

Hoffmann Bird Club Canoe Meadows Nighthawk Watch 2023 Summary

Compiled by Tom Tynning

Held at the Public Gardens at Mass Audubon's Canoe Meadows Wildlife Sanctuary, Pittsfield, Ma
Saturday, August 19 to Saturday, September 2 from 5:30 to 7:30 pm.

This year about 45 different persons attended the watch, bringing snacks, chairs, spotting scopes, and conversation. Sometimes a lot of conversation! It was a great season, beginning with our first night when Jean Jew suggested we invite past Hoffmann Bird Club presidents to greet participants. About 40 people showed up and stories were shared by Rene Wendell, Zach Adams, Dick Ferren, Greg Ward, Charlie Kieweg, Jonathan Pierce, Ed Neumuth, Tom Tynning, and especially Gary Shampang and Norma Purdy. Family and friends of some of the presidents joined the gathering. Good thing everyone brought food and good feelings – we only recorded a single nighthawk that first day! For the rest of the count, we had a range of 6 to 15 people on hand each night to count nighthawks, record all bird species, as well as butterflies (and a few other insects), and mammals. A list of all participants and other bird species is at the end of this note.

We keep track of birds seen during 15-minute increments and collect basic temperature, cloud cover, wind direction, and precipitation. This year, a total of 2110 nighthawks were counted over the two-week period, a few visible almost entirely (and only) with spotting telescopes. Interestingly, on most nights, the birds were moving in a northerly direction, while a couple of nights it was clear they were foraging on (presumably) aerial ants and perhaps other insects. On several evenings, nighthawks flew directly over our heads, providing excellent views to those who could follow them. Only on one night, when it never stopped raining, did we count zero birds, and on four other nights we recorded fewer than 5 individuals. Three nights gave us 200 or more birds while one night had 537 and another (our last) 707 individuals. A brief spreadsheet of the days, times, and brief weather conditions is on the next page where you may want to try and make some interesting observations, such as which quarter hour had the most birds (think 6 to 6:15) and if there appears any connection between flights and weather.

One of the conundrums of our count is the problem of double (or even triple) counting individual birds. Besides many seen at the limits of binoculars, some clearly went in various compass directions, other than south. Hard to know if some returned in our view at some point later that night, or even on other evenings. Our location is at the beginning of the Housatonic River watershed and perhaps the birds are either just starting to gather for their trip along floodplains or perhaps there are so many feeding areas here, they just move about. We also thought that if we can keep interest up in this count, we might try to get at least 3 other teams that could cover the fields near the Canoe Meadows entrance, the Sewer Beds fields, the Darey Management area, and then several sites in south County. This is in addition to the folks who are counting nighthawks in the Hoosic/Hudson watershed for the Hoffmann Bird Club.

The 2023 Daily Nighthawk Count, Canoe Meadows, Pittsfield, MA

Date:	Total	Sky Condition	5:30 - 5:45	5:45 - 6:00	6:00 - 6:15	6:15 - 6:30	6:30 - 6:45	6:45 - 7:00	7:00 - 7:15	7:15 - 7:30
19-Aug	1	Mostly cloudy	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
20-Aug	42	Mostly clear	3	7	7	2	9	12	0	2
21-Aug	2	Mostly cloudy	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
22-Aug	11	Mostly clear	0	0	0	0	1	7	1	2
23-Aug	238	Mostly clear	0	12	82	54	28	23	13	26
24-Aug	0	heavy rain	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
25-Aug	288	Rain, Clear,	13	3	51	3	135	83	0	0
26-Aug	34	Calm	8	24	0	2	0	0	0	0
27-Aug	60	Clear	11	1	41	0	4	3	0	0
28-Aug	147	calm	1	18	42	33	29	22	2	0
29-Aug	527	50/50	30	62	1	19	8	77	330	0
30-Aug	4	Partly cloudy	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0
31-Aug	3	Mostly clear	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
1-Sep	46	Clear	7	0	6	11	7	15	0	0
2-Sep	707	High clouds	139	39	347	106	39	24	8	5
		Quarter totals:	212	166	578	234	262	266	354	38
		Final 2110:								

Butterflies and Mammals Seen During the Nighthawk Count

Butterflies: Cabbage White, Common Sulphur, Monarch, Black Swallowtail, Red Admiral.

Mammals: Cottontail Rabbit, White-tailed Deer, Bobcat (27 Aug found by Stefan), Black Bear (30 Aug found by Stefan), Chipmunk.

Other Birds Recorded During the 2023 Nighthawk Watch at Canoe Meadows

There were at least 53 other bird species seen during each evening. Some members made extra efforts to record as many as possible. For this survey, we only recorded species, not individual numbers. One exception is when we found what we consider uncommon species, such as Merlin (which 2 were seen on two nights and at least 1 seen nearly every night) and Harriers.

Double Crested Cormorant	Tree Swallow
Great Blue Heron	Barn Swallow
Canada Goose	Blue Jay
Wood Duck	American Crow
Black Duck	Common Raven
Mallard	Black-Capped Chickadee
Turkey Vulture	White-breasted Nuthatch
Bald Eagle	Carolina Wren
Northern Harrier	House Wren
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Eastern Bluebird
Red-tailed Hawk	American Robin
American Kestrel	Gray Catbird
Merlin	Cedar Waxwing
Peregrine Falcon	European Starling
Rock Dove	Yellow Warbler
Mourning Dove	Connecticut Warbler
Common Nighthawk	Common Yellowthroat
Chimney Swift	Northern Cardinal
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Rufous-Sided Towhee
Downy Woodpecker	Chipping Sparrow
Northern Flicker	Song Sparrow
Pileated Woodpecker	Bobolink
Eastern Wood Pewee	Common Grackle
Least Flycatcher	House Finch
Eastern Phoebe	American Goldfinch
Eastern Kingbird	

Participants of Hoffmann Bird Club 2023 Canoe Meadows Nighthawk Watch

Zach Adams, Kathi Cafiero (with lots of great snacks), Tom Collins, Sue Collins, Vale Colman (and Joan), Ann Connors, Sue Cook, Charlie Dutelle, Kinney Frelinghuysen, Tom Frelinghuysen, Ruth Green, Nicole Hall, Kyron Hansen, Wendi Haugh, Lynn Hertzog (and friends Peter, Sue, and Kim), Holly Higinbotham, Gale Hurley, Jean Jew, Chloe Jew (Jean's four-legged child), Nellie Jew, Chuck Kieweg, Linda Merry, Kevin Moore, Peter Morrill, Priscilla Morrill, Ed Newmuth, Jonathon Pierce, Norma Purdy, Sue Purdy, Patricia Purdy, Joseph Sestner, Gary Shampang (with Dana, Steve, Larry, Jerod), Pete Sibling, Carol Sibling, Stefan Townsend, Tom Tynning, and Greg Ward.

Some Good Links to Nighthawk information For You

The Cornell Lab: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common_Nighthawk/overview

National Audubon: <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/common-nighthawk>

National Audubon, Migration Map:

<https://explorer.audubon.org/explore/species?sidebar=expand>

American Bird Conservancy: <https://abcbirds.org/bird/common-nighthawk/>

eBird: <https://ebird.org/species/comnig>

New Hampshire PBS: <https://nhpbs.org/natureworks/commonnighthawk.htm>

New York DEC: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/60051.html>

Nature Canada: <https://naturecanada.ca/discover-nature/endangered-species/common-nighthawk/>

Mass Audubon: <https://www.massaudubon.org/our-work/birds-wildlife/bird-conservation-research/breeding-bird-atlases/find-a-bird?id=2752>

Vermont Center for Eco Studies: <https://vtcostudies.org/blog/nighthawks-light-up-late-summer-evening-skies-an-october-reminiscence/>

The View and the Quarry

