

Species Status Assessment

Common Name: Common Nighthawk **Date Updated:** March 3, 2025
Scientific Name: *Chordeiles minor* **Updated By:** MDP
Class: Aves
Family: Caprimulgidae

Species Synopsis

(a short paragraph which describes species taxonomy, distribution, recent trends, and habitat in New York):

Nine subspecies of common nighthawk have been recognized based on plumage color and size. Habitats include mountains and plains in open and semi-open areas: open coniferous forests, savanna, grasslands, fields, vicinity of cities and towns. In New York, populations seem to be concentrated in urban areas where rooftops are presumably used for nesting, and also in areas of the state with open barrens habitat including Fort Drum, eastern Long Island, and eastern Clinton County. Range-wide trends and New York trends show severe population declines, both short-term and long-term.

I. Status

a. Current legal protected Status

i. Federal: **Candidate:**
ii. New York: Special Concern

b. Natural Heritage Program

i. Global: G5
ii. New York: S2S3B **Tracked by NYNHP?** On Active Tracking List

Other Ranks:

Proposed NYS 2025 SGCN status: High Priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need
COSEWIC: Special Concern
IUCN Red List: Least Concern
Northeast Regional SGCN: Watchlist [Assessment Priority]

Status Discussion:

Common nighthawk is a widespread but localized breeder in New York. It is a common to abundant migrant in the fall, though less numerous in the spring.

II. Abundance and Distribution Trends

Region	Present ?	Abundance	Distribution	Time Frame	Listing status or S-Rank	SGCN?
North America	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend for US		
Northeastern US	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend		Watchlist [Assessment Priority]
New York	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	SC	
Connecticut	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	S1B	
Massachusetts	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	S2B,S5M	
New Jersey	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	S3B,S4N	
Pennsylvania	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	S3B,S4M	

Region	Present ?	Abundance	Distribution	Time Frame	Listing status or S-Rank	SGCN?
Vermont	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	S1B	
Ontario	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	S4B	
Quebec	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	S3B	

Column options

Present?: Yes; No; Unknown; No data; (blank) or Choose an Item

Abundance and Distribution: Declining; Increasing; Stable; Unknown; Extirpated; N/A; (blank) or Choose an item

SGCN?: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item

Monitoring in New York

(specify any monitoring activities or regular surveys that are conducted in New York):

Standardized methodology has been developed for nightjars, though that methodology may not be well suited for common nighthawk because of its more crepuscular nature and prevalence in urban areas where driving routes may prove difficult.

Trends Discussion

(insert map of North American/regional distribution and status):

Breeding range map for Common Nighthawk

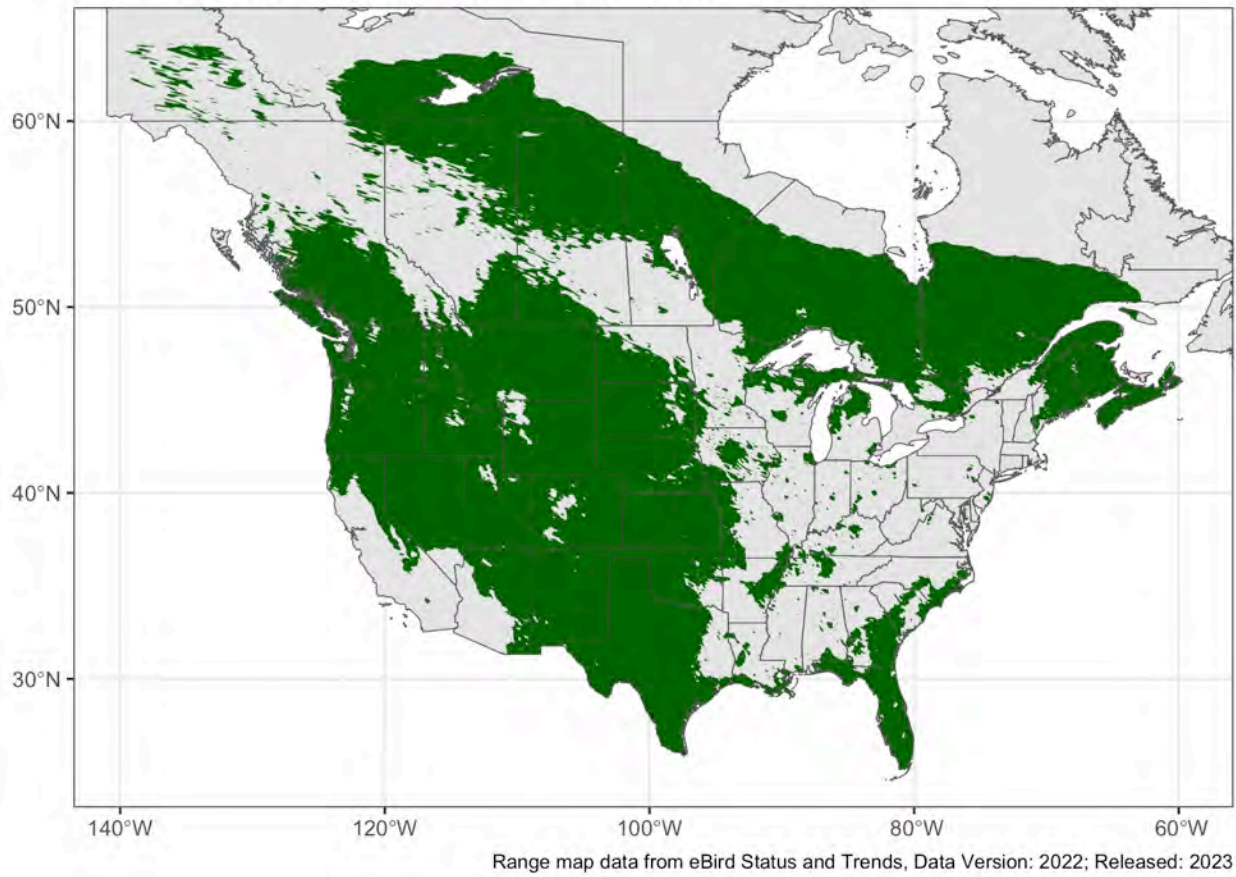
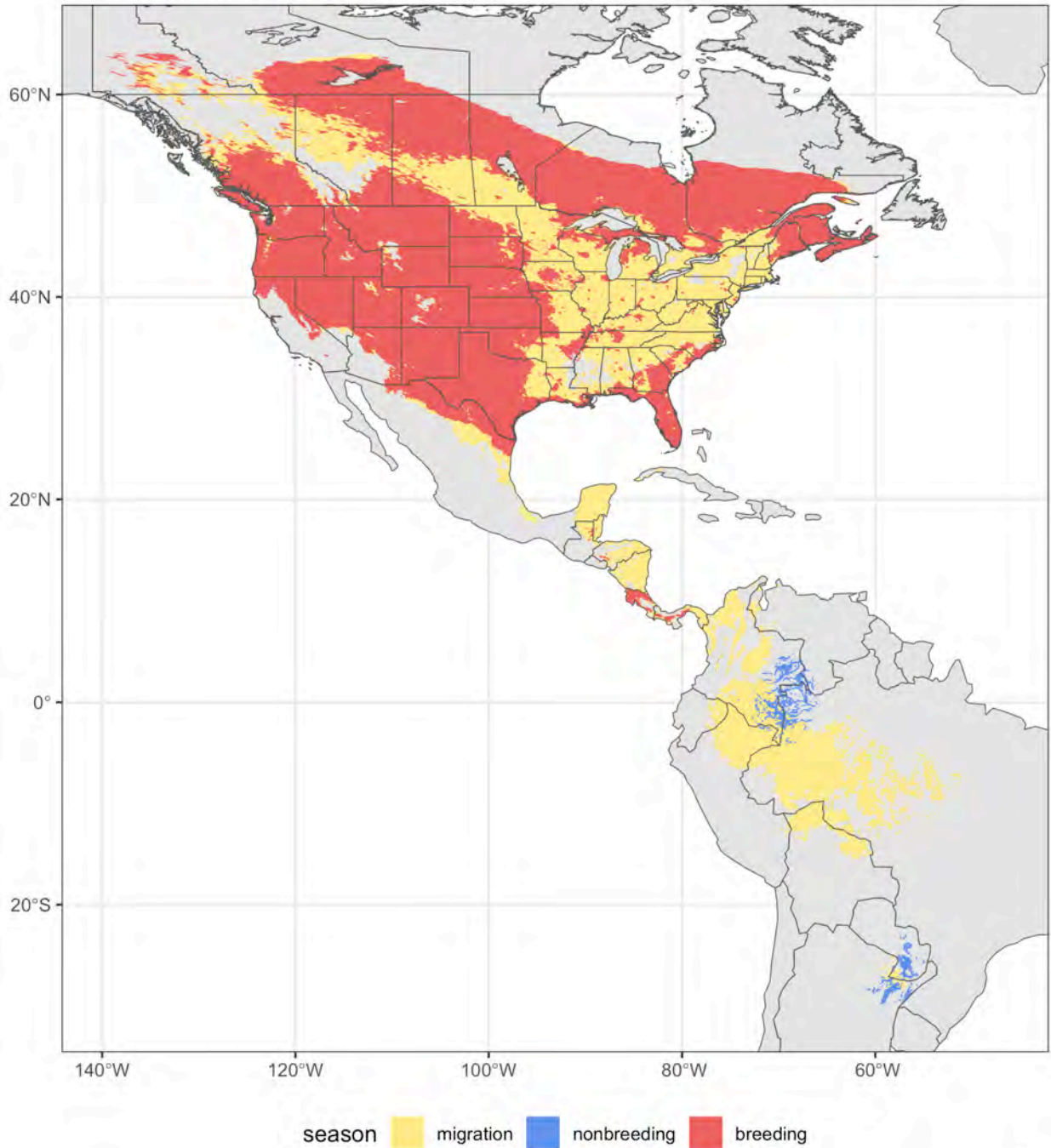


Figure 1: Breeding range of common nighthawk (eBird).

Year-round range map for Common Nighthawk



Range map data from eBird Status and Trends, Data Version: 2022; Released: 2023

Figure 2: Full (year-round) range of common nighthawk (eBird).

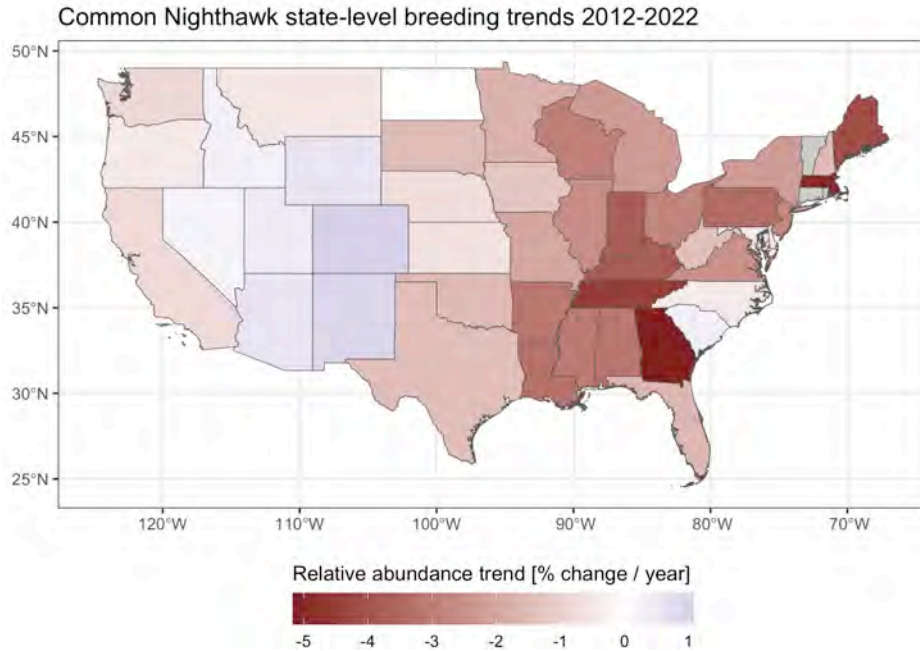


Figure 3: Trends, by state, of common nighthawk (eBird).

III. New York Rarity

(provide map, numbers, and percent of state occupied)

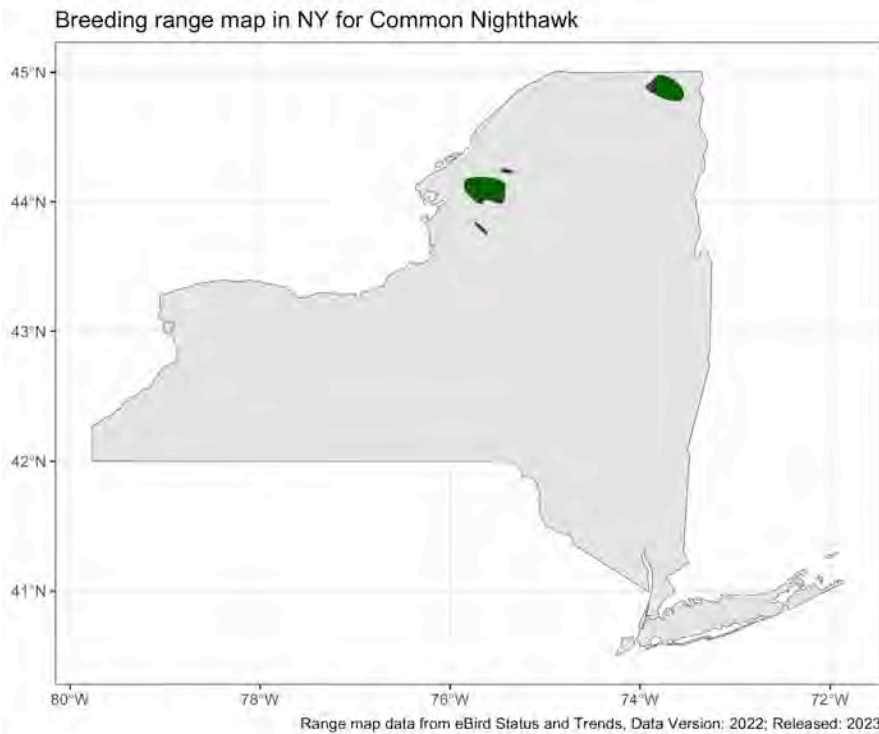


Figure 4: NYS breeding range for common nighthawk (eBird).

Details of historic and current occurrence:

The first Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) (1980-85) documented occupancy in 477 blocks, 8.9% of the survey blocks statewide (Andrle and Carroll 1988). The second BBA (2000-05) documented occupancy in 138 blocks, 2.6% of the survey blocks statewide (McGowan and Corwin 2008).

The third BBA (2020-25) is currently underway and utilizes a different number and layout of survey blocks across New York, making direct comparison with the first two Atlases difficult. There were 5,333 blocks in the first and second BBAs, and there are 5,710 blocks in the current BBA, of which 1,815 are considered priority blocks. To date, common nighthawk has been documented in 112 priority blocks, 2.5% of all priority blocks statewide during the third BBA (NY BBA III Overview, 2024).

New York’s Contribution to Species North American Range:

Based on eBird data, 0.01 percent of the population breeds in New York, while 0 percent of the non-breeding population occurs in New York. Among all states with breeding populations, New York ranks 38 of 38.

Percent of North American Range in NY	Classification of NY Range	Distance to core population, if not in NY
1-25%		

Column options

Percent of North American Range in NY: 100% (endemic); 76-99%; 51-75%; 26-50% 1-25%; 0%; Choose an item

Classification of NY Range: Core; Peripheral; Disjunct; (blank) or Choose an item

IV. Primary Habitat or Community Type

(from NY crosswalk of NE Aquatic, Marine, or Terrestrial Habitat Classification Systems):

NatureServe broad habitat types: Savanna, Shrubland/chaparral, Cropland/hedgerow, Grassland/herbaceous, Old field, Woodland - Conifer, Suburban/orchard, Aerial, Aerial, Aerial

NY Natural Heritage Communities: Dwarf pine plains, Pitch pine-scrub oak barrens, Post oak-blackjack oak barrens, Urban structure exterior, Brushy cleared land, Cropland/field crops, Pine barrens shrub swamp, Maritime dunes, Maritime shrubland, Oak openings, Successional old field

Habitat or Community Type Trend in New York

Habitat Specialist?	Indicator Species?	Habitat/ Community Trend	Time frame of Decline/ Increase
Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Column options

Habitat Specialist and Indicator Species: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Habitat/Community Trend: Declining; Stable; Increasing; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Habitat Discussion:

Common Nighthawks are found in natural open habitats and urban areas. In its natural habitat, this species can be found foraging in open areas near wetlands or wooded areas. Eggs are laid on the ground without any nesting materials in open areas (Brigham et al. 2020). Breeding season habitats includes gravel bars, rock outcrops, forest clearings, open pine woods, coastal sand dunes, beaches, and sparsely vegetated grasslands. In urban areas, this species nests on gravel roofs. They can be observed early mornings and evenings foraging over cities during the breeding season and during migration.

Habitats include mountains and plains in open and semi-open areas: open coniferous forests, savanna, grasslands, fields, vicinity of cities and towns. Nesting occurs on the ground on a bare site in an open area. In some areas, this species also nests on flat gravel roofs of buildings, perhaps related to prey availability at artificial lights. It prefers areas with sandy soil in the southern United States.

V. Species Demographics and Life History

Breeder in NY?	Non-breeder in NY?	Migratory Only?	Summer Resident?	Winter Resident?	Anadromous/Catadromous?
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

Column options

First 5 fields: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Anadromous/Catadromous: Anadromous; Catadromous; (blank) or Choose an item.

Species Demographics and Life History Discussion

(include information about species life span, reproductive longevity, reproductive capacity, age to maturity, and ability to disperse and colonize):

Interspecifically territorial toward the Antillean nighthawk in the Florida Keys (Ehrlich et al. 1992).

VI. Threats

Threat Level 1	Threat Level 2	Threat Level 3	Spatial Extent	Severity	Immediacy	Trend	Certainty
1. Residential and Commercial	1.1 Housing & Urban Areas	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
9. Pollution	9.2 Industrial & Military Effluents	9.3.3 Herbicides & pesticides	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
8. Invasive & Other Problematic Species	8.2 Problematic Native Plants & Animals	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
7. Natural System Modifications	7.1 Fire & Fire Suppression	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
7. Natural System Modifications	7.3 Other Ecosystem Modifications	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.

Table 1. Threats to common nighthawk.

Are there regulatory mechanisms that protect the species or its habitat in New York?

Yes: ✓ **No:** **Unknown:**

If yes, describe mechanism and whether adequate to protect species/habitat:

This species is included in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703-712) and is protected as a native species under the NYS Environmental Conservation Law. It also receives additional protections as a species listed as Special Concern in New York State.

Describe knowledge of management/conservation actions that are needed for recovery/conservation, or to eliminate, minimize, or compensate for the identified threats:

Action Category	Action	Description
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.3 Mitigate human environmental impact	A.1.3.3 Remove and improve anthropogenic infrastructure
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.1 Manage plants, animals, fungi, or bacteria (A.1.1.6 Chemical Management – animals).	A.1.1.6.5 Insecticides, acaricides, and products used to control other terrestrial arthropods
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.2 Manage non-living habitat components	A.1.2.2 Manage fire regime
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.1 Manage plants, animals, fungi, or bacteria	Manage for young forests and early successional species.

Table 3. Recommended conservation actions for *common nighthawk*.

VII. References

This SSA drew heavily from these resources:

eBird. 2024. eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Available: <http://www.ebird.org>. [Accessed: 11/25/2024].

Ziolkowski Jr., D.J., Lutmerding, M., English, W.B., and Hudson, M-A.R., 2024, North American Breeding Bird Survey Dataset 1966 - 2023: U.S. Geological Survey data release, <https://doi.org/10.5066/P136CRBV>.

New York Natural Heritage Program, State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. 2024. Element Occurrence and Element Dataset. Albany, New York. [Exported 11/20/2024].

NatureServe. 2024. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. [Accessed 11/20/2024].

Additional references:

American Ornithologists' Union (AOU). 1983. Check-list of North American Birds, 6th edition. Allen Press, Inc., Lawrence, Kansas. 877 pp.

Andrle, Robert F. and Janet R. Carroll, editors. 1988. The atlas of breeding birds in New York State. Cornell University Press. 551 pp.

Brigham, R. M., J. Ng, R. G. Poulin, and S. D. Grindal. 2020. Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (A. F. Poole, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.comnig.01>

Bull, John. 1974. *Birds of New York State*. Doubleday, Garden City, New York. 655 pp.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology. 2019. All About Birds: Common Nighthawk. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common_Nighthawk/overview Accessed on [June 23, 2021].

Dickerman, R. W. 1990. Geographic variation in the juvenal plumage of the common nighthawk (*CHORDEILES MINOR*) in North America. *Auk* 107:610-613.

Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1992. *Birds in Jeopardy: the Imperiled and Extinct Birds of the United States and Canada, Including Hawaii and Puerto Rico*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California. 259 pp.

Gross, A. O. (1940). "Eastern Nighthawk." In *Life histories of North American cuckoos, goatsuckers, hummingbirds, and their allies.*, edited by A. C. Bent, 206-234. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 176.

Harrison, C. 1978. *A Field Guide to the Nests, Eggs and Nestlings of North American Birds*. Collins, Cleveland, Ohio.

Hilty, S.L. and W. L. Brown. 1986. *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, USA. 836 pp.

Jordan, M. J., W. A. Patterson III, A. G. Windisch. 2003. Conceptual ecological models for the Long Island pitch pine barrens: implications for managing rare plant communities. *Forest Ecology and Management* 185, 151-168.

Levine, E. 1998. *Bull's birds of New York State*. Comstock Publishing Associates, Ithaca, NY.

Marzilli, V. (1989). Up on the roof. *Maine Fish and Wildlife* 31:25-29.

McGowan, K.J. and K. Corwin, eds. 2008. *The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State: 2000-2005*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. 688 pp.

Medler, Matthew D. 2008. Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*). In *The second atlas of breeding birds in New York State* (K.J. McGowan and K. Corwin, eds.). Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. 2015. *New Hampshire wildlife action plan*. Appendix A: Birds. 371 pp.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. *Checklist of the amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals of New York State, including their protective status*. Nongame Unit, Wildlife Resources Center, Delmar, NY.

Poulin, R. G., S. D. Grindel and R. M. Brigham. 1996. Common nighthawk; *The Birds of North America*. Vol. 6, No. 213. American Ornithologists' Union. The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

Raffaele, H. A. 1983a. *A guide to the birds of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands*. Fondo Educativo Interamericano, San Juan, Puerto Rico. 255 pp.

Sauer, J.R., J.E. Hines, and J. Fallon. 2007. *The North American breeding bird survey, results and analysis 1966-2006*. Version 10.13.2007. US Geological Survey, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD.

Stevenson, H. M., et al. 1983. Notes on common and Antillean nighthawks of the Florida Keys. *Auk* 100:983-988.

Stiles, F. G. and A. F. Skutch. 1989. *A guide to the birds of Costa Rica*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, USA. 511 pp.

Terres, J. K. 1980. *The Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York.