

# Common Nighthawk

*Chordeiles minor*



Status: **Special Concern**

## Threats:

- ◆ Decline in food source (flying insects) primarily through pesticide use
- ◆ Loss of suitable open habitat due to fire suppression, land use changes and intensive agriculture
- ◆ Nest predation by domestic cats



## Description:

- ◆ Medium-sized bird 21-25 cm long
- ◆ Large, flattened head; large eyes and mouth, small bill and a notched tail
- ◆ Wings are long, slender and come to a point, with a white patch near the tip
- ◆ Body is mottled grey, brown, and black with wide white wing bars under the wings
- ◆ Males also have a white chin and bar across underside of the tail
- ◆ Call is a high nasal sound or 'peent' given while in flight
- ◆ Active at night or at twilight

## Biology:

- ◆ Nests on the ground in areas of sparse vegetation or on gravel rooftops
- ◆ Lays 2 eggs that are well-camouflaged
- ◆ In breeding season, males perform a "booming" dive, turning abruptly upward about 2 m above the ground
- ◆ Average life span of 4-5 years
- ◆ Are monogamous
- ◆ Feeds at dusk and dawn while in flight on flying insects by funnelling with forward-facing feathers that surround their mouth
- ◆ Young are fed regurgitated food

## Habitat:

- ◆ Prefers open areas with low ground vegetation and plenty of flying insects, such as forest openings, grasslands, bogs, rock outcroppings and gravel rooftops
- ◆ Overwinters in South America (Peru, Ecuador and Brazil) returning mid-May

Species at Risk  
STEWARDS' GUIDE SERIES

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### Common Nighthawk on Your Property? *Here's What You Can Do:*

- ◆ **Don't disturb nests, young or adults.** Be respectful and observe from a distance.
- ◆ **Please keep your cats and dogs indoors.** Cats are particularly hard on ground nesting birds like the Common Nighthawk.
- ◆ **Appreciate flying insects.** Flying insects like moths and beetles are an important component of the ecosystem, becoming food for a wide variety of birds and other animals.
- ◆ **Support sustainable forestry practices when you purchase wood products.** Look for the FSC logo.
- ◆ **See or hear a Common Nighthawk close by?** Submit your sighting to the Natural Heritage Information Centre at [nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/nhic/species/species\\_report.cfm](http://nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/nhic/species/species_report.cfm). Photographs with specific locations or mapping coordinates are always helpful.
- ◆ **Contact the Ministry of Natural Resources.** If you find a Common Nighthawk or a nest on your property, you may be eligible for stewardship programs that support the protection and recovery of species at risk and their habitats. Contact the MNR for more information.
- ◆ **Learn More.** Check out the Species at Risk section on the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources website at [www.mnr.gov.on.ca](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca).



Nest & Eggs  
Photo: Ted Krug



Photo: USFWS

### Ontario's *Endangered Species Act*

Ontario's *Endangered Species Act, 2007* came into force on June 30, 2008, making Ontario a North American leader in the protection of species at risk and their habitats.

Compared to Ontario's previous Act, written in 1971, the new ESA 2007 provides:

- ◆ Science-based assessment of species' status
- ◆ Automatic protection of a species and its habitat once it's listed as endangered or threatened
- ◆ Broader protection for species at risk and their habitats
- ◆ Greater support for volunteer stewardship efforts of private landowners, resource users, and conservation organizations
- ◆ A commitment to recovery of species through recovery planning
- ◆ Greater accountability, including government reporting requirements

Ontario is home to more than 30,000 species, most of which have stable populations.

However, more than 180 species in Ontario, 34 of which are found in Parry Sound-Muskoka, are currently considered "at risk" because of threats like:

- ◆ Habitat loss
- ◆ Global changes in insect populations
- ◆ Pollution
- ◆ Invasive species
- ◆ Climate change
- ◆ Over-harvesting
- ◆ Road mortality



Learn more about Species at Risk on the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources website at [www.mnr.gov.on.ca](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca).