

Eastern Whip-poor-will

Astrostomus vociferus

STATUS	Threatened 	Not Listed 
Threatened 	Threatened 	Not Listed 

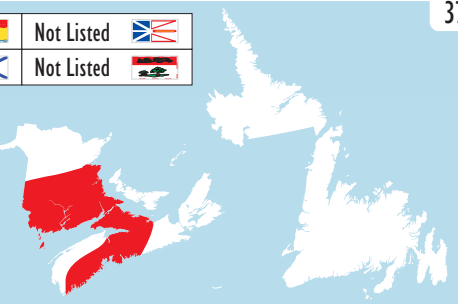


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Species Description

The Eastern Whip-poor-will is a robin-sized (24 cm long) nocturnal bird with a large head and eyes, and a beak surrounded by long, black sensory bristles. Its grey and brown patterned plumage allows it to blend in well with its surroundings. Its name comes from its loud, distinctive name-saying “whip-poor-will” song, which is known for its continuous repetition during summer nights.

Uncommon in southern NB and central NS. Population declines of over 75% have been observed throughout their Canadian range. Overwinters from Florida to Central America.



Habitat

The Eastern Whip-poor-will is often found in semi-open forest and barren habitats and avoids areas that are either too dense and closed-in, or too expansive and open. It is found in all forest types but is associated with pine and oak trees. Females do not create a typical nest and lay their eggs directly on the ground in leaf litter in well drained areas.



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Foraging habitat

The Eastern Whip-poor-will is a rarely observed nocturnal bird. Only two recent, confirmed breeding records exist in Atlantic Canada: one in the Saint John River valley and one in the lower Miramichi River watershed.

Interesting Points

- Have eyes that are adapted to low light.
- Whip-poor-wills use their large sensory bristles to feed in flight, typically by sallying from branches to prey on insects like moths, beetles, and fireflies.
- Have been known to live up to 15 years!
- Whip-poor-will nests typically hatch a few days before a full moon. The bright moonlight on clear nights allows the parents to forage for insects all night to feed to their hungry young.



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Similar Species

Common Nighthawk (page 45):

Long, pointed wings. White patch under throat and near “elbows” under wings. Vocalization a loud, distinctive “buzz-squak”. More active at dusk than at night.



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Threats to Survival

- Habitat loss and degradation (agricultural expansion and intensification; urban development).
- Changes in food supply (decrease in insect prey populations from pesticide and herbicide use).
- Vehicle collisions (typically on gravel roads).
- Predation (racoons).

How You Can Help

Learn to recognize this species, its song and report sightings to eBird. Reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides and herbicides. Watch for birds and all other wildlife when driving.



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