

PROJECT NIGHTHAWK 2013



Photo by sciencebog.com



Photo by allaboutbirds.org



photo by oklahomabirdsandbutterflies.com

A Strange Season for Nighthawks

It was a very strange year for nighthawk watchers in the summer of 2013. An old Buffalo Springfield song sums it up pretty well: "there's something happening here, what it is ain't exactly clear..." Behavior was atypical at many sites and we weren't able to confirm nesting anywhere, although we strongly suspected it at a couple of sites.

The birds appeared to be late in settling down, and some of them seemed like they never did. It was frustrating for the volunteers who kept watching for the consistent behavior that indicates nesting and just couldn't find it. The general thought is that the cold rainy weather early in

the season delayed the birds and then the frequent rains may have caused nest failure. There were fewer birds in Concord and the Ossipee region although Keene held its own.

According to statistics from the National Climatic Data Center, the average temperature across the lower 48 for the spring season was 50.5° Fahrenheit, making it the 38th coolest spring on record. The total spring precipitation average across the contiguous United States was 0.21 inches above the 20th-century average. The wettest period for Concord ran for eight consecutive days from May 19

through May 26 which is when nighthawks were returning to the area. Wet conditions from May continued into June. The region's 7.65 inches of rain for the month was 185% of normal, making it the fifth wettest June since record-keeping began.

We're hoping that the low number of birds this year is an anomaly and that next year will be more like normal. However, with the Common Nighthawk population continuing to decline, this year gives us cause for concern and perhaps insight into factors that affect their nesting success.

Concord Highlights

Two coordinated watches were held in Concord, June 14 and July 16. Numbers were down from last year and there was much less activity. Despite a few reports of a nighthawk in downtown Concord, no regular activity was observed. For the first time we had enough people to include part of Broken Ground* during the June 14 watch.

We had two females during the July 16 watch, the same number as last year, which is very encouraging. We only had seven males which is half of the number we had last year.

*side note: over 100 Red Efts and one Milk Snake were observed that evening.

Concord Coordinated Watch Totals

Steeplegate Mall: 2 males, 1 female

Rt. 106: 1 male

Broken Ground: 1 male

Industrial Park Drive: 1 male, 1 female

53 Regional Drive: 1 male

NHTI/Downtown: 1 male

Ossipee Highlights



Volunteer Darlene Bean taking pictures of nighthawks in flight.

Photo by Jane Koliias

One coordinated watch was held in the Ossipee pine barrens on June 19. There were fewer nighthawks than last year, six instead of nine. Activity levels were lower than in previous years even at Red Baron Gate which last year had four to six males and one female, but during this watch only four males were observed.

Thanks to all who attended and a special thanks to those who came from far away to help.

Ossipee Coordinated Watch Totals

West Branch Preserve: 2 males
Red Baron Gate: 4 males



Volunteers gather for coordinated watch in Ossipee.

Photo by Bob Basile

Keene Highlights

Keene Coordinated Watch Totals

1 female
4 males

Brett Amy Thelen (AVEO/Harris Center for Conservation Education) and a crew of nighthawk watchers conducted four coordinated surveys: June 20, July 9, July 22, and July 30. In addition one mini-survey was conducted on Aug. 2 to focus on a building that was a possible nest site.

Five individual birds (same as in 2012) were observed. Four males and one female including one probable (though unconfirmed) late nesting attempt on the roof of a bank in downtown Keene.

There was no evidence of nesting at last year's rooftop nest site at Keene State College, which was a disappointment, since the college had a high-definition, live-streaming web cam all set up to serve as a nestcam on that roof!



Common Nighthawk in flight over Keene.

Photo by Dave Hoitt

Common Nighthawk "Bird of the Year"

The American Birding Association named the Common Nighthawk as the 2013 Bird of the Year. The American Birding Association (ABA) provides a community, forum, and resources for every birder, bird watcher, and bird enthusiast. Each year a bird of the year is chosen with activities and information throughout the year that focus on that particular species.



Summary of Nest Patch Experiment

Since the Project's inception in 2007, 35 project-sponsored patches have been placed on rooftops in the towns of Concord, Keene, Hanover and Lebanon. Each summer volunteers have monitored the sites looking for indications that nighthawks are using the patches for nesting. Although nighthawks have been observed displaying over a few of the patches, we have no evidence that any of the patches have been used for nesting.

In 1986-1987 researchers at U-Maine Orono had nighthawks nest on three out of seven gravel nest patches that were placed on university rooftops. The placement of the nest patches was shortly after the rooftop substrate was changed from

gravel to rubber. One theory as to why these patches were used is that nighthawks had strong site fidelity to these rooftops and readily made the transition from nesting on the gravel roofs to nesting on the gravel patches.

The data gathered through Project Nighthawk seems to indicate that without previous nesting on a rooftop, adding a patch does not attract nighthawks to rooftops.



Rooftop nest patch in downtown Concord.

Photo by Jane Kolias

Nighthawk Migration

Common Nighthawks have one of the longest migration routes of any North American bird. They may travel up to 4,200 miles from their nesting grounds in Canada to their wintering grounds in South America. Their distribution in their winter range is poorly known due to difficulties in distinguishing the bird from the Lesser Nighthawk and in differentiating between migrants and resident birds. They will migrate during the day and at night sometimes numbering in the hundreds or thousands. Wind and weather conditions combined to produce good evenings for watching.

In 2008 Rob Woodward began leading an effort to monitor nighthawks during migration in Concord and this fall was a record year. He reports: "The migration began with good solid counts, including 203 on August 21 and 310 on August 24. The skies opened on August 25 when 966 nighthawks were counted, with another 640 on August 27 and 790 on August 30." These birds are coming from Canada and where they appear in migration depends on wind and weather.

Although numbers like these may make it appear that nighthawks are abundant, their numbers have been declining steadily. Recent data suggest the species' numbers may have dropped by as much as half in Canada since the mid-1960s. In North America, nighthawk populations have seen similar declines over the past couple of decades. NH Audubon conducted nighthawk surveys in the early 1990s and again in 2001 and 2002. In the roughly ten years between the surveys, the species disappeared from nine of the thirteen areas surveyed in both periods.

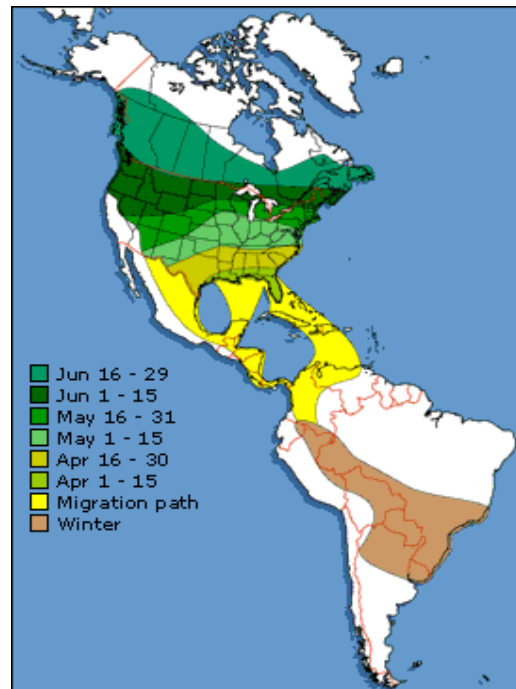


Photo: www.enature.com

Volunteers

Thank you to the dedicated volunteers who logged over 280 hours for Project Nighthawk and traveled over 1,780 miles.

Bob Basile	Susan Lee
Siobhan Basile	Sharon Meany*
Darlene Bean	Caleb & Jonas O'Mara*
Ken Bergman*	Kathie Palfy
Stefan Birardi*	Bill Parkinson
Chris Borg	Stephanie Parkinson
Gabriella Brennan*	Carol Plato
Russell Cobb	Ann Preston*
Zeke Cornell	Bob Quinn
Stephen Day*	Linda Rauter
Caitie Donohue	Udo Rauter
Kathy Gunther	Marsha Richelli
Emily Hague*	Andrea Robbins
David Hoitt*	George Robbins
Dave Howe	Keegan Scriber*
Jenn Jones*	Barbara Skuly*
Ellen Kenny	Jenna Spear-O'Mara*
Alexandra Kirk*	Rebecca Suomala
Jane Kolias	Kyle Tefft*
Doreen Lania	Robert Vallieres
Lisa LaPierre	Mary Wright*



Volunteers gather for the annual end of season Goatsucker Gala potluck.

Photo by Mark Suomala

* Ashuelot Valley Environmental Observatory volunteer

Supporters-Partners

We gratefully acknowledge the following companies and individuals who have helped support Project Nighthawk.

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 Keene High School
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<http://nhbirdrecords.org/bird-conservation/Nighthawk-main.htm>.