

General Field Notes

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Antillean Nighthawk in North Carolina

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During the first half of August 1994, an Antillean Nighthawk (*Chordeiles gundlachii*) was present in the vicinity of the campground at Cape Hatteras Point, N.C. On 6 August, several people, including Craig Roberts, were birding at the point and were returning to their cars at dusk when they heard a nighthawk with a multiple note call, in addition to hearing two Common Nighthawks (*C. minor*). Roberts identified it as an Antillean, based on his experience with the species from the Florida Keys. The bird was seen and heard on the next evening by Ned Brinkley and other birders. I saw and heard the bird on 10 August, along with Jeff Pippen and Will Cook. Greg Lasley heard and saw the bird on 13 and 14 August. Dozens of birders also saw and heard the nighthawk during the 6 to 14 August period.

The habitat of the area consists of dunes vegetated in grasses,

with a scattering of shrubs. Most of the observations were made from a man-made berm, which afforded a good overview of the surrounding dunes. The nighthawks fed by cruising at varying heights over the dunes and shrub thickets, ranging from eye-level to heights over 50 feet. From time to time, the Antillean chased the Commons, and at other times the reverse occurred.

The descriptions of the Antillean Nighthawk varied somewhat among the field notes reported by Roberts, Brinkley, Lasley, and myself, primarily because the bird was seen only in partial light near dusk, and because it was seen only in flight. In general, the Antillean was slightly smaller than the Commons. It showed a white wing patch on the outer portion of the wing in the same position as that present on the Common Nighthawk. Other plumage descriptions do not seem warranted in this paper, as the viewing conditions were poor and as the species is apparently not separable from the Common solely on plumage.

Fortunately for observers, the Antillean called frequently. Roberts heard both three-note and four-note calls, the latter sounding like "kiddy-kiddic". Lasley described the call he heard as "kitty dik". Brinkley described the calls as variously "pitty-pi-tik", "pik-pit-tik", and "pitty-pi-ti-tik". My description of the calls was "peer-pit-pit-pit", with an emphasis on the first syllable, and with two or three similar "pit" notes following the "peer". I detected no "k" sound beginning the syllables, nor did I hear any two-note "pitty" sound. The bird called for about 10 to 15 minutes each evening, around dusk. Its call was conspicuously distinct from the "pee-ur" call given by the Commons, as it was a choppy or stuttering call of three or four notes, and not the downward slurred call of the Common.

Roberts, Brinkley, Lasley, and I provided written descriptions of the bird to the N.C. Bird Records Committee. Michael O'Brien also provided a tape recording of the call of the bird. The Committee accepted the record, and the tape recording provides tangible documentation, which places the species on the Official List (Chat 60:138-139).

This is the first record of Antillean Nighthawk, apparently, from north of Florida. The species nests on the Florida Keys, but it winters south of the United States. Thus, its occurrence at Cape Hatteras was quite unexpected.