

FIRST RECORD OF CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW IN CALIFORNIA

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On the evening of 16 October 1986 Mr. William Levett of 460 Fairway Drive, Half Moon Bay, San Mateo County, California, found a strange bird hopping and fluttering in the road on his block. He took it to the wildlife rehabilitation department of the Peninsula Humane Society in San Mateo on 17 October. There Sandi Stadler tentatively identified it as a Chuck-will's-widow (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*). That afternoon, I confirmed the identification and photographed the live bird in the hand, using direct sunlight and Ektachrome 400 film (Figures 1 and 2).

This bird had a superficial but seemingly not serious wound on its wing. Its health seemed to improve but its weight dropped from 83 to 78 g, despite force feeding and other care. Late on 19 October it looked "listless," and it was found dead in the cage on the morning of 20 October. I obtained the frozen carcass on 21 October.

Lise Thomsen prepared the specimen (CAS83955, California Academy of Sciences) as a study skin plus body skeleton on 30 October. A female, the bird's ovary was 6 × 4 mm, granular, and yellowish ivory. The stomach was full of mealworms from the force feeding. The kidneys and intestines were gray, and Lise considered their appearance to be abnormal. The bird's weights during captivity were 30.6–34.8% below the 119.6-g "normal" mean of 12 breeding-season birds, and even below the 86.7-g weight of an "emaciated" bird (Rohwer and Butler 1977).

The large size, dark ochraceous plumage colors, and lack of white in the wings and tail combine to eliminate all other species of *Caprimulgus*, worldwide (Hartert 1892, Ridgway 1914, Fry et al. 1988). Also very distinctive are the Chuck-will's-widow's rectal bristles, which have lateral filaments on their basal portions (Figure 1). The neotropical Rufous Nightjar (*Caprimulgus rufus*) is the most similar species, but it lacks these lateral filaments and is smaller (wing 176–194 mm, Ridgway 1914). The California specimen's wing chord of 203 mm is at the small end of the range for this species (201–225 mm, Ridgway 1914, Oberholser 1974), but nevertheless it is long enough to eliminate all other American species of the genus. Among Eurasian caprimulgids the species most likely to reach California is the Jungle Nightjar (*Caprimulgus indicus*), which has been recorded on the Aleutians (Day et al. 1979). The Jungle Nightjar is about the same length as Chuck-will's-widow but has a smaller head, longer body, and shorter tail. Figure 2 shows the Chuck-will's-widow to have been about 28 cm long in life, with at least 50% of this length being tail and about 30% being "head," as measured to the end of the nape feathers. In the Jungle Nightjar, the male has a white bar across the primaries but the female has a subdued buffy bar, obvious only in the hand. No such bar is present on the Half Moon Bay specimen, which instead matches the female Chuck-will's-widows in the CAS collection. The Jungle Nightjar is also grayer and lacks lateral filaments on its rectal bristles. The California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) unanimously accepted this record on its first circulation.

This species' breeding range extends west to central Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas (Johnsgard 1979, Oberholser 1974). Sutton (1967) listed a 2 September 1963 record from extreme western Oklahoma. The American Ornithologists' Union Check-list (1983) includes no record farther west. A specimen picked up under a telephone line crossing the Desert Wildlife Range, Clark Co., Nevada, 12 June 1984 (Kingery 1984) provided the first record for western North America (DeSante and Pyle 1986). The bird reported here represents the first record of Chuck-will's-widow for California, the second for western North America, and the westernmost for this species.

NOTES



Figure 1. Head of Chuck-will's-widow picked up at Half Moon Bay, San Mateo Co., California. Note lateral filaments on rictal bristles.

Photo by Stephen F. Bailey

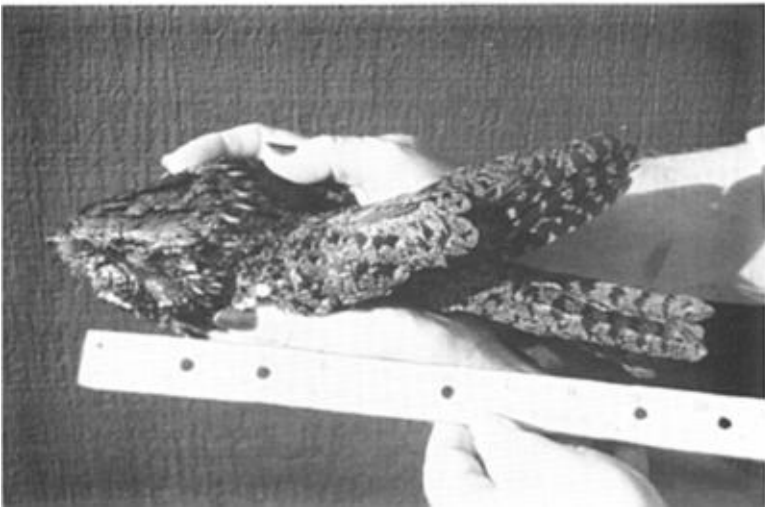


Figure 2. Chuck-will's-widow picked up at Half Moon Bay, San Mateo Co., California.

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NOTES

It is my pleasure to thank Sandi Stadler and the Peninsula Humane Society for providing a first California record specimen for the second time! (The first was Least Auklet.) An anonymous reviewer and the members of the CBRC improved the manuscript.

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