

**Ontario Species at Risk Evaluation Report for  
Common Nighthawk  
Engoulevent d'Amérique  
(*Chordeiles minor*)**

Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario  
(COSSARO)

Assessed by COSSARO as Special Concern

September 2020

## Engoulevent d'Amérique (*Chordeiles minor*)

L'engoulevent d'Amérique est un membre de la famille des engoulevents connu pour ses cris nasillards pînt et des piqués à plein régime de sa parade nuptiale. Il se reproduit dans une grande variété d'habitats qui offrent des aires ouvertes pour s'alimenter en vol et un sol dénudé près d'une zone ombragée pour nidifier. La physiologie et le cycle de vie de l'engoulevent d'Amérique sont étroitement liés à la disponibilité des insectes volants. L'espèce, présente presque partout en Ontario, affiche ses plus fortes densités dans le sud et le nord-ouest de la province.

L'évaluation que le CDSEPO a faite de l'engoulevent d'Amérique le classe dans la catégorie des espèces préoccupantes, puisqu'il ne répond à aucun des critères des espèces en voie de disparition ou menacées. Cette espèce connaît toutefois un déclin depuis une vingtaine d'années, déclin moindre mais continu au cours de la dernière décennie. Cette évaluation concorde avec la classification fédérale de cette espèce par le COSEPAC (2018).

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## Executive summary

Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*) is a member of the nightjar family and is known for its nasal *peent* calls and booming courtship dives. It breeds in a wide variety of habitats that provide open areas for foraging in flight, and bare ground with nearby shade for nesting. Common Nighthawk physiology and life history are strongly linked to the availability of flying insects. It occurs across much of Ontario with highest densities in the south and northwest.

Widespread threats that may have an important impact include reduced abundance of aerial insects due to effects of agricultural and other pesticides, changes in precipitation and hydrological regimes, changes in temperature regimes, and increasing frequency of severe or extreme weather events. Several other threats have been proposed but appear to be less severe or affect only a small proportion of the population (COSEWIC, 2018). The highest threats relate to the availability of aerial insect food where one third of monitored insect populations are declining due to alterations in habitat, pesticide use and climate change (COSEWIC, 2018).

Common Nighthawk is classified by COSSARO as Special Concern as it does not meet any of the criteria for Endangered or Threatened. However, this species has experienced declines over the last 20 years, with reduced but continued declines over the last decade. This classification is consistent with the federal classification of this species by COSEWIC (2018).

# 1. Eligibility for Ontario status assessment

## 1.1. Eligibility conditions

### 1.1.1. Taxonomic distinctness

Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*) is recognized as a distinct taxon. There are three subspecies that are recognized in Canada: the widespread *Chordeiles minor minor*, the greyer *C. m. hesperis* found from southeastern British Columbia east to southwestern Saskatchewan, and the pale *C.m.sennetti* of southern Saskatchewan and southern Manitoba. Variation in Canadian birds has not been studied, and the distribution of each subspecies is not thoroughly understood. Differences in plumage and morphology across these subspecies throughout the U.S. appear to be continuous and a comparison of nuclear and mitochondrial DNA showed no clear genetic differences across the subspecies (COSEWIC, 2018).

### 1.1.2. Designatable units

There is no evidence for discrete genetic or morphological differences among Common Nighthawk in Canada and therefore is treated as one designatable unit (COSEWIC, 2018).

### 1.1.3. Native status

Common Nighthawk is native to Ontario with earliest records dating back to the early 1900s (Cadman *et al.*, 2007).

### 1.1.4. Occurrence

Common Nighthawk is known to occur in Ontario where it breeds (COSEWIC, 2018).

## 1.2. Eligibility results

Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*) is eligible for status assessment in Ontario.

# 2. Background information

## 2.1. Current designations

- GRANK: G5 (NatureServe 2020)
- IUCN: LC (September 2020)
- NRANK Canada: N4B, N3M
- COSEWIC: Special Concern (April 2018)
- SARA: Threatened (Schedule 1)
- ESA 2007: Special Concern

- SRANK: S4B (ranked in 2009)

## 2.2. Distribution in Ontario

Common Nighthawk occurs across much of Ontario with highest densities in the south and northwest (Cadman *et al.*, 2007).

The number of locations in Canada was assumed by COSEWIC (2018) to greatly exceed 10, and the same logic can be applied to Ontario based on the number of occurrences that have been documented by NHIC (NHIC, 2020). The Estimated Area of Occurrence and Index of Area of Occupancy for Common Nighthawk in Ontario is assumed to exceed the relevant thresholds of 20 000 km<sup>2</sup> and 2 000 km<sup>2</sup> respectively, and therefore was not calculated here (Cadman *et al.* 2007; COSEWIC 2018).

## 2.3. Distribution, broader biologically relevant geographic range and status outside Ontario

Common Nighthawk breeds across Canada, as far north as central Yukon and southwestern Northwest Territories in the west, and slightly north of the Boreal Shield in the east. It breeds throughout the contiguous United States and locally south into Central America. It winters in South America, mainly in the lowlands east of the Andes Mountains.

All adjacent jurisdictions to Ontario have extant populations of Common Nighthawk where some are experiencing population declines where others are experiencing an increase in population. This species is a long-distance migrant making its entire global range biologically relevant.

## 2.4. Ontario conservation responsibility

The species' population in Canada, based on Breeding Bird Survey results is estimated at 900,000 adults, which is ten percent of the global population of Common Nighthawks (Environment Canada, 2016). Due to its wide range of occupancy, Ontario has a low conservation responsibility of less than 1% of the global range.

## 2.5. Direct threats

Widespread threats that may have an important impact include reduced abundance of aerial insects due to effects of agricultural and other pesticides, changes in precipitation and hydrological regimes, changes in temperature regimes, and increasing frequency of severe or extreme weather events (COSEWIC, 2018). Several other threats have been proposed but appear to be less severe or affect only a small proportion of the population. The highest threats relate to the availability of aerial insect food where one third of monitored insect populations are declining due to alterations in habitat, pesticide use and climate change (COSEWIC, 2018).

## 2.6. Specialized life history or habitat use characteristics

Common Nighthawk is a member of the nightjar family, roughly the size of American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*), but with longer, pointed wings, and a more slender and elongated build (COSEWIC, 2018). It is often observed on wing, hawking insects at dusk and dawn. Its loud, nasal *peent* calls, spectacular booming courtship dives, and erratic flight make this a reasonably familiar bird (COSEWIC, 2018; Brigham *et al.*, 2020).

Common Nighthawk breeds in a wide variety of habitats that provide open areas for foraging in flight, and bare ground with nearby shade, for nesting (COSEWIC, 2018). Breeding habitat includes open forests, especially those with cuts, burns, or rock outcrops, prairie with short grass or bare patches, dry bogs, rocky areas, sandy coastal habitats, and settled areas that resemble the natural areas mentioned above, such as railways, gravel roads, airports, cultivated fields, orchards, parks, urban areas with gravel roofs, oil-well pads, and pipelines. In boreal regions, outcrops and post-burn habitats may provide important nesting areas.

Ground nesters like Common Nighthawks are especially susceptible to predators like skunks, opossums, and raccoons. They do not make nest *per se* but usually lays eggs directly on the ground; the cryptic plumage of this species makes nesting birds difficult to see (Brigham *et al.*, 2020). Common Nighthawk can breed by its second year. It has an average clutch size of 1-2 eggs and raises one brood per year. The limited data available suggest that it lives for 4-5 years on average, with a generation time of about 2-3 years. Survival and reproduction are thought to be constrained by the availability of flying insects on which they feed. Nests can fail due to hot or cold temperature extremes, flooding, or predation. Nesting success is particularly hard to estimate in this species, because the altricial chicks often move away from the nest.

Common Nighthawk physiology and life history are strongly linked to the availability of flying insects (COSEWIC, 2019). This is particularly true during peaks in energy needs, such as chick-rearing and migration, when a change in insect availability, or in the timing of peaks in insect abundance, can have a disproportionate effect on energy budgets. The timing of these periods is particularly important in this species, because its long-distance migration restricts it to a relatively short breeding season. Also, while many nightjars are able to go into torpor to survive periods of scarce food or cold weather, Common Nighthawks rarely do so.

## 3. Ontario status assessment

### 3.1. Application of endangered/threatened status in Ontario

### 3.1.1. Criterion A – Decline in total number of mature individuals

Does not apply. Reduction of total numbers of mature individuals not greater or equal to 50%. The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas estimates an annual rate of change of -2.4% (CI: -3.7 to -1.2), i.e., a 38% decline overall, between 1981-85 and 2001-2005 for the Canadian population (Cadman *et al.*, 2007). Numbers declined by 68% between 1970 and 2015, and the rate of decline has slowed appreciably to 12% over the 10-year period between 2005-2015 (COSEWIC, 2018).

Population trend estimates based on Breeding Bird Survey data for Ontario suggest a short-term rate of change in annual index scores of 0.195 (CI: -10.6 to 16.9) (Smith *et al.* 2019, Figure 5), corresponding to a 1.95% increase in population size between 2007 and 2017. However, the overall reliability of the short-term data is considered as low. Long-term annual trends for the period 1970-2017 are estimated at -1.68% (CI: -3.98 to 1.19) and are assigned an overall reliability of medium.

### 3.1.2. Criterion B – Small distribution range and decline or fluctuation

Does not apply. EOO is well over 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> (623,822 km<sup>2</sup> using GeoCat and NHIC observations). IAO is well over 2,000 km<sup>2</sup> (5,502 km<sup>2</sup> see Appendix 1).

### 3.1.3. Criterion C – Small and declining number of mature individuals

Does not apply. Total number of mature individuals exceeds thresholds. Conservative estimate of Canadian population is 270,000 individuals (Haché *et al.*, 2014; COSEWIC, 2018). Based on the Canadian distribution, the Ontario population is estimated at 38,880 individuals (see Appendix 1). eBird has documented over 12,372 observations. iNaturalist has documented 3,610 individuals.

### 3.1.4. Criterion D – Very small or restricted total population

Does not apply. Total number of mature individuals exceeds thresholds per above.

### 3.1.5. Criterion E – Quantitative analysis

Does not apply. Analysis not completed.

## 3.2. Application of Special Concern in Ontario

No criteria for Threatened or Endangered were met. However, the Canadian population of Common Nighthawk has experienced long-term decline and a 12% decline over the 10-year period between 2005-2015 has been observed (COSEWIC, 2018). The causes of decline are not well known but include threats that reduce numbers of aerial insects attributed to agricultural and other pesticides, changes in precipitation, temperature and hydrological regimes. An increasing frequency of severe or extreme weather events is also likely affecting this species.

### 3.3. Status category modifiers

#### 3.3.1. Ontario's conservation responsibility

Does not apply. Due to its wide range of occupancy, Ontario has a low conservation responsibility of less than 1% of the global range.

#### 3.3.2. Status modification based on rescue effect

Does not apply.

### 3.4. Other status categories

#### 3.4.1. Data deficient

Does not apply.

#### 3.4.2. Extinct or extirpated

Does not apply.

#### 3.4.3. Not at risk

Does not apply.

## 4. Summary of Ontario status

Common Nighthawk is classified as Special Concern in Ontario as it does not meet any of the criteria for Endangered or Threatened. However, the species has experienced declines over the last 20 years, with reduced but continued declines over the last decade. This assessment is consistent with that of COSEWIC (2018) for this species.

This status of this species is consistent with the definition of Special Concern under the Endangered Species Act, 2007.

## 5. Information sources

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## Appendix 1: Technical summary for Ontario

Species: Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*)

### Demographic information

Demographic attribute	Value
Generation time. Based on average age of breeding adult: age at first breeding = X year; average life span = Y years.	2-3 years
Is there an observed, inferred, or projected continuing decline in number of mature individuals?	Unknown
Estimated percent of continuing decline in total number of mature individuals within 5 years or 2 generations.	Estimated 1.17% increase over 2 generations (6 years) based on Smith et al. (2019).
Observed, estimated, inferred, or suspected percent reduction or increase in total number of mature individuals over the last 10 years or 3 generations.	BBS data suggest a 1.95% increase in population size between 2007 and 2017 (CI limits: -106% to +169%).
Projected or suspected percent reduction or increase in total number of mature individuals over the next 10 years or 3 generations.	Unknown
Observed, estimated, inferred, or suspected percent reduction or increase in total number of mature individuals over any 10 years, or 3 generations, over a time period including both the past and the future.	Unknown
Are the causes of the decline (a) clearly reversible, and (b) understood, and (c) ceased?	a. Unknown b. No c. Unknown
Are there extreme fluctuations in number of mature individuals?	No

### Extent and occupancy information in Ontario

Extent and occupancy attributes	Value
Estimated extent of occurrence (EOO). <i>If value in COSEWIC status report is not applicable, then use <a href="http://geocat.kew.org">geocat.kew.org</a>. State source of estimate.</i>	623,821.52 km <sup>2</sup> (calculated from NHIC occurrence data).
Index of area of occupancy (IAO). <i>If value in COSEWIC status report is not applicable, then use <a href="http://geocat.kew.org">geocat.kew.org</a>. State source of estimate.</i>	Canadian population estimated at 270,000

Extent and occupancy attributes	Value
	adults (COSEWIC, 2018; Haché <i>et al.</i> , 2014). Ontario's population represents 14.4% of the national population (Haché <i>et al.</i> , 2014) which is approximately 38,880 individuals (19,440 pairs). Based on average territory size of 28.3 ha (COSEWIC, 2007) and the estimated minimum provincial population of 19,440 pairs, this represents an IAO of 5,502 km <sup>2</sup> .
Is the total population severely fragmented? i.e., is >50% of its total area of occupancy is in habitat patches that are: (a) smaller than would be required to support a viable population, and (b) separated from other habitat patches by a distance larger than the species can be expected to disperse?	a. No b. No
Number of locations. <i>See Definitions and Abbreviations on COSEWIC and IUCN websites for more information on the term "location". Use plausible range to reflect uncertainty if appropriate.</i>	Unknown, but far greater than the threshold of 10 locations
Number of NHIC Element Occurrences <i>Request data from MNRF.</i>	NHIC as not yet created Eos for this species (MNRF pers. Comm). 60 observations in database.
Is there an observed, inferred, or projected continuing decline in extent of occurrence?	Unknown
Is there an observed, inferred, or projected continuing decline in index of area of occupancy?	Unknown
Is there an observed, inferred, or projected continuing decline in number of sub-populations or EOs?	Not applicable
Is there an observed, inferred, or projected continuing decline in number of locations?	Unknown
Is there an observed, inferred, or projected continuing decline in [area, extent and/or quality] of habitat?	Yes, inferred decline in the quality of habitat in some areas
Are there extreme fluctuations in number of populations?	Not applicable

<b>Extent and occupancy attributes</b>	<b>Value</b>
Are there extreme fluctuations in number of locations?	No
Are there extreme fluctuations in extent of occurrence?	No
Are there extreme fluctuations in index of area of occupancy?	No

Number of mature individuals in each sub-population or total population (if known)

<b>Sub-population (or total population)</b>	<b>Number of mature individuals</b>
Ontario (Ontario's population cannot be divided into sub-populations)	35,000-38,880 (PIF; Haché <i>et al.</i> , 2014)

Quantitative analysis (population viability analysis conducted)

No population viability analysis has been conducted.

## Threats

A threats calculator was completed for this species on February 14 2017 by COSEWIC. Identified threats include:

Low to High Threat Impact:

- Other ecosystem modifications – includes potential changes in insect abundance and community composition due to pesticide use. Lack of data makes it difficult to quantify this threat.

Negligible Impact:

- Residential and commercial development (Negligible)
- Agricultural (non-timber) crops, livestock farming and ranching (Negligible)
- Transportation and service corridors - roads and railroads (Negligible)
- Dams and water management and use (Negligible)
- Invasive non-native or alien species and diseases (Negligible)
- Problematic species/diseases (Negligible)
- Excess energy (light pollution) (Negligible)

Unknown Impact:

- Fire and fire suppression (Unknown)
- Agricultural and forestry effluents (Unknown)
- Air-borne pollutants (Unknown)
- Climate change and extreme weather (Unknown)

## Rescue effect and broader biologically relevant geographic range

Rescue effect attribute	Value
Does the broader biologically relevant geographic range for this species extend beyond Ontario?	Yes
Status of outside population(s) most likely to provide immigrants to Ontario	Quebec S3B, Manitoba S23B, Michigan S3, Minnesota SNRB, Nunavut S2B/SUM, New York S2S3B, Ohio S5, Pennsylvania S3S4B, Wisconsin S2S3B
Is immigration of individuals and/or propagules between Ontario and outside populations known or possible?	Yes
Would immigrants be adapted to survive in Ontario?	Yes
Is there sufficient suitable habitat for immigrants in Ontario?	Yes
Are conditions deteriorating in Ontario?	Unknown but likely
Is the species of conservation concern in bordering jurisdictions?	Yes
Is the Ontario population considered to be a sink?	No
Is rescue from outside populations likely?	Yes – likely from adjacent states/provinces. However, populations in all states bordering Ontario are experiencing declines

## Sensitive species

Not a data sensitive species.

## Appendix 2: Broader biologically relevant geographic range

Information regarding rank and decline for Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*)

Adjacent Jurisdictions	Biologically Relevant to Ontario (n/a, yes, no)	Status & Trends	Condition	Notes & Sources
Ontario	Yes	S4B	<p>Annual trend of 0.195 from 2007-2017 (CI: -10.6 to 16.9)</p> <p>Annual trend of -1.56 from 2007-2017 (CI: -8.38 to 26.3)</p>	<p>COSEWIC, 2018, Sauer <i>et al.</i>, 2017</p> <p>Smith et al. (2019)</p> <p><a href="https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/">https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/</a></p>
Quebec	Yes	S3B	<p>Annual trend of 2.56% from 2007-2017 (CI: -6.89 to 35.15)</p> <p>Annual trend of -1.7% from 1966-2017 (CI: -5.7 to 3.4)</p> <p>Annual trend of 1.15% from 2007-2017 (CI: -13.9 to 25.7)</p>	<p>Smith et al. (2019)</p> <p><a href="https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/">https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/</a></p>
Manitoba	Yes	S2S3B	<p>Annual trend of -3.68% from 2007-2017 (CI: -11.8 to 6.49)</p> <p>Annual trend of -4.4% from 1966-2017 (CI: -7.1 to -1.5)</p> <p>Annual trend of -3.91% from 2007</p>	<p>Smith et al. (2019)</p> <p><a href="https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/">https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/">https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/</a></p>

Adjacent Jurisdictions	Biologically Relevant to Ontario (n/a, yes, no)	Status & Trends	Condition	Notes & Sources
			-2017 (CI: -10.03 to 3.36)	
Michigan	Yes	S3	<p>Annual trend of -3.7% from 1966-2017 (CI: -5.4 to -2.1)</p> <p>Annual trend of -3.96% from 2007-2017 (CI: -9.51 to -0.25)</p>	<a href="https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/">https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/</a>
Minnesota	Yes	SNRB	<p>Annual trend of -4.1% from 1966 to 2017</p> <p>Annual trend of -5.16% from 2007-2017 (CI: -16.11 to 4.58)</p>	<a href="https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/">https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/</a>
Nunavut	Yes	S2B, SUM	unknown	
New York	Yes	S2S3B	<p>Annual trend of -3.7% from 1966-2017 (CI: -6.7 to 0.2)</p> <p>Annual trend of -2.2% from 2007-2017 (CI: -12.29 to 18.77)</p>	<a href="https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/">https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/</a>
Ohio	Yes	S5	<p>Annual trend of -3.2% from 1966-2017 (CI: -6.3 to 0.1)</p> <p>Annual trend of -2.98% from 2007-2017 (CI: -10.64 to 5.33)</p>	<a href="https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/">https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/</a>
Pennsylvania	Yes	S3S4B	<p>Annual trend of -4.7% from 1966-2017 (CI: -7.3 to -1.9)</p> <p>Annual trend of -4.92% from 2007-</p>	<a href="https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/">https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/</a>

Adjacent Jurisdictions	Biologically Relevant to Ontario (n/a, yes, no)	Status & Trends	Condition	Notes & Sources
			2017 (CI: -15.42 to 5.08)	
Wisconsin	Yes	S2S3B	Annual trend of -2.4% from 1966-2017 (CI: -3.9 to -1.1)  Annual trend of -2.93% from 2007-2017 (CI: -7.33 to 0.57)	<a href="https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/">https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/</a>

### Broader Biologically Relevant Geographic Range in Other Jurisdictions

All adjacent jurisdictions to Ontario have extant populations of Common Nighthawk and are experiencing population declines. This species is a long-distance migrant making its entire global range biologically relevant.

### Global Status and Trends

GRANK: G5 (NatureServe 2020)

IUCN: LC (September 2020)

NRANK Canada: N4B, N3M

COSEWIC: Special Concern (April 2018)

SARA: Threatened (Schedule 1)

ESA 2007: Special Concern

SRANK: S4B (ranked in 2009)

## Acronyms

COSEWIC: Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada  
COSSARO: Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario  
ESA: Endangered Species Act  
EO: Element occurrence (as defined by NHIC)  
EOO: extent of occurrence  
GRANK: global conservation status assessments  
IAO: index of area of occupancy  
IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources  
MNRF: Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry  
NHIC: Natural Heritage Information Centre  
NNR: Unranked  
NRANK: National conservation status assessment  
SARA: Species at Risk Act  
SNR: unranked  
SRANK: subnational conservation status assessment  
S1: Critically Imperiled  
S2: Imperiled  
S3: Vulnerable  
S4: Apparently Secure  
S5: Secure  
IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources  
CDSEPO: Le Comité de détermination du statut des espèces en péril en Ontario