

Common Nighthawk (CONI)
Chordeiles minor

**A North American Banding Council
Guide to Age and Sex Determination**

Photos and text by Kenneth M. Burton

**All specimens courtesy of University of
Washington Burke Museum (UWBM).
Specimen numbers are indicated in
photo captions.**

April, 2007

This is one of a series of species accounts produced by the North American Banding Council. These accounts use live and specimen material to illustrate photographically age- and, where possible, sex-related criteria described in other references, especially Peter Pyle's *Identification Guide to North American Birds*. No attempt is made here to validate those criteria or describe new criteria.

Although skull, gonad, and/or bursa data are known for many of the birds depicted, in many cases age or, less often, sex was deduced from external characteristics. It is possible that some errors were made in age or sex determination of the birds depicted in these accounts due to published information being either inaccurate or misapplied.

Every species exhibits individual and/or geographic variation in coloration, molt extent, feather shape, etc. It is not possible to illustrate the full range of variation in a work of this nature. Where possible, the birds depicted represent the majority of individuals (as per Pyle) for the characters shown. However, they were selected because they show these characters especially well and the norm may be more ambiguous. Month and location of capture/collection are indicated for each bird shown.

New material for these accounts is always welcome. If you have photos that show criteria or plumages not depicted here, or better examples, or wish to write an account yourself, please contact the Chairman of NABC's Education Committee (see <http://www.nabanding.net/nabanding/nabcoff.html>). Thank you for your assistance.



Fig. 1. Dorsal view. From left: Juvenile (UWBM #17347, WA, Sep), basic female (UWBM #12979, WA, Jun), basic male (UWBM #59029, WA, Jun).

Juveniles of both sexes resemble adults but are paler and less strongly patterned above, with considerably less black in the scapulars (see Pyle Fig. 73). There is considerable geographic and individual variation, but within subspecies, basic males are often grayer above than females and females often have coarser dorsal mottling, as in these individuals. The subspecies shown here (*C. m. hesperis*) is medium-dark and grayish compared to others.



Fig. 2. Ventral view. Same specimens as in Fig. 1.

Note that the adult female's throat patch is buff and mottled, while the adult male's is pure white. The juvenile lacks the patch altogether and has less distinct breast mottling than either of the adults. The female's underparts are suffused with buff, while the male's are suffused with white; the difference is particularly distinct on the under-tail coverts. Finally, the male has a white sub-terminal tail band, lacking from the juvenile and female (see Pyle Fig. 75).



Fig. 3. Juvenal (HY) female wing (UWBM #38896, WA, Aug).

All feathers juvenal.

Note the limited extent of the white patch in the primaries, discontinuous between p9 and p10; a 2nd basic or older female probably would show more whiteness, and a male of any age definitely would (see Pyle Fig. 74). Because this bird had not undergone any PBs, its remiges and coverts are uniformly juvenal; note the narrow, white tips on the primary and greater coverts (see Pyle Fig. 77). The secondary coverts show extensive white patterning and the outer primaries are fresh and tapered. Note that p1-p2 and s1 are slightly paler than the adjacent remiges; this may be characteristic of the species, regardless of age (see figs. 4-7).



Fig. 4. 1st basic (SY) male wing (UWBM #65014, WA, Jul).

Most or all secondary coverts 1st basic; all(?) other feathers juvenile.

The shape and extent of the white patch on p10 identify this bird as a juvenile or 1st basic male (see Pyle Fig. 74). Because the 1st PB does not include any remiges (except possibly tertials), this wing contains mostly worn juvenile feathers. The complete lack of white in this bird's primary coverts appears to be anomalous. The outer primaries are tapered but worn. This bird appears to have replaced most or all of its secondary coverts in the 1st PB, as evidenced by the lack of white tips on the greater coverts and the much reduced amount of white throughout compared to Fig. 3.



Fig. 5. 2nd basic (TY) male wing (UWBM #64447, OR, Jun).

s4-s7 juvenal; greater coverts 3 & 5-7 juvenal or 1st basic; all(?) other feathers 2nd basic.

2nd and subsequent PBs in this species often are incomplete, with some secondaries and, less often, primaries retained, but the molt limits can be obscure. The 2nd PB often skips up to four juvenal secondaries, often in a block, and sometimes other feathers, including primaries and greater coverts. This bird retained s4-s7; note their paler tips and vanes and greater wear (see Pyle Fig. 71). Greater coverts 3 and 5-7 also were retained. Birds with complete molts cannot be designated more precisely than AHY/ASY. Note the extent of white on p10, extending towards the feather tip beyond that on p9; this is characteristic of basic male feathers (see Pyle Fig. 74).



Fig. 6. Definitive basic (ATY) male wing (UWBM #59029; WA, Jun).

s3-s4, s6-s7, and some greater coverts retained basic; all(?) other feathers replaced basic.

3rd and subsequent PBs can skip up to five basic secondaries (usually not in a block) and/or some coverts. This bird retained s3-s4 and s6-s7; the molt limits are harder to see in this case than in Fig. 5 because the retained feathers are basic, not juvenal (see Pyle Fig. 71).

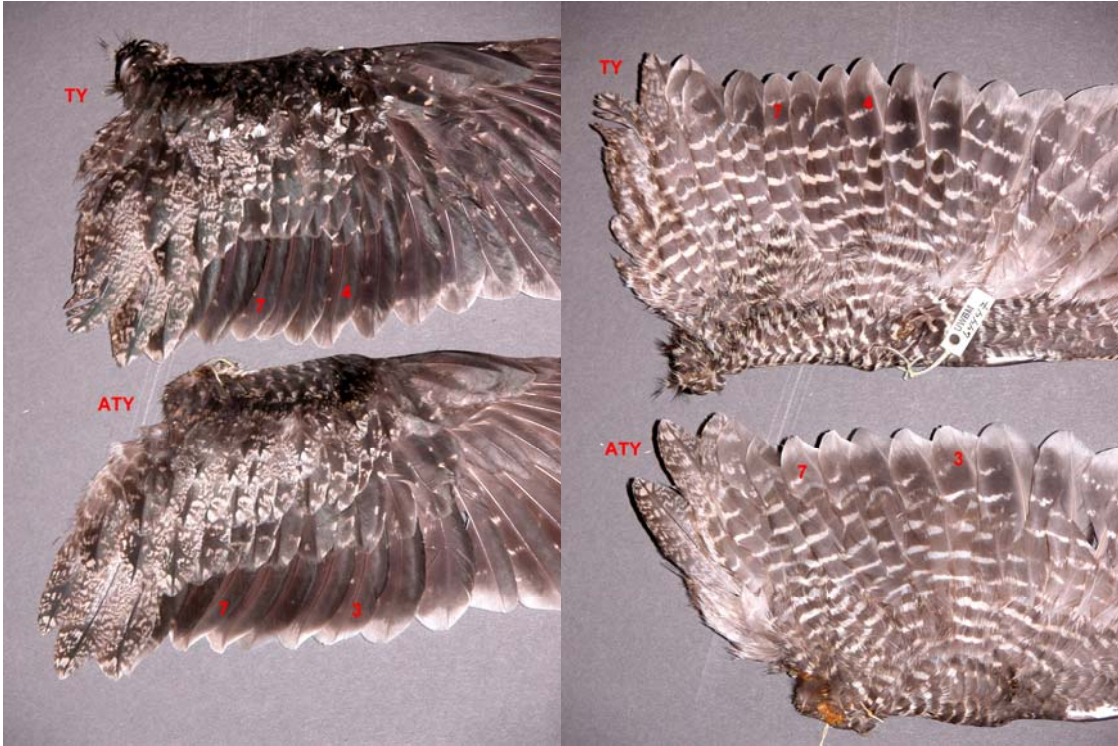


Fig. 7. Comparisons of 2nd and definitive basic molt limits (same specimens as in Figs. 5-6; TY on top, ATY on bottom).

The molt limits are perhaps more apparent on the under-wings.