

# AN OBSERVATION OF ANTILLEAN NIGHTHAWK (*CHORDEILES GUNDLACHII*) ON BARBADOS

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*Resumen.*—AVISTAMIENTO DEL QUEREQUETÉ (*CHORDEILES GUNDLACHII*) EN BARBADOS. Se reporta el primer avistamiento del querequeté (*Chordeiles gundlachii*) en Barbados, y en las Antillas Menores. Este observación provee evidencia tentativa de la teoría que el Querequeté se migra hacia y por las Antillas Menores.

*Key words:* Antillean Nighthawk, Barbados, behavior, *Chordeiles gundlachii*, Lesser Antilles, record, vocalization

AROUND 18:25 HR, shortly after sunset, on 17 May 2000 while at Bailey Hill, St. Thomas, I heard an unfamiliar call which caused me to look skyward. A few moments later the source of the calling – a bird – flew over, almost overhead, at about 18 m (60 ft). It flew around for about a minute before heading eastward calling continuously and I immediately determined that it was a vocalizing nighthawk species. In the twilight I could see that the bird was relatively slim in appearance, about the length of a Zenaida Dove (*Zenaida aurita*), with long, slim wings, which were well angled at the carpal joint. The under parts appeared silvery brown, as did the underwings except for a white patch on the primaries. Although not clearly seen as the bird flew away, the upper parts appeared dark. The flight was direct, but there were at least two sudden changes of direction. The call was a rapid, rhythmic four-syllable call which I recorded as “pu-du-du-dunt,” rising on the last syllable, and audible at a distance, even when the bird was no longer visible.

Voice provides one of the best methods of identifying nighthawk species, which are notoriously difficult to separate in the field. Within an hour of the observation, I was able to confirm that it was an Antillean Nighthawk (*Chordeiles gundlachii*) by perfectly matching the call heard to a tape recording of this species' call in the Dominican Republic (Reynard 1981). This represents the first report of this species from Barbados and the Lesser Antilles.

The Antillean Nighthawk breeds in the Bahamas, Cuba, Cayman Islands, Jamaica, and Hispaniola, and less commonly in Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands. It may occur in the Lesser Antilles on migration to and from its presumed winter range in South America (Raffaele *et al.* 1998). Although apparently no confirmed records exist from the mainland, September and April specimens occur from Curacao, Netherland Antilles (Voous 1983). Based on the departure from the breeding grounds by late August to mid-September, it has been suggested by some authors that nighthawks seen in the Lesser Antilles in August and early September may be Antillean rather than Common Nighthawks (*C. minor*), which likely

migrate later through the region (Norton 1984, Evans 1990). At this time of the year, however, birds are invariably silent and therefore not safely identified without a specimen. There appear to be few nighthawk specimens from the Lesser Antilles. A recent examination confirmed that a specimen collected on Barbados on 29 September 1887 was a Common Nighthawk (Feilden 1889), whereas one collected on Martinique on 16 October (year not stated) was also identified as this species (Bond 1956). The possibility of specifically identifying a nighthawk in the Lesser Antilles is greatest in spring and early summer when calling is more likely. The Barbados observation provides the first evidence supporting the notion that Antillean Nighthawks may migrate through the Lesser Antilles. This evidence, however, should be considered as tentative because it is possible that the bird could have been a vagrant, well off its usual course.

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