

The Whip-poor-will is a very uncommon breeder in open woodlands in the Hudson River Valley.

Conservation Status

The Whip-poor-will is regarded as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need and as a Species of Special Concern in New York. Partners in Flight lists it as a Species of Regional Concern in Bird Conservation Regions 13, 28 and 30. There is no Breeding Bird Survey trend map for the state, but the NYS Breeding Bird Atlas indicates that populations have declined statewide as well as in the Hudson River Valley.



Identification

This medium-sized bird is a mix of brown with black flecks, black throat, and a white neck band. It has short round wings with a reddish tint and a long rounded tail. On each side of the tiny bill there is a row of hair-like bristles that funnel insect prey into its large mouth. Whip-poor-wills perch on branches or sit on the ground or along roadsides, where the birds' eyes gleam red or bright orange in the glare of automobile headlights. The Whip-poor-will is named for the male's loud repetitive calling at dawn and dusk; it is heard more often than seen.

Habitat

Although usually described as a forest species, this bird is generally not present in large, undisturbed mature forests. The required habitat includes a mix of young, deciduous forest with little or no understory, woodland edges, and open areas such as fields, pastures, wetlands, or orchards. The bird hunts in forest clearings and around water, orchards, and gardens. The degree of openness in the forest understory appears to be more important than forest composition. Shade, proximity to open areas for foraging, and fairly sparse ground cover are key elements of habitat chosen. The minimum forest plot size needed to sustain a pair is unknown.

Food

This species eats a variety of large moths, such as sphinx moths, noctuid moths and the big silk moths, as well as other insects. It usually forages only at dawn or dusk, but on moonlit nights it will feed all night long.

Nesting

The Whip-poor-will lays its eggs directly on the ground on leaf litter partially shaded by seedling trees or low shrubs at the forest edge or in open woodland. Adults remain motionless on the nest during daylight hours and become active only at dusk. The hatching of chicks seems to be closely tied to periods of the full moon so the parents can supply the extra energy demands of their rapidly growing young. Young are fed regurgitated insects and can move from the nest site within days of hatching if disturbed.

Threats

- Habitat loss due to suburban development.
- Habitat fragmentation.
- Habitat loss due to closing of forest openings because of forest succession.
- Decline of prey base, including decreases in populations of the giant silkworm moth due to industrial pollution and pesticide use.
- Predation by skunks, raccoons, foxes and feral cats.

Management Recommendations

The Whip-poor-will requires forest habitat with open areas. Managing forest habitats to create the openings needed by Whip-poor-wills can be done by forest management or fire. Unfortunately, there are few data to determine the size of needed openings, or their interspersions with unaltered forest. Existing data suggest average home range size of approximately 125 acres, which is made up of 50% open habitat. Forest management that results in such a habitat distribution may only be possible in large forests, and not practical in much of the Hudson Valley.

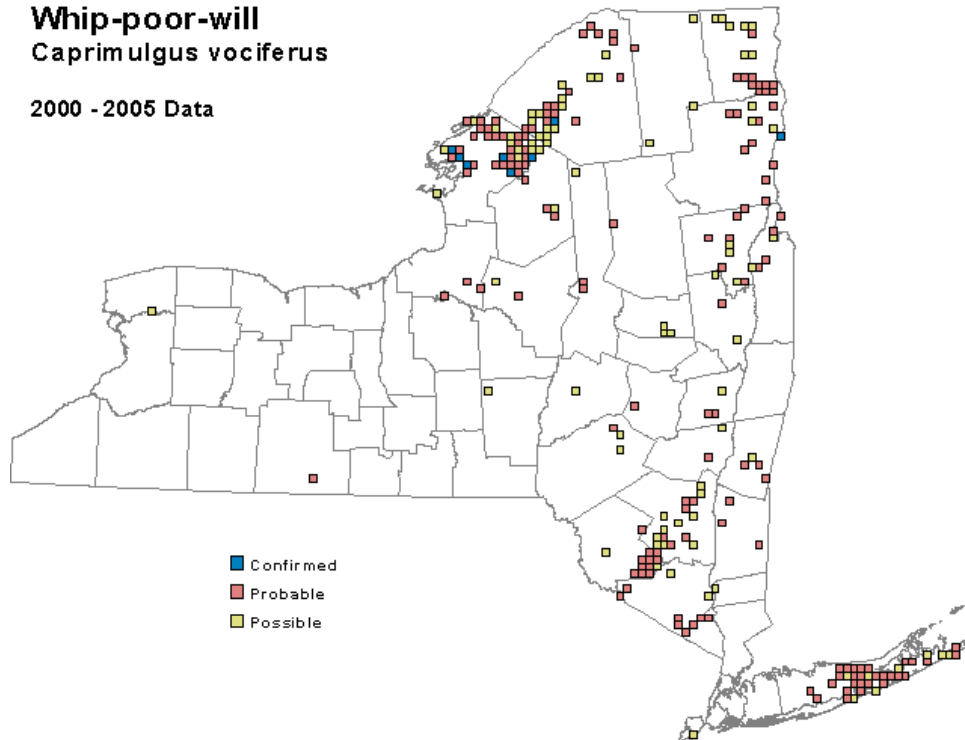
This species summary is adapted from Brown 1999, Cink 2002 and NatureServe 2008.

For additional information, see the following references:

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NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

Whip-poor-will
Caprimulgus vociferus
2000 - 2005 Data



Whip-poor-will
Caprimulgus vociferus
1980 - 1985 Data

