



# 2024 PROJECT NIGHTHAWK

## A Special Thank You!

by Rebecca Suomala, Project Nighthawk Coordinator

As many of you know, I retired in the fall of 2024 after more than 36 years with NH Audubon. It has been wonderful to be the coordinator of Project Nighthawk, getting to know these imperiled birds. In 2007, we started Project Nighthawk to install gravel nest patches on roof tops in hopes of attracting nesting nighthawks. Although the nighthawks did not use the patches, the effort generated a lot of questions about nighthawks in New Hampshire and thus began a journey of inquiry.

We started by searching for displaying nighthawks, trying to determine if they were nesting and if they were successful. It turned out to be a huge challenge. Nighthawk males are easy to find as they circle, peent, and boom over potential nest sites, but females are quiet and they, the chicks and eggs are cryptically colored to blend in with their surroundings making them hard to spot. I didn't know how extraordinarily lucky we were in 2008 to have a nest on the ground in East Concord that was visible from the roadside and had lights on at night so we could watch the adults and chicks. We learned so much from that nest, and over the years, with many observations, we gained a tremendous amount of knowledge about nighthawk behavior. I am so grateful for the volunteers who contributed hundreds of hours observing behavior at nest sites or checking locations for nighthawk activity.

The knowledge we've gained has been incredibly valuable. I used everything we learned when I consulted on nighthawks nesting at wind turbines, trying to avoid mortality. We created guidelines for turbine sites with nesting nighthawks. We've provided up-to-date information for construction projects in areas with nesting nighthawks. With intern Jason Mazurowski we looked at habitat use in the Ossipee pine barrens. Every year we have provided data on nighthawk nesting sites statewide to the NH Natural Heritage Bureau where it is accessible for environmental reviews.

Field work with nighthawks is always interesting and you never know what you might find. I've rescued chicks from the street and climbed trees with my scope to view rooftop nests. I will never forget the heart-break of watching flooding rains rise around a female nighthawk on a nest, coming over her back as she desperately tried to hang on, only to have her newly hatched chick and pipping egg die underwater. I shared that heartache with volunteers Jane Kalias and Stephanie Parkinson that night as we watched the pair searching for their young, but then rejoiced when they re-nested at a nearby spot a week later.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to all the Project Nighthawk volunteers who have been a critical part of the Project, not only watching nighthawks but keeping me motivated and sharing my excitement and sorrows. Thank you to Brett Thelen and Ken Klapper for their work in Keene. A big thank you to the Project Nighthawk Office Assistants, Jane Kalias, Connie Linna, and Ellen Nunes without whom I could not have managed the project all these years. They have organized the data, tracked volunteer hours, wrote and designed newsletters, created posters and nighthawk information, prepared training materials, and so much more.

A huge thank you to all the donors who have supported Project Nighthawk over the years. Your contributions have made this project possible. I hope you will continue to support nighthawk research and monitoring.

(continued)



Why we do what we do! Who can resist this young Common Nighthawk chick? (Photo by JM Sungur on a rooftop deck in Massachusetts.)

NH Audubon will be working to determine the best strategy for monitoring Common Nighthawks in the future. I am honored to be the first Biologist Emerita for NH Audubon and in retirement I will be working to publish the results of the nest patch experiment and our other data. When summer rolls around and the nights are warm, I hope to still watch nighthawks peent and boom in New Hampshire – and I hope to see you out watching.



Installing a gravel parch at Keene Cinemas in 2008. Photo by Ken Klapper.



Becky Suomala being interviewed by NH Public Radio while installing a gravel patch on the roof of the Concord Public Library in 2007. Photo by Mark Suomala.



Installing a gravel patch at Salloway & Hollis in 2007. Photo by Stephanie Parkinson.

## Plans for 2025

We will be watching the progress of the demolition at Steeplegate Mall (see page 3) as spring approaches and we get close to the return of the nighthawks in the third week of May. NH Audubon is working to secure funding to hire a seasonal biologist to monitor at the Mall and the surrounding area to determine how the nighthawks respond to the changes. I will be available as an advisor and Biologist Emerita for NH Audubon.

## Report Your Common Nighthawk sightings to eBird

As the nighthawk monitoring effort changes in the future, we are asking people to report Common Nighthawks to eBird, especially during the breeding season in June and July. eBird is a free, online database for birders to record and share their sightings. It has become the primary source of bird reports in New Hampshire and many bird researchers and conservationists turn to it for data. I used it in 2024 to locate possible nighthawk nests when we weren't able to do statewide monitoring.

To report sightings, go to eBird.org and set up an account. You can also download the eBird Mobile app on your phone and report that way. There's good information on eBird about how to get started, but I'm happy to answer any questions about reporting your nighthawk sightings. Please add information about what the nighthawks were doing: peenting, circling, flying by, etc. That's very helpful in the nesting season. As we have learned, the nighthawk's behavior is critical to determining nesting status. eBird reports will be the primary source of information on nighthawks in years when there is no active monitoring so please help by reporting your sightings!

Thank you all for your support,

## Saving the Nighthawks at Steeplegate Mall in 2024 by Rebecca Suomala

The 2024 nighthawk nesting season turned out to be very different than originally planned. I thought I would retire in April of 2024 and there would be a pause in nighthawk monitoring in 2024 to determine the best monitoring strategy in the future. Well, that plan changed radically! My retirement timeline moved to the fall of 2024 and then developers announced plans to demolish most of Steeplegate Mall in Concord NH.

The Mall has a large stone roof which is a reliable nesting location for Common Nighthawks. There are usually at least two male nighthawks displaying and one or two nests on the roof every year. It's one of the few sites that appear to be reliably successful at producing young. With only about 15 active nighthawk nesting territories in the state, that makes the Mall a significant site for the state. Since Common Nighthawks are endangered in New Hampshire the developers' consultant met with NH Fish & Game and NH Audubon to discuss the nesting nighthawks in February of 2024. The demolition timeline was uncertain, and we heard nothing more from them as May approached, but it was clearly important that we track nighthawk activity from the start of the nesting season. That became the focus of this summer's Project Nighthawk efforts.

Nighthawks returned to the Mall as usual in May. When I left for my "retirement" trip to Alaska in June, I provided NH Fish & Game with a map of the known nighthawk activity spots at the Mall. A huge thank you to Dave Howe and Lindsay Herlihy who monitored the Mall twice a week while I was gone. I returned on July 3 to discover that the developers had wanted to remove the stone on the roof over the holiday weekend, but thanks to the information we provided, NH Fish & Game was able to delay the removal. Whew!

By July 5, it was clear we had three active males at the site and likely two nests. I met with the consultant for the developers to share observations – his from the rooftop and ours from the ground. With this information, the developers were receptive to further delays in roof work.

For some reason, the Mall nighthawks are active much later than most other nighthawks which are active in the evening until about 9:30 pm. The Mall nighthawks usually first appear around 9:00 pm and to monitor all the activity it requires watching until about 10:30 pm.



The Steeplegate Mall fenced off in August 2024 preparing for demolition. Photo by Rebecca Suomala.



JC Penney remained open and was the site of one of the nesting locations. We suspect this site may have failed. Photo by Rebecca Suomala.

Volunteer John Madigan helped monitor twice a week at the Mall in July and August. He could spot the nighthawks feeding above the lights, something that has always been a challenge. Thanks to his sharp eyes, he was able to document two fledged young feeding in the lights on August 7, 2024. When the Mall lights were turned off in preparation for demolition in mid-August, he re-found the nighthawks feeding over the lights at the Shaw's parking lot next door. With his guidance and direction, I started to pick them out and it was fascinating to watch them feed in the dark. This is the first time we have been able to document feeding locations used after dark. Perhaps it is this feeding activity in the lights that is responsible for their late-night hours.

The developers delayed demolition activity until August 15 and then again until September by which time nighthawks had migrated out of the state. Having so many watches at the Mall gave us the information for advising the developers and gave us a lot more knowledge about this site and these particular birds. We are always learning!

# 2024 Summary

## Concord Area

Monitoring efforts were focused on Steeplegate Mall due to the impending demolition and new construction of the mall, including the roof (see page 3). There were only a few watches at other sites in the area that were active in 2023.

### Nesting Sites

- ◆ Agile Magnetics (probable)
- ◆ EJ Prescott (possible)
- ◆ Pembroke Sand & Gravel (possible)
- ◆ Steeplegate Mall - Zoo/BonTon end (confirmed)
- ◆ Steeplegate Mall - JC Penney (confirmed)
- ◆ Steeplegate Mall - Sears end (possible)

## Keene

We are sad to report that, for the **third** year in a row, there were no nighthawks in Keene, NH. Thanks to Brett Thelen of the Harris Center and her crew of volunteers for all their watching.

## Ossipee Pine Barrens

Although there were no watches in the Ossipee area this year, there were a few sightings reported in eBird at known nest sites. A lack of reports does not mean a site wasn't active, it just means no one checked in June or July of 2024.

### Nesting Sites

- ◆ #767 Depot Rd. (possible)
- ◆ West Branch Pine Barrens (possible)

## 2024 Volunteers and Donors

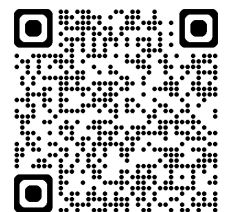
Thank you to the dedicated volunteers who logged over 77 hours for Project Nighthawk and traveled over 670 miles in 2024 to make this project possible. \*Donors

Peg Ackerson *	John Madigan	Ellen Nunes	Meta Alice Keith Bratten Foundation *
Roberta Collins *	Kate McKay	Mark Suomala	in honor of Tracy Holmes
Lindsay Herlihy	Lucy McKay	Brett Amy Thelen	
Dave Howe	Nanci Mitchell		
Madale Kooima	Charlie Mitchell		

Project Nighthawk is funded entirely by private donations. Contributions may be made online at: <https://www.nhaudubon.org/donate/other-ways-to-give/support-research/>

Under Gift Designation, select Project Nighthawk.

Checks may also be sent by mail to: NH Audubon, 84 Silk Farm Rd, Concord, NH 03301  
Put Project Nighthawk in the memo line.



**We are forever grateful for the many donors, volunteers, and partners who have made Project Nighthawk possible since its inception in 2007.**

