

The long, slow exodus of Chimney Swifts in fall 2006

By Paul R. Clyne

Something went haywire in the migration synapses of Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) in northeastern Illinois in fall of 2006. For reasons unknown, and with not even a conjecture that has come to my attention, swifts remained widespread into November – more than three weeks past their usual departure date. The phenomenon did not involve isolated late singles, but rather the steady presence of flocks at numerous sites, particularly in Lake, Cook, and Du Page Counties. The last (and only previous) time such an event was noted in Illinois dates back to 1925.

Chimney Swifts “usually leave on a rigid schedule about mid October” (Bohlen 1989), with no significant variation in departure dates statewide (see Table 2). More generally, they tend to depart from their entire breeding range in North America by mid-October to early November for their wintering grounds in South America.

Cink & Collins’ 2002 summary of Chimney Swift migration cites late September to mid- October as typical late dates over most of this species’ range, extending to late October in South Carolina and Texas and to early November in Alabama. Bent (1940) provides one winter record: “During the winter of 1937-38..., two of these birds remained on the campus of the Louisiana State University, at Baton Rouge.”

At Chicago’s Jackson Park, where I’ve done most of my local birding, I’ve had reasonably good success at predicting the departure date of Chimney Swifts each year based on weather forecasts. They typically leave, often *en masse*, with the first cold snap in October. It’s



not unusual to find scores, maybe even a couple hundred birds, through the departure date, then zero thereafter until their springtime return in April.

In 2006, Chicago weather conditions were perfect for an exodus of swifts the night of 11 October with an overnight low just below freezing

TABLE 1: Fall 2006 Chimney Swift reports from northeastern Illinois

DATE	NO.	CO.	SITE (OBSERVER(S))
25 Oct	1	Cook	Lincoln Park, Chicago (Geoffrey A. Williamson et al.)
	2	Cook	Oak Park (Greg Neise)
	2	Cook	over Eisenhower expressway, Chicago (Jill S. Anderson)
	28	Cook	Jackson Park, Chicago (Paul R. Clyne)
	48	Du Page	various sites (Peter A. Moxon)
26 Oct	3	Kankakee	Kankakee (Jed B. Hertz)
	15-20	Cook	over Eisenhower expressway, Chicago (Jill S. Anderson)
	10	Cook	Orland Park (Fran Morel)
27 Oct	24	Du Page	various sites (Peter A. Moxon)
27 Oct	3	Du Page	(Peter A. Moxon)
28 Oct	numerous	Lake	Illinois Beach State Park hawk watch (Vic Berardi et al.)
	small #s	Lake	Lake County lakefront (Douglas F. Stotz)
	3	Cook	Evanston (Fran Morel)
	1	Cook	Montrose Harbor, Chicago (Sue Friscia, Cindy Alberico)
	23	Cook	migrating at Lincoln Park, Chicago (Greg Neise)
	15	Cook	Jackson Park, Chicago (Tom de Boor)
	70	Du Page	Greene Valley Forest Preserve hawk watch (Robert E. Fisher et al.)
29 Oct	9	Lake	Mundelein and vicinity (Steven D. Bailey)
	24+	Lake	Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve (Roy E. Peterson)
	1	Cook	Brewyn (Greg Neise)
	41	Cook	Jackson Park, Chicago (Paul R. Clyne)
	70-80	Du Page	Greene Valley Forest Preserve hawk watch (Robert E. Fisher et al.)
30 Oct	3	Kankakee	Kankakee (Jed B. Hertz)
	37	Cook	northbound at Evanston (Fran Morel)
	several	Cook	Lincoln Park, Chicago (Emil J. Martinec et al.)
	30+	Cook	Thatcher Woods Forest Preserve, River Forest (Jill S. Anderson)
	9	Cook	Jackson Park, Chicago (Paul R. Clyne)
	30+	Du Page	Springbrook Prairie Forest Preserve (Peter A. Moxon)
	80	Du Page	southbound at Greene Valley Forest Preserve hawk watch (Robert E. Fisher et al.)
	1	Kankakee	Kankakee (Jed B. Hertz)