

# PROJECT NIGHTHAWK



by Bob Hines

Project Nighthawk is a statewide research initiative aimed at conserving a state-threatened bird species, the Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*). Most active at dusk and dawn, the “peent” call of Common Nighthawks was once a familiar sound in cities and towns throughout New Hampshire, where they nested on flat, pea stone gravel roofs and fed on insects attracted to city lights. In recent years, rubber and PVC have largely replaced pea stone roofing, and nesting nighthawks have disappeared from many New Hampshire towns; in the few towns where they remain (primarily Concord and Keene), their numbers have dramatically declined. Biologists are trying to determine if the loss of the nighthawks is linked to the disappearance of pea stone roofs.

Nighthawks naturally nest in open areas such as gravel beaches, burned-over areas, and cultivated fields. They began nesting on gravel rooftops, which resemble these natural sites, as early as 1915 in New Hampshire. New Hampshire Audubon initiated Project Nighthawk in 2007 to investigate the potential for restoring nesting nighthawks by placing simple gravel “nest patches” on flat rooftops in Keene and Concord. With the help of supporters and volunteers Project Nighthawk installed 14 nest patches in the greater Concord area, 14 in the Keene area, six in Hanover, and seven additional patches.



Volunteers installing a nest patch in Concord. Photo by Pam Hunt.

In addition to monitoring patches for nighthawk activity, volunteers also search for any rooftop nesting nighthawks and conduct coordinated watches in Concord and Keene to determine how many birds were present. As of 2013, the patches have not been used, although nighthawks have displayed over several of them, and there have been very few females and nests located. The scarcity of nighthawk nests has prompted behavioral observations at both nesting and non-nesting display sites as well as daily monitoring at any confirmed nest. Since Project Nighthawk’s inception volunteers have gathered over 2,550 hours of data observing nighthawk displaying, nesting, and chick rearing behavior.

New Hampshire Audubon is leading the effort in Concord and providing statewide coordination. The Ashuelot Valley Environmental Observatory (AVEO), a program of the Harris Center for Conservation Education, monitors Common Nighthawk activity in the Keene area.

## PROJECT PARTNERS

Project Nighthawk is a partnership that is made possible through the help and support of many volunteers, building owners and managers, sponsors and supporters. Individuals and companies have generously donated time, expertise, and materials. New Hampshire Audubon and AVEO are grateful for this vital support. For more details see the annual summaries of project activities, volunteers and sponsors – <http://nhbirdrecords.org/Nighthawk/Nighthawk-main.html>.



Female Common Nighthawk with two chicks. Photo by Pam Hunt.

For more information, contact Becky Suomala at [bsuomala@nhaudubon.org](mailto:bsuomala@nhaudubon.org) or 603-224-9909 x309.



### Project Nighthawk – A Partnership

Project Nighthawks depends on volunteers, partners, and supporters. We hope you will help.

- I'd like to volunteer
  I'd like to support Project Nighthawk with a contribution of:  
 \$20    \$50    \$100    \$500   Other \_\_\_\_\_

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Return this form with payment to: New Hampshire Audubon, Membership Department, 84 Silk Farm Road, Concord, NH 03301-8200.