

## Field Notes From Here and There \_\_\_\_\_

### RED-TAILED HAWK CHASED OFF BY COMMON NIGHTHAWKS

While studying the behavior of Common Nighthawks (*Chordeiles minor*) near Boston's Fenway during the summer of 1999, I observed the reaction of a nesting nighthawk pair to an encroaching Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*). At around 5 a.m. on July 16, I was on the roof of a Northeastern University-owned apartment building watching a male nighthawk perched on a neighboring roof. While this bird was perched, I heard a second nighthawk calling from about a block away, in the direction of the Back Bay Fens. After about thirty seconds, this second bird flew into view. I was able to identify it as a female by the lack of a white throat patch. It was vigorously pursuing an adult Red-tailed Hawk. As soon as these two birds came into view, the perched male nighthawk took flight and joined the female in chasing the hawk. Both nighthawks gave their characteristic *peent* call and made swift passes near the hawk. After another thirty seconds, the hawk flew toward the Fens with the nighthawks still in close pursuit. The nighthawks were not heard or seen again until the next night.

Due to the crepuscular habits of this species, observations of this type are rare. This appears to be the first account of Common Nighthawks driving off an aerial predator. Male nighthawks have been reported to defend nest sites from possible ground predators such as raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) and domestic cats (*Felis catus*) by diving at the intruder and rapidly giving *peent* calls (Poulin et al. 1996). It is assumed that roof-nesting nighthawks, such as the pair noted here, are relatively safe from these types of predators (Poulin et al. 1996). However, they are still vulnerable to aerial predators. American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) have been reported preying on roof-nesting nighthawks (Gross 1940), but the response to the predators of these nighthawks was not reported. The observation reported here is also one of only a few accounts of female nighthawks displaying agonistic behavior. Gross (1940) reported a female nighthawk helping her mate chase off an intruding conspecific. Caccamise (1974) stated that females may join the male in excluding intruders from a territory; he did not specify how common this behavior may be. Neither of these reports mention any response to aerial predators.

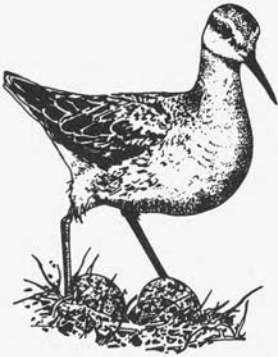
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#### References

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### OBSERVATIONS ON A CHUKAR IN BOSTON

This report may sound bizarre, but it's true. How a Chukar got to the Boston Public Garden is a mystery that I will leave to others to resolve. I can only assume that the bird escaped in transit between some game farm and a private estate or shooting preserve. It's certain that the species isn't native, or even established, in this part of the country, and a "wind-blown vagrant" seems more than a little far-fetched!

In any case, at about 8:30 a.m. on the morning of September 6, 1999, I noticed a strange bird feeding on the ground in the Boston Public Garden. At first, I assumed that it was a variety of pigeon, although it was bigger than the park Rock Doves feeding nearby. The morning was overcast, and in the shade cast by the trees, I was unable to distinguish colors and patterns very well. Upon closer approach, I determined that the unknown bird was of a gallinaceous species that I had never seen before; the name "Chukar partridge" kept popping into my mind. I had not seen a Chukar before, but I had certainly seen pictures of them.

I left the park to fetch a monocular and a camera. Upon returning fifteen minutes later, I again located the bird and studied it through the 8 x 20 glass. The pattern matched that of a Chukar, which I had quickly looked up in my field guide while getting the camera. The red beak, osprey-like facial pattern, and prominent dark flank bars were easily discerned. I got two quick photos of the bird on the ground, at a distance and in very poor light. Then it took flight and

headed over the lagoon. The manner of flight was very different from that of a pigeon but resembled that of a pheasant or Ruffed Grouse.

Unfortunately, the bird either deliberately or inadvertently set down in the water about thirty meters from shore. It flapped frantically for a few seconds but was unable to make much headway. I was able to get two more photos as the bird gradually sank lower into the water; the light was somewhat better with the bird in the open than it had been under the trees, but all I could really see was the black-and-white facial pattern. Before long — no more than five minutes or so — the bird had sunk completely and presumably drowned.

I know exactly where the bird sank, and the remains might be identifiable, even if badly decomposed, by an expert. The Parks Department usually drains the lagoon in autumn, so the carcass might be found.

I am quite certain that the bird was either a Chukar or some species so similar as to be indistinguishable in the field. The only other possibility I have been able to find was Red-legged Grouse, but this species has a white eyebrow stripe that this bird lacked. I'm also pretty sure it lacked the extensive black markings on the chest that a Red-legged Grouse would show. It positively was not a bobwhite, being much too big. I am familiar with Ruffed Grouse, and the bird I saw was not a Ruffed Grouse. It was also too small for a pheasant.

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