

Natural. Valued. Protected.

Whip-poor-will (*Caprimulgus vociferus*)

The Whip-poor-will is a medium-sized bird 22 to 26 centimetres long with mottled brown and grey feathers that help it blend in with its surroundings. Since it becomes active at dusk and rests during the day, it is more commonly heard than seen.

Whip-poor-wills are most vocal during bright, moonlit nights when they can be heard singing their name “Whip-poor-will” often in long, seemingly endless series.



Did you know?

Whip-poor-will chicks seem to hatch near full moons, giving parents more light for foraging so they can supply the extra energy demands of their rapidly-growing brood.

The Whip-poor-will is very difficult to survey and monitor. Most bird surveys are completed during the day and Whip-poor-wills only call at dusk and on cloudless, nights. As a result, this species requires special surveying effort.

Habitat

The Whip-poor-will is usually found in areas with a mix of open and forested areas, such as savannahs, open woodlands or openings in more mature, deciduous, coniferous and mixed forests. It forages in these open areas and uses forested areas for roosting (resting and sleeping) and nesting. It lays its eggs directly on the forest floor, where its colouring means it will easily remain undetected by visual predators.

Range

The Whip-poor-will's breeding range includes two widely separate areas. It breeds throughout much of eastern North America, reaching as far north as southern Canada and also from the southwest United States to Honduras. In Canada, the Whip-poor-will can be found from east-central Saskatchewan to central Nova Scotia and in Ontario they breed as far north as the shore of Lake Superior.

Although Whip-poor-wills were once widespread throughout the central Great Lakes region of Ontario, their distribution in this area is now fragmented. The Whip-poor-will migrates to Mexico and Central America, where it stays throughout the cold Canadian winter.

Threats

Although there is some uncertainty surrounding the decline of the Whip-poor-will, the main threat to the species is likely habitat loss and degradation. The habitat loss is a result of natural changes when open fields and thickets become closed forest in the north, and intensive agriculture in the south.

Additional threats include car mortalities and changes in food supply related to pesticides. Nest predators, including feral cats, are likely a threat in the highly populated southwest part of the province.

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Protection

The Whip-poor-will is a threatened species and receives automatic species protection under Ontario's *Endangered Species Act, 2007*. General habitat protection also protects the species' habitat from damage and destruction. A recovery strategy and a species-specific habitat regulation are being developed.

The Whip-poor-will was assessed as a threatened species nationally by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).

Status: threatened provincially and designated threatened federally

What you can do to help the Whip-poor-will

- Volunteer with a local nature club, stewardship council or Provincial Park to participate in surveys or stewardship work focused on species at risk. www.ontariostewardship.org
- As with all wildlife, don't disturb nests, young or adults. Be respectful and observe from a distance.
- The Ministry of Natural Resources tracks species at risk such as the Whip-poor-will. You can use an online form to report your sightings to the Natural Heritage Information Centre. Photographs with specific locations or mapping coordinates are always helpful!
http://nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/species/species_report.cfm

- Report any illegal activity related to plants and wildlife to 1-877-TIPS-MNR (847-7667).
- Private landowners have a very important role to play in Whip-poor-will's recovery. If you find Whip-poor-will 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. For more information contact the Ministry of Natural Resources.
- Bird Studies Canada is working to advance the understanding, appreciation and conservation of wild birds and their habitat, in Ontario and elsewhere. For more information on how you can help, visit: <http://www.bsc-eoc.org>

For additional information:

Visit the species at risk website at ontario.ca/speciesatrisk

Contact your MNR district office

Contact the Natural Resources Information Centre
1-800-667-1940

TTY 1-866-686-6072

mnr.nric.mnr@ontario.ca

ontario.ca/mnr

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Did you know?

In an attempt to discourage predators, adults fake injuries and lead predators away from the nest.

The Whip-poor-will has large, well adapted eyes for seeing at night when they are active and are looking for food.