

Nova Scotia Species At Risk Beneficial Management Practices Series

Version 1, March 2022

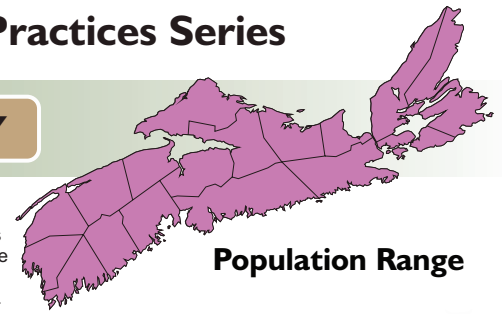
Common Nighthawk

Chordeiles minor

STATUS

Threatened 
Threatened 

FORESTRY



Population Range



Common Nighthawk resting on downed woody debris

Found throughout Nova Scotia. The population has decreased by 50% over the past 40 years. Winters throughout South America.

© NICOLE NEAULAC

SPECIES DESCRIPTION



©Ronnie D'Entremont

- The Common Nighthawk is a medium sized bird (24 cm) with a large flattened head, large dark eyes, small bill and large mouth.
- They have long, slender wings. When in flight, a white bar can be seen across the underside of their wings (see photo to left).
- Plumage is dark brown, mottled with black, white and buff.
- They make a loud “peent” call in flight.
- Males make a loud booming noise with their wings as part of their display to advertise their territory and to attract females.
- This aerial insectivore primarily feeds at dusk and dawn, at heights from 1-80 metres.

THREATS

- The greatest threat to the Common Nighthawk is the reduced availability of insect prey. Factors that may contribute to the decline in prey include: the loss of insect-producing habitats (e.g. wetlands), a mismatch in the timing of breeding and insect hatches due to climate change, pesticide use, light pollution, and extreme weather events.
- Loss of breeding habitat. Factors that have contributed to the loss of breeding habitat include: fire suppression, residential and commercial development, and the intensification of agriculture.
 - The intensification of agriculture has led to the reduction in habitat availability across Canada. Market pressure and increased mechanization have led to the elimination of edge and natural features, and the conversion of pastures and hayfields to cereal or row groups, which are less suitable for nesting.
- Collisions with vehicles, planes and human structures. Common Nighthawks will rest along gravel roads at night, where they are vulnerable to collisions. Road kills can also be high in areas where foraging habitat is located close to roads.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION

- Common Nighthawks breed in open areas with little ground vegetation. These can be natural or man-made/maintained habitats, such as sand dunes, beaches, logged or burned-over areas, forest clearings, rock barrens, peat bogs, blueberry fields, quarries, and pastures.
 - The nesting period extends from late May through mid-August. A successful nesting attempt takes at least 7 weeks.
 - Nests consist of two eggs laid directly on bare soil, sand, or gravel. From laying of the first egg to hatching of the chicks takes about 20 days.
 - After hatching, nestlings remain with their parents in the nesting area for up to 30 days, when they can fly well, but are not fully developed.
- They require areas with an abundance of flying insects to eat. Areas with water, such as wetlands, lakes and rivers, often make good foraging habitat.
- Areas with artificial lighting can also attract foraging nighthawks, as flying insects are attracted to this light.
- They roost (rest) in a variety of places, including on logs, tree limbs, the ground, fenceposts, or rooftops. They select roost sites that offer shade from overheating, camouflage from predators, and an unobstructed flight path.
- In the fall, nighthawks migrate south to their overwintering grounds in South America in large flocks. In the spring they migrate north individually.

KEY TERMS

Aerial insectivore:

A guild of birds that feed by capturing flying insects. This guild includes Whip-poor-wills, nighthawks, swifts, swallows, martins and flycatchers.

Riparian area:

The area next to streams/rivers/lakes/wetlands/etc. These areas can be periodically flooded and are transitional lands between a body of water and drier upland areas.

Roost:

A place where wildlife regularly settle or congregate to rest.

HOW YOU CAN HELP (BENEFICIAL PRACTICES)

- Learn to identify Common Nighthawks and report all observations (see “Report Sightings”).
- Avoid any forestry activities, including harvesting, silviculture, site preparation or planting, in areas of breeding habitat during the breeding season (May 15 - August 15) if possible. Ideally, harvest on snow packed or frozen ground to minimize risk to nesting birds.
- Halt operations if an adult is flushed from the ground and mark off the suspected or known nest area to be avoided. Do not place markers directly next to nests, as they may attract predators. If defensive behaviour (e.g., hissing, diving, flushing) is observed during operations, increase the buffer distance until the behaviour ceases.
- Leave a buffer of 25 metres around suitable breeding habitat if conducting low-impact activities, including non-merchantable silviculture treatments (eg. planting, weeding, site prep).
- Leave a buffer of 100 metres around breeding habitat if conducting high-impact activities, such as harvesting or road building. If a 100 metre buffer is not possible, a minimum width of 50 metres is recommended.
- In the case of natural disturbance events, such as those caused by fire, wind, flooding, insects or disease, leave at least 25% of these areas unsalvaged, as they provide suitable habitat for breeding.
- Avoid or limit the use of pesticides that may negatively affect non-pest insect populations. Herbicide application also lowers the abundance of insects eaten by nighthawks.
- Create suitable nesting conditions by leaving some areas of old/deactivated roads, turnarounds and other open areas undisturbed during the breeding season. When possible, select areas near to wetlands, aquatic habitats or other high quality foraging grounds.
- When safe to do so, retain large, dead and imminently declining trees, as these are future sources of downed woody debris, which creates roosting habitat. Retain at least 12 cavity trees/ha, with at least half greater than 25 cm DBH.
 - Where feasible and practical, girdle unmerchantable stems to create snags to replace any that are knocked down during harvest operations.
 - If conducting whole tree harvesting, large cull pieces (25+ cm diameter and 2+ m long) left on landing should be skidded back into the cut block.



Common Nighthawk with chicks

Project Partners:



© KENNETH COLE SCHNEIDER

Common Nighthawk



© CINDY STAIGER

Common Nighthawk habitat

REPORT SIGHTINGS

When possible, report any of your observations of species at risk. Details such as time, date, location (Geographic or UTM coordinates) as well as photos are valuable additions to all reports. **Contact:** 1-866-727-3447, sightings@speciesatrisk.ca AND the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Renewables, biodiversity@novascotia.ca.

TO LEARN MORE

To learn more about the Common Nighthawk or other species at risk view the **Species at Risk in Nova Scotia, Identification & Information Guide**, available online at <http://www.sarguide.speciesatrisk.ca/>

Landbird species at risk in forested wetlands website: <http://landbirdsar.merseytobetic.ca/>

Content and design from the **Species at Risk in Nova Scotia, Identification & Information Guide, 2nd Edition** used with permission of Mersey Tobetic Research Institute.

This project was undertaken with the financial support of:
Ce projet a été réalisé avec l'appui financier de :



Environment and
Climate Change Canada

Environnement et
Changement climatique Canada

