28–30 days before babies fledge. If forced from the nest too soon, the youngsters will be unable to sustain flight and feed themselves, and their parents will be unable to find them—condemning the babies to a

slow death by starvation. You can muffle the noisy demands of hungry nestlings by placing a large piece of foam rubber or non-fiberglass insulation above the closed damper; remove the material before using the fireplace in the fall.

► Delay maintenance on chimneys where swifts have nested or roosted until after Oct. 31; the birds should be safely on their way south by this point.

► The Migratory Bird Treaty Act prohibits the harming of chimney swifts or disturbance of an active nest. Avoid any chimney cleaning service that says it will remove a nest of eggs or chicks. Most reputable companies belong to the National Chimney Sweep Guild, which supports the

birds' protection and conservation.

The Hornes help with conservation efforts by reporting their winged guests' annual arrival and departure to the Texas-based Driftwood Wildlife Association and participating in counts of swifts gathering en masse ahead of their annual journey to wintering grounds in Peru. On late summer evenings, they sit outside and watch as the birds congregate, swirling above the chimney and zooming down the flue one by one. "They look like little cigars with wings," Robin says.

The couple counted 99 in August 2004; the number dropped to 68 in 2008 and zero in 2009. A nesting pair is back this year, but the Hornes don't know why their flue no longer hosts flocks. They're hoping a freshly cleaned chimney will act as a giant welcome sign—bringing a full house once again.



SWEET SYMPHONY:
Nestling swifts tweet
for their meals.

**RECIPE
BOX**



Nourishing the Soul

Eco-chef and social justice activist Bryant Terry drew inspiration for his *Vegan Soul Kitchen* cookbook from a variety of sources: memories of his grandparents' farm in Tennessee, training at New York City's Natural Gourmet Institute, and a creative approach to mixing it up in the kitchen. But it was the song "Beef" by hip-hop artist KRS-One that Terry says catapulted him into awareness of the injustices of factory farming. For the one-time fast food junkie, there was no turning back.

Almost two decades later, Terry uses his latest book to advocate a way of cooking and eating that is antithetical to industrial food production. "'Soul' is actually looking at the essence of the food," Terry says. "... If we really want food that is vibrant and healthy and beneficial at all, then we will start thinking about how it's reared."

The cookbook puts an animal- and environment-friendly stamp on Southern dishes such as gumbo, cornbread, and barbecue sandwiches; the recipes are paired with recommended soundtracks by artists ranging from Aretha Franklin to Radiohead. Terry's fresh take on the region's cuisine evokes the African-American culture that defined it, while his recipes preserve an authentic element of that culture by using local, seasonal, and natural ingredients—the kind that can be found growing in backyard gardens.

As a boy, Terry enjoyed the bounty of homegrown and home-cooked food: His maternal grandmother's 7-foot-tall cupboard was packed with staples such as pickled pears, peaches, green beans, carrots, chutneys, sauerkraut, and homemade mustard. The cookbook lures readers to this way of life. "It's important to understand that many Americans are reaching back and caring for the earth and sustainability and eating whole foods," Terry says. "These are traditions that African Americans have had, and it's a matter of re-embracing those traditions and reaching those people." — **Gail Berrigan**

Open-Faced BBQ Tempeh Sandwich with Carrot-Cayenne Coleslaw — serves 5

TEMPEH SANDWICH

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| 3 tablespoons apple cider vinegar | 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil |
| 3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice | 1 tablespoon ground cumin |
| ¾ cup tamari | ⅛ teaspoon cayenne |
| ¼ cup canned tomato sauce | 2 tablespoons water |
| 1 large chipotle chile in adobo sauce | 1 pound tempeh (two 8-ounce packages), cut into ½ inch fingers |
| ¼ cup agave nectar | 5 4x4-inch pieces of focaccia |

1. In a blender, combine the apple cider vinegar, lime juice, tamari, tomato sauce, chile, agave nectar, olive oil, cumin, cayenne, and water to create a marinade. Puree until well combined. Set aside.
2. Preheat grill. In a large baking dish, place the tempeh fingers in one snug layer. Pour the marinade on them and tightly cover the dish with foil. Transfer to the grill, close, and bake for 50 minutes, turning the tempeh once halfway through. (If you aren't using a grill, pack the tempeh in a baking dish, cover with the barbecue sauce, and bake at 350° F for 1 hour.)
3. Remove the baking dish from the grill. With a slotted spoon, transfer the tempeh fingers back to the grill and cook until sizzling and slightly charred, about 1 minute per side.
4. While the tempeh is grilling, put the focaccia on the grill and cook until warm and slightly charred, about 2 minutes per side.
5. Construct the sandwiches by adding 3 to 4 tempeh fingers to each square of focaccia and topping with coleslaw.

CARROT-CAYENNE COLESLAW

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| ½ small green cabbage head, cored and sliced thinly | 1 teaspoon agave nectar or organic raw cane sugar |
| 2 large carrots, grated | 1 teaspoon coarse sea salt |
| ¼ small purple cabbage head, cored and sliced thinly | ¼ teaspoon cayenne |
| ½ teaspoon Dijon mustard | 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil |
| ¼ cup champagne vinegar | 2 tablespoons sesame seeds, toasted |

1. Place the green cabbage and carrots in one bowl and the purple cabbage in a separate bowl.
2. In an upright blender, combine the mustard, vinegar, agave nectar, salt, and cayenne. While blending, slowly add the olive oil.
3. Add half of the dressing to the green cabbage/carrot mixture and add the remaining dressing to the purple cabbage. Massage them both well until wilted, about 3 to 5 minutes each. Cover, and refrigerate them for at least 1 hour or overnight. Remove at least 15 minutes before serving, combine them, add the sesame seeds, and mix well.

From the book *Vegan Soul Kitchen: Fresh, Healthy, and Creative African-American Cuisine* by Bryant Terry. Excerpted by arrangement with Da Capo Lifelong, a member of the Perseus Books Group. © 2009.

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