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Ralph W. Dexter

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Chimney Swifts reuse ten-year-old nest

Ralph W. Dexter

Between 1972 and 1976 Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica* L.) occupied the same nest built in a hole on the wall of an air shaft (S1) on the Administration Building at Kent State University. Usually, swift nests placed on the side of a wall either fall from the wall or are removed by returning birds the following year. Only once in my experience of 38 years of studying the Chimney Swift did I observe a pair attempting to use the nest of the previous year, and that was unsuccessful because of its weakened condition (Dexter 1962). In this special case, however, the nest was placed on top of a brick at the bottom of a hole some 8" (20 cm) in diameter, 13' (4 m) down from the top of the shaft, and has remained in position to the present time. Details of the banded birds involved and the nesting procedure during those 5 years have been published (Dexter, 1978). After 1976 this nest was abandoned for 4 years, even though swifts did nest in that same air shaft from 1978 through 1980. In 1981, however, the 10-year-old nest was again used by a mated pair. Following are the details of the birds involved.

Chimney Swift No. 870-14396, which later proved to be a male, was banded from that air shaft (S1—see Figure 1) on 4 June 1978. He was mated to swift No. 870-14391, but this pair started nest building late (paired up late), and failed to complete their nest which had been started on the south wall that year. They then parted company. An earlier prospective mate of the male in S1 soon left him and joined a male in air shaft B1 instead. (If the S1 male was in his first year, he was very likely immature. Most Chimney Swifts do not nest until their second year.) In 1979 No. 870-14396 did succeed in completing the nest on the south wall with a new mate, No. 870-90714, although their nest fell from the wall during a heavy rain storm on 22 July 1979 (3 nestlings survived the fall. See Dexter, 1952 and 1960, for discussion of that problem). They both returned to shaft S1 in 1980 but failed to make a nest.

In 1981, No. 870-14396 was mated in shaft S1 to a new bird banded with No. 24-167828, when his former mate No. 870-90714 returned to Kent but went into air shaft

Q2 to mate with a male which had nested there for the past 2 years and whose mate failed to return. On 20 June 1981, fresh saliva had been added to the 10-year-old nest, and henceforth one bird sat on the nest at night while the other perched on the wall adjacent to it. The first egg was seen on the morning of 28 June; that night the female was sitting on 2 eggs while her mate was clinging to the adjacent wall. 3 eggs were layed altogether, the mates took turns incubating them, and occasionally both mates sat on the nest at night. Probably No. 24-167828 was nesting for the first time, as first-year nesting females usually lay 3 eggs, while in subsequent years they lay an average of 4 eggs. (Dexter, 1981).

The 10-year-old nest, being constructed on a level surface rather than on a vertical wall, was circular in shape instead of the usual semi-circular nest characteristic of the species. Also, because of its position and protection from the elements, it has survived to the present day. ♦

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Department of Biological Sciences, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242

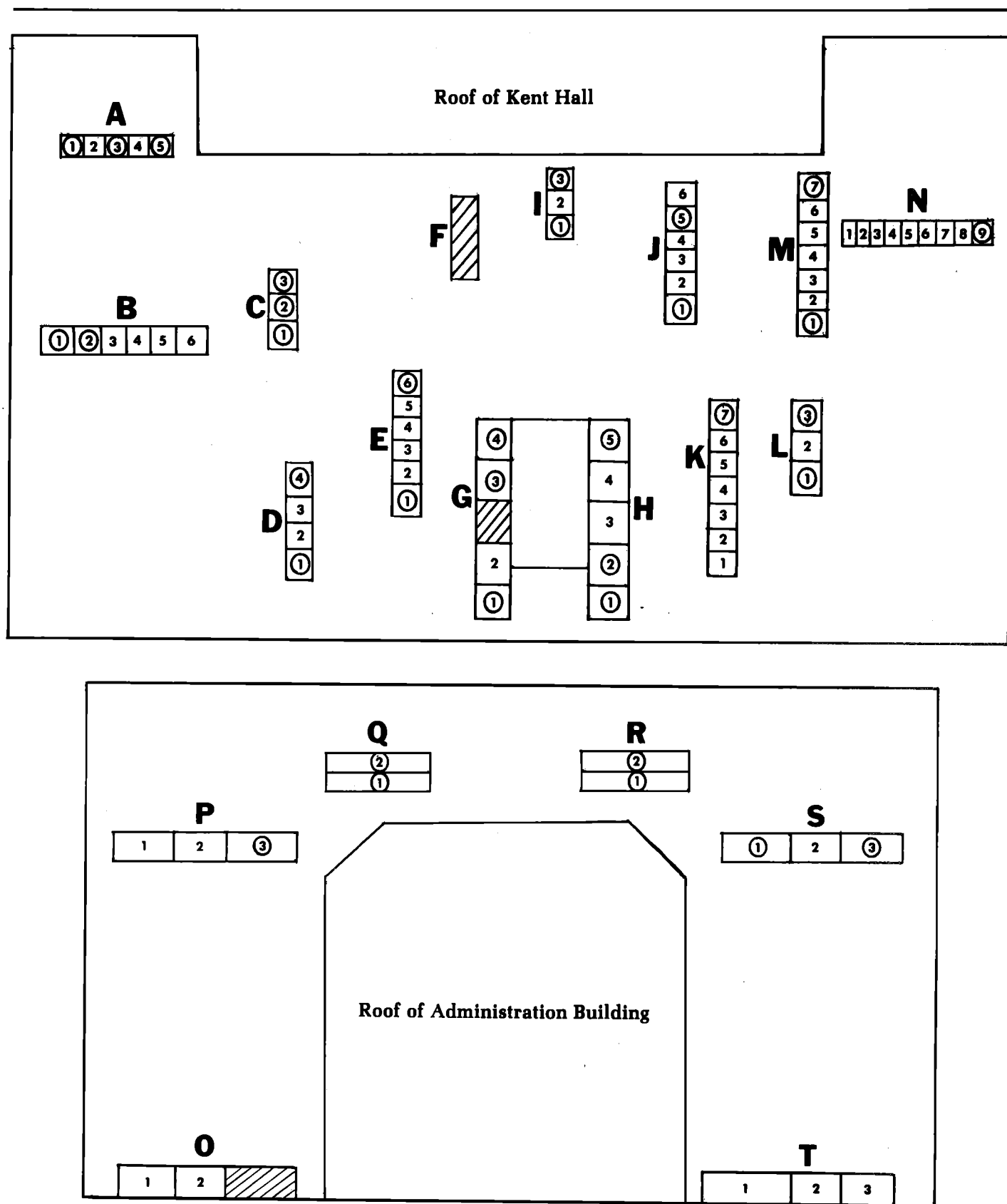


Figure 1. Air shafts at Kent Hall and the Administration Building, Kent State University. (Reprinted with permission from Dexter, 1969.)