

The Common Nighthawk is a rare breeder and uncommon migrant in the Hudson River Valley.

Conservation Status

The nighthawk is considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need and listed as Special Concern in New York. Breeding Bird Survey data show a drastic decline in the state's population. NYS Breeding Bird Atlas data also reflect a reduced distribution in the Hudson River Valley, although it has never been very common.

**Identification**

This medium-sized bird is about the size of a Blue Jay, and is most often seen while flying. It is dark brown with white, buff, and black mottling, and has large white patches on its long pointed wings. It has a large head, a very small beak and a large, bristled mouth with which it catches flying insects at dusk and dawn. Its erratic flight makes it look something like a large bat. Its call is a short, nasal “peent” given while flying.

Food

The diet of the Common Nighthawk includes a wide variety of flying insects, including mosquitoes, moths, beetles, flies, and caddisflies. It feeds primarily at dusk and dawn by catching its prey high in the air or close to the ground. Where insect densities are high, this species can feed in groups ranging from a few dozen to several hundred individuals. In urban areas, nighthawks often forage near street and building lights and other lighted areas such as ballparks, where they capture insects attracted by the light.

Habitat

This species breeds in open habitats where the ground has little vegetation, such as logged or burned-over areas, forest clearings and pastures, as well as flat gravel rooftops of urban buildings.

Nesting

This species nests either on gravel rooftops or directly on the ground. It makes no nest per se, and usually lays its eggs directly on a surface.

Threats

- Habitat loss and alteration, in particular the reforestation of abandoned agricultural fields and harvested forests, fire suppression, and intensive agriculture.
- Reduction of buildings with flat gravel-covered rooftops.
- Decline in insect populations due to large-scale insecticide use, particularly mosquito control.
- Collisions with motor vehicles.
- Predation of eggs and nestlings by American Crow, Common Raven, gulls, owls, coyotes, striped skunks, opossums, dogs, foxes, feral cats, and snakes.

Management Recommendations

- Institute controlled burning programs, including burning a number of small sites in forests to provide nesting locations.
- Reduce pesticide use to increase insect abundance.
- Control predators where known to be a problem.
- Place gravel pads in corners of non-gravel roofs to create nesting areas.

This management summary is adapted from Poulin 1996 and Savignac 2007.

For additional information, see the following references:

Brigham, R. M. 1989. Roost and nest sites of the Common Nighthawk: are gravel roofs important? *Condor* 91:722–724. <http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/Condor/files/issues/v091n03/p0722-p0724.pdf>

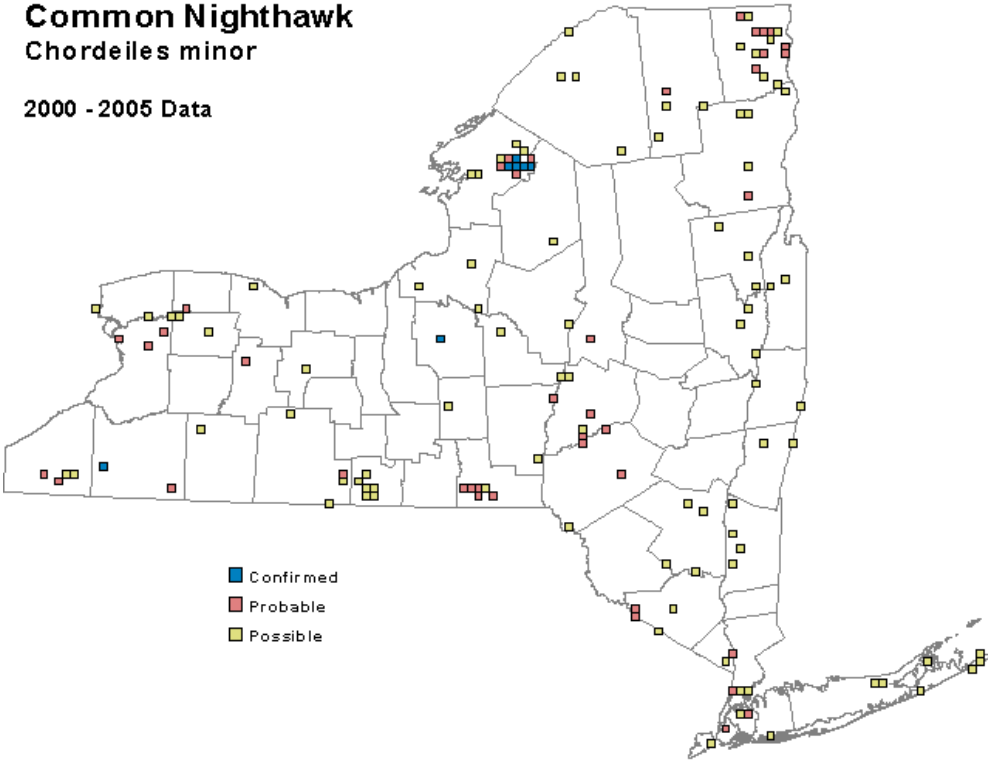
NatureServe. 2008. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.0. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>.

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Savignac, C. 2007. COSEWIC Status Report on the Common Nighthawk. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. https://www.nsassessment.ca/natr/wildlife/biodiv/species_recovery/statusreports/sr_CommonNighthawk.pdf

NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

Common Nighthawk
Chordeiles minor
2000 - 2005 Data



Common Nighthawk
Chordeiles minor
1980 - 1985 Data

