

# Swifts versus Swallows

## Identification Tips

Swifts and swallows are superficially similar in appearance. They are, however, only distant cousins, swifts being more closely related to hummingbirds.

Both swifts and swallows can be seen foraging aerially for insects, usually over water. However, swallows have a relatively languid wingbeat while swifts have a rapid, jerky, flickering flight reminiscent of bats. Swifts rarely fly in a straight line, and often give the false impression of flapping their wings alternatively. Swifts also tend to hunt higher in the air column than do swallows.



### Swifts:

The stubby, streamlined bodies of Chimney Swifts often incite the description “cigars with wings.” They have very short, squared tails ending in bristles, which they use to prop themselves up on vertical surfaces. Their long, narrow wings surpass their tails by over an inch when resting.

The individual to the left can be identified as an adult due to gaps in its flight feathers. This means it is moulting, or losing older feathers to replace them with new ones.



### Swallows:

Swallows have longer, notched tails and broader, shorter wings than do Chimney Swifts. They also have generally paler undersides than Chimney Swifts, as observed in these Cliff Swallows

Swallows often perch on poles or wires to rest or preen. Swifts never do this as they are only capable of coming to rest on vertical surfaces.

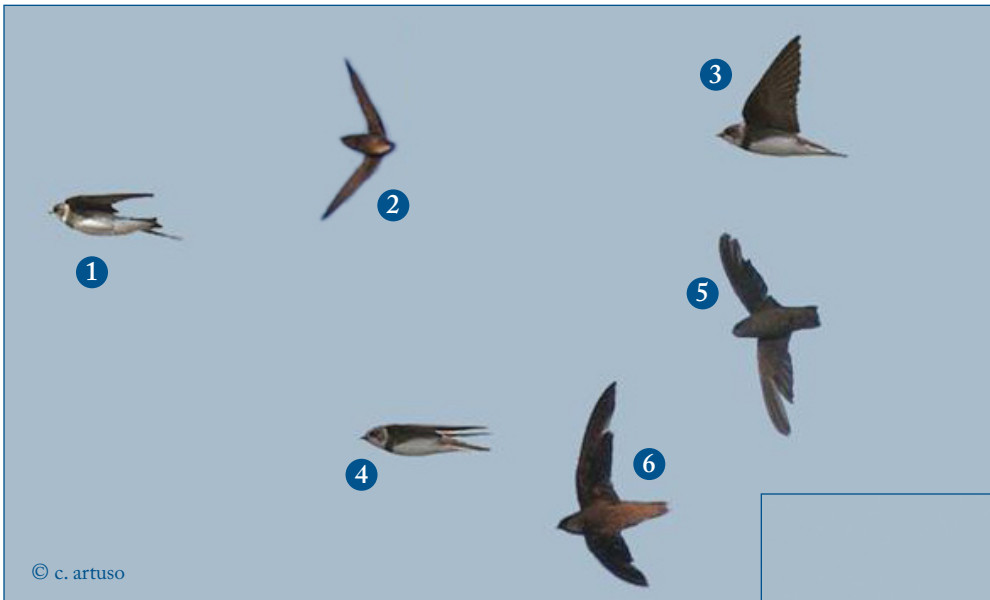


**Barn Swallows** (below) can be easily identified by their long, strongly forked tails. **Purple Martins** (right) are much larger than other swallows or Chimney Swifts.



### Quiz Time! Are you ready to be a swift watcher?

The photos below contain mixtures of swifts and swallows – can you tell the difference?



Answers: 1.Bank Swallow 2.Chimney Swift 3.Bank Swallow 4.Bank Swallow 5.Chimney Swift 6.Chimney Swift 7.Bank Swallow 8.Cliff Swallow 9.Purple Martin 10.Chimney Swift