

COMMON PAURAQUE or NIGHTJAR - NYCTIDROMUS ALBICOLLIS

Taxonomy: Kingdom: Animalia Phylum: Chordata Class: Aves Order: Caprimulgiformes Family: Caprimulgidae Genus: Nyctidromus Species: N. albicollis

Habitat:

Biomes: It is found in open woodland/grassland habitats, but also scrubland and crop fields. This species has long legs (by nightjar standards) with bare tarsi, and is more terrestrial than most of its relatives. If disturbed, it will sometimes run rather than fly, and it frequently rests on roads and tracks. In general it prefers mixed habitat which offers densely vegetated hiding places – ideally forest – for the day, as well as open landscape – perhaps even rivers or wetlands – to hunt at night.

Distribution:

In US: The breeding range of the common pauraque extends from southern Texas to the lower Paraná River region. Most populations are all-year residents, although the U.S. breeders may winter in eastern Mexico.

In Other Countries: At the southern end of its range, subspecies N. a. derbyanus ranges from central and southern Brazil into the adjacent parts of Bolivia, and through Paraguay into Argentina and Uruguay. Even the southernmost birds seem to be nonmigratory, but at the limit of its range the species is only patchily distributed

Holistic Description: A widespread nightjar throughout the American tropics, the Common Pauraque reaches the United States only in very southern Texas. It breeds in the subtropical and tropical of the New World, and except for northernmost birds it is largely resident all year round.

Species Richness: SIX SUBSPECIES

Population Dynamic: Not globally threatened, it is considered a Species of Least Concern by the IUCN. Being an adaptable species that will tolerate human disturbance of habitat well, the pauraque has actually benefited from limited deforestation. Logging creates areas of low and secondary growth in which the birds are able to hunt more efficiently. However, it will of course abandon heavily built-up or clear-cut locales, and, in addition, it is very vulnerable to predation by feral dogs and cats, disappearing from areas where these pests are abundant.

Evolution and Systematics:

Evolution: NONE

Systematics: Variation across geographic space is masked by considerable variation among individuals, as well as dichromatic plumage (color morphs) -- one a deep, warm brown to rufous, the other a distinctly gray. Plumage also varies with sex and elevation. In general, northern populations are paler and grayer, southern ones darker and redder. Darker plumage is associated with wetter environments (Griscom 1932), although its relationship with relative humidity versus absolute humidity has not been examined. Body size varies from large in northernmost and southernmost populations to small in intermediate populations.

Number of Species: SIX SUBSPECIES

Number of Genera: SIX SUBSPECIES

Physical Characteristics:

Size and Length: Length: 11.0-11.8 in (28-30 cm) Weight: 1.9 oz (53 g)

Wingspan: 24 inches

Coloration: Has two colour morphs, the plumage being variegated greyish-brown or rufous-brown. It is long-tailed and has broad rounded wings. The buff 'eyering' and 'facial stripe' contrast with the reddish sides of the face. The adult male pauraque has a white band near the wing tips, and the outer tail feathers are mainly white. The female's wing band is narrower and the white in the outer tail is more restricted.

General Body Features: Medium-sized to large nocturnal bird. Large-headed with a tiny bill. Tiny feet (rarely seen). Very well camouflaged, colored in browns, black, and gray. In flight, long, rounded wings with light bar near tip. Long, rounded tail.

Special Features of the Body: They also have forward-facing whiskers that may either help them funnel food into the mouth or protect the eyes. Due to their cryptic appearance, these birds blend perfectly into their habitat and they are very difficult to spot during the daytime, when they are usually hidden away sleeping. They are most easily detected at night when light from car headlights are reflected red from their eyes, as they are sitting on tracks or roads. However, their presence is most often made known by their loud calls given at dusk.

Special Features of the Head and Sensory Organs: The beak has evolved to be much wider than it is long, and it opens wide both - vertically as well as horizontally. The resulting big gaping mouth allows it to more easily scoop up insects in flight. Its large eyes are placed on each side of the head (laterally) - which significantly increases its visual field.

Dentition: BEAK/LAMELLAE/GIZZARD

Special Features of the Limbs and Digits: NONE

Any Special Internal Anatomy: A reflective membrane behind the retina (tapetum) enhances its vision at night by augmenting the light-gathering ability of its eyes.

Sexual Dimorphisms: The adult male has a white bar near the wing tips and his outer tail feathers are mostly white. The female's wing bars are narrower and she has much more restricted white outer tail patches. Adult female similar but throat chevron buff, wing-band narrower and buff, and white in tail reduced to tipping of inner webs of feathers.

Differences Between Juvenile Stage and Adult: Juveniles similar to adults, but plumage generally more blurred, less distinct, and white markings tinted buff and rust.

Behavior:

Diurnal, Nocturnal, or Crepuscular: Nocturnal

Activity: The pauraque is nocturnal, like other nightjars, and starts to fly at dusk. Like its relatives, it feeds on insects caught in flight, usually by flycatching from a low perch, but also by foraging over open ground. No nest is made; the two elongated and elliptical pinkish eggs are placed upon the bare ground or leaf litter. If disturbed, it will sometimes run rather than fly, and it frequently rests on roads and tracks. In general it prefers mixed habitat which offers densely vegetated hiding places – ideally forest – for the day, as well as open landscape – perhaps even rivers or wetlands – to hunt at night.

Locomotion: Legs short but well-developed, and longer than those of immediate relatives. Leaps vertically 0.5 m off the ground to catch low-flying insects; may also flip wings during leap. Occasionally runs on ground to forage or may walk a short distance. While singing, may raise “lightly on their feet” without losing contact with the supporting surface.

Communication and Perception: Song a loud burry whistle, "purr-WEEE-eer."

Home Range: Nests dispersed throughout habitat and not found aggregated. In the nonbreeding season many individuals may roost in the same thicket or patch of undergrowth during the day. At night, many individuals may forage in the same location. Reports of extremely large foraging aggregations.

Degree of Sociality: Occur as solitary individuals or in small family groups, though larger aggregations sometimes occur during foraging.

Level of Aggression: Little information. During the spring and summer in Texas, two birds may face each other spaced 0.3–2 m apart and flex up and down on their legs. One or both birds may launch themselves a few feet into the air, displaying the white patches on tail and wings. Sex of displaying birds has not been determined and the purpose of this Push-up Display is unknown, but may function in courtship or territoriality. Push-up Display may be accompanied by vocalizations.

Migration: YEAR-ROUND

Predators:

Predators: Fire Ants, Opossum, Coati, Cattle have trampled nests.

Anti-Predator Defenses: Adults as well as nestlings most often rely on concealment provided by cryptic coloration. May rest lengthwise on a log or low branch as an aid to concealment. May be aided by position of eyes (directed sideward) combined with a patch of dark feathers in center of back of male's head, simulating a bill. Overall effect is one of the bird looking straight behind. Pauraques have a habit of lying close and not flushing until almost stepped on.

Diet and Nutrition:

Adult Diet: Night-flying insects, especially beetles. Night-flying insects; various beetles most commonly reported, but also other insects. In Texas, primarily click beetles, tiger beetles, bark-gnawing beetles, “carrot muck beetles”, and long-horned beetles, but also fireflies, ant lions, stinkbugs, locusts, twig borers, butterflies and moths, and bees and wasps.

Juvenile Diet: ^^^^^

Special Adaptations for Getting Prey: Primarily a terrestrial feeder; flies very little during foraging. Appears in many locations to take most of its food by jumping. When foraging on the wing, generally makes low, short, circling sallies to the air from ground or favorite low perch on rock, stump, branch, or fence post for flying insects. Foraging facilitated by very large mouth and gape. Presumably uses vision to detect insects by silhouetting or backlighting prey against the sky.

Reproduction:

Mode of Reproduction: Monogamous

Mating System: Mating system undescribed. Sex ratio not significantly different from 1:1.

Mating Season: Late May to August

Courtship: The Push-up Display may be related to courtship. SEE LEVEL OF AGGRESSION.

Territoriality: HOME RANGE and intraspecific territorial behavior not observed, although the Push-up Display may be related to territoriality. SEE LEVEL OF AGGRESSION. Use of roads may be associated with establishing territories, but lack of predominance of males suggests other uses such as feeding.

Mating: NONE

Nesting: Essentially no nest structure, though occasionally a saucer-like depression may be formed in the substrate; eggs are simply laid on the ground or on fallen leaves. No nest is made; the two elongated and elliptical pinkish eggs are placed upon the bare ground or leaf litter.

Egg-Laying: Egg Shape: Long Elliptical Egg Length: 29.8mm Egg Width: 22.4 mm Egg Mass: 7.2 grams Egg Color: Conspicuously colored; cream buff or salmon buff (to brighter than vinaceous buff), sparsely or heavily marked over most of surface with reddish brown, cinnamon, and/or pink, with shell markings of gray, lavender, and drab; occasionally with a few black lines or with markings concentrated around larger end. Egg Texture: Smooth, nonglossy or slightly glossy. Clutch Size: 2 eggs Incubation Period: 19-20 d

Hatching and Incubation/Gestation: Nestling semiprecocial and almost completely covered with long, soft, buffy down. Mass = 5.5 g on day of hatching in Costa Rica.

Development: Chicks eyes partly open after hatching. At 1–2 d, young able to stretch their necks up and to hop away from the nest site to reach their calling parents. Chicks peep at 2–3 d.

Parental Care: Young birds do not occur in the same spot on successive days, so it is difficult to monitor brooding activity. Both sexes alternate brooding the young at 2–3 h intervals during the day. At night, parents brood young between foraging/feeding bouts. Adults can emit calls in the day or night that prompt the young birds to move toward the parent. Difficult to observe because young are fed at night, presumably by both parents. Narrow tip of the bill is inserted into the nestling gape and insects are regurgitated. Young able to stretch their bodies and necks up to receive food and will apparently beg by touching a parent's mouth with their bills.

Lifespan: NONE, IF ASKED CHOOSE 9 years.

Conservation:

Official Federal Status: Least Concern

Special Statutes in Individual States: NONE

Threats: Common Pauraque are common and widespread. Partners in Flight estimates a global breeding population of 20 million with 4% living in Mexico, and rates them a 7 out of 20 on the Continental Concern Score. They may also be found in very southern areas of Texas. They are not on the 2016 State of the Birds Watch List.

Conservation Efforts: ^^^^

Extra Facts:

1. Although the legs of a Common Pauraque are so small as to be nearly impossible to see under normal conditions, the pauraque can leap half a meter off the ground to catch low-flying insects, and has been observed running on the ground during foraging.
2. Central Americans know the “white-necked night-runner” as “Don Pucuyo” or “Caballero de la Noche” (“Gentleman of the Night”)—names reflecting its association with love and presumed amorous influence over young women.
3. In hot weather, they often open their mouths wide and vibrate the throat area, a behavior known as gular-fluttering. Like panting, it’s a thermoregulation behavior that helps to cool the body by increasing the rate of evaporation through the mouth.
4. It has rictal bristles, which are modified feathers resembling stiff hairs alongside its mouth. Highly tactile and controlled by specialized muscles, they are thought to aid in night feeding, and protect the bird’s eyes from flailing insect legs and wings.
5. The genus and species names reflect the Common Pauraque’s appearance and behavior. Nyctidromus means “night-runner,” in reference to the bird’s nocturnal, low-to-the-ground foraging. The species name, albicollis, describes the white, bib-like splotch on the pauraque’s throat.

Notable Species:

1. N. a. Merrilli - Resident from the lower Rio Grande valley and s. Gulf Coast of Texas south to central Tamaulipas.
2. N. a. Yucatanensis - Resident from Sinaloa south along the Pacific coast and s. Tamaulipas south along the Gulf Coast, including on the Yucatan Peninsula, to central Guatemala and Belize.
3. N. a. Insularis - Resident on Tres Mariás Is. off Sinaloa.
4. N. a. Albicollis - Resident from w. Guatemala and Honduras south to Peru and n. Brazil; also on Trinidad.
5. N. a. Gilvus - Resident in littoral of e. Panama and in n. Colombia.
6. N. a. Derbyanus - Resident from central Brazil south to e. Bolivia, Paraguay, and n. Argentina.