

TIPS FOR NIGHTHAWK WATCHING

FLIGHT BEHAVIOR

Only male nighthawks *boom* and dive, so if you see a diving nighthawk, it is definitely a male. Females do not dive or *boom*. Males also have a distinctive flight pattern when they are displaying, which alternates between several normal flaps and several rapid flaps: flutter, flutter, *fly-fly-fly-flutter*, flutter, flutter, *fly-fly-fly-flutter*.

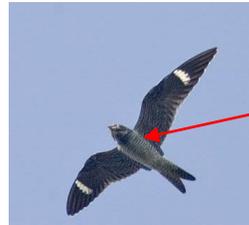
VOCALIZATIONS

Although females do theoretically *peent*, we seldom hear them do so. If a bird *peents* just once or twice, you may want to stick with “Unknown,” but if it is *peenting* repeatedly overhead, it is almost certainly a male. Females have been known to make a soft, low *quacking* sound, usually repeated only once or twice. Males may also *quack* loudly and frequently if there is a perceived threat, such as a predator nearby. In addition, males will often *peent* rapidly when another bird is around—including the female leaving or returning to a nest. If you hear a rapid *peent*, be on alert for another bird.

VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS

The only visual characteristic that we have been able to reliably use to distinguish males from females is the bright white throat of the male. Females have a buffy throat that often looks dark in the field. Watch for the throat when the bird is circling overhead.

Bright white
throat patch,
easily seen on
male.



Buffy throat
patch, not
easily seen on
female.

NESTING FEMALE?

If a female is nesting, she will be quite sneaky, coming into and leaving the nest site like a shadow. In general, she will leave the nest sometime between 8:20 and 8:40 p.m. and return between 9:00 and 9:15 p.m., sooner if she is feeding chicks. These are the times to keep your eye out for her and for interactions with the male. Often, but not always, when she is leaving the nest or returning to it, the male will follow her in a close chase. He may also vocalize by *peenting* rapidly.

QUESTIONS?



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