

Common Nighthawk

Chordeiles minor

STATUS

Threatened 

Threatened 

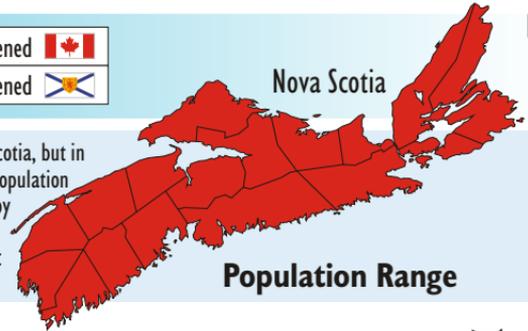


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Species Description

The Common Nighthawk is a medium-sized (24 cm) bird, with a large flattened head, large eyes, small bill, and large mouth. It has long slender pointed wings and a long, slightly notched tail. Its dark brown plumage is mottled with black, white, and buff. In flight, adults have a white patch across their wings. They make a “buzz-squawk” sound in flight, and males make a booming noise with their wings when they dive.

Found throughout Nova Scotia, but in dwindling numbers. The population in Canada has decreased by 50% over the past 40 years. Winters throughout South America.



Population Range

Habitat

Breeding habitat is varied and includes open areas with little ground vegetation, such as sand dunes, beaches, logged or burned-over areas, forest clearings, rocky outcrops (below), rock barrens, peat bogs, and pastures.



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Nighthawks are seen from mid-April through September in open areas with lots of insects. Watch and listen for them feeding over lakes at dusk.

Interesting Points

- Two eggs are laid directly on bare soil, sand, gravel or rock.
- Only the female incubates the eggs, and the male will feed her.
- They are aerial insectivores (they eat bugs in mid-air) and feed mainly at dusk and dawn.
- The “night jar” family are also called “goat suckers” because they were believed to drink goat’s milk!
- The booming noises are made by the wings of the male as they pull out of steep dives.



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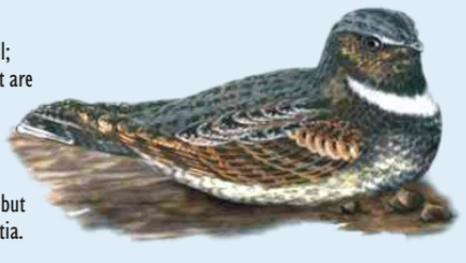
Similar Species

Whip-poor-will:

Long, fine feathers surrounding the bill; rounded wings; larger tail patches that are white (male) or buff (female).

Note:

Common Poor-will and Chuck-will’s-widow are also similar in appearance, but they are very rarely found in Nova Scotia.



Threats to Survival

- Reduction in habitat availability, due to fire suppression and intensive agricultural practices.
- Habitat degradation and fragmentation.
- Depletion of insects as a food source, due to pesticides.
- Light pollution in urban settings where historically nesting was common on flat roofs.
- Disturbance, severe weather events, and climate change.



North America at night



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How You Can Help

Encourage sustainable land use practices and do not use pesticides. Report sightings, especially of known nest sites or flocks in migration.

Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

Contact: Environment Canada (506) 364-5044 or www.ec.gc.ca

Info: www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca or www.gov.ns.ca/natr/wildlife/

Sighting Reports: 1-866-727-3447 or sightings@speciesatrisk.ca

Stewardship: Bird Studies Canada 1-888-448-2473, www.bsc-eoc.org