

FIELD NOTES ON CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW MIGRATIONTHEODORE H. BELOW,¹ BEVERLY J. ANDERSON,² AND JOHN L. DOUGLAS³¹*National Audubon Society, Rookery Bay Sanctuary,
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Considerable information is contained in the literature on the life history, distribution and timing of migration of the Chuck-will's-widow *Caprimulgus carolinensis* (CWWI) in Florida (American Birds 1977-1994, Bent 1940, Howell 1932, Sprunt 1954, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, and Robertson and Woolfenden 1992). The above references, except for Robertson and Woolfenden (1992), give many dates for migration but no numbers of individuals, implying that many or most of the records were of individual birds. In the spring of 1995, we recorded several unusual observations about the migration of the CWWI.

Since 1972, THB has conducted a number of population monitoring projects on coastal waterbirds in southwest Florida. All of these projects entail repetitive surveying and censusing of transects, roosts, and colonies located along 57 km of coast and estuaries between Naples and Indian Key, Collier County, Florida. These projects include the Cape Romano Shorebird (CAPE) study (ongoing since 1982) that surveys and censuses 36 km of coast, and the Rookery Bay Sundown (RBSD) study (ongoing since 1977) that censuses biweekly, birds coming in at sundown to a colonial roost in Rookery Bay. In recent years, field assistance for both of these studies has been provided by BJA (CAPE) and JLD (RBSD).

During a CAPE census, 14 March 1995 at 1000 hrs., both BJA and THB observed a CWWI and several unidentified warblers flying in from the west. As we continued south in the boat, almost immediately another CWWI flew by, and we decided to spend a few minutes looking for more. We patrolled slowly parallel to the coast (NW-SE) about 1.5 km off Marco Island, covering 8 km twice. In 30 minutes, we recorded 5 CWWIs and 10 unidentified warblers coming in from the Gulf of Mexico, about 0.5 m over the water. The sky was clear, temperature 80°F, and the wind east at 20-30 knots. Six kilometers farther south, we recovered one freshly dead CWWI floating 1 km offshore.

On 24 March 1995, while conducting the 515th RBSD census, the first documented CWWI at the roost island was observed by THB and JLD. At 1850 hrs, the bird flew into the roost. It was 10 minutes past sundown and the light was good enough for both observers to easily identify the bird. A few seconds later, several more CWWIs, filtered in, then 40 arrived in a long compact flock, followed by several more, concluding the flight. In all, 51 CWWIs were recorded. All came from the east, passed close to the boat, low over the water, and went into the nearest part of the roost island. The next morning before light, THB monitored the fly-out from the roost; no CWWIs were encountered. That evening (25 March 1995), the fly-in was monitored and one CWWI arrived at about the same time, using the same flight pattern. Since that time, 14 censuses have been conducted and no CWWIs have been observed. To our knowledge, CWWIs have never been reported migrating in groups or flying into the roosts of other bird species. These sightings have been submitted to the spring 1995, reports for *Audubon Field Notes* and the *Field Observations*, in the *Florida Field Naturalist*.

It is obvious from the known ranges of CWWI (Bent 1938, Howell 1932, Sprunt 1954, and Stevenson and Anderson 1994) that most of the migrating birds recorded in Florida

must pass over either the Atlantic Ocean or Gulf of Mexico, in both spring and fall. In the last 23 years we could find only three reports of CWWI migrating over water near the Florida coast; two for the Atlantic coast (H. P. Langridge *in* Kale 1983, J. Johnson *in* Langridge 1987) and one for the Gulf of Mexico (B. Atherton *in* Langridge 1989).

Because we were unable to find any published references to CWWI migrating in groups, we interviewed other Florida bird watchers. We were only able to find one observation that might indicate CWWI group migration: On 25 April 1991, 25-30 CWWIs were observed on a dirt road just after dark in Apalachicola National Forest (F. James, pers. comm.).

The Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*) is recorded as migrating in large numbers of hundreds to thousands (Howell 1932, Bent 1938, Sprunt 1954, and Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Bent (1938) states that Taverner and Swales in 1907 reported a "great flight" of Whip-poor-wills (*Caprimulgus vociferus*) at Point Pelee, Ontario, on 13 September 1907. Therefore, in the family Caprimulgidae two species have previously been recorded migrating in flocks. Although this phenomenon has not been reported for CWWI, it could possibly occur. We found no references of other members of the Caprimulgidae going into or using mixed-species colonial roosts.

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