



Common Nighthawk by Walter Marcisz

spotting and no streaking.

To distinguish between the two round-winged species, use the following descriptive aids.

Size of Chuck vs. Whip

Chuck-will's-widow is longer and bulkier than the Whip-poor-will and has a massive head. The difference in size between the two is similar to the difference between Herring and Ring-billed Gulls.

Color Differences

Although the two species are superficially similar in color, Chuck-will's-widow tends to have a duskier, brownish-gray color overall, especially on the underparts. It is sometimes described as being reddish or buffy, but the study skins I examined did not exhibit this trait. The Whip-poor-will is paler, grayer, and exhibits more contrast, particularly on the crown, tail, and underparts.

The throat of the male Whip-poor-will is black, bordered below by a prominent, narrow white band or necklace. The female has a dark brown throat with a buffy necklace. Both sexes of the Chuck-will's-widow have a paler, buffy brown

throat with a pale buff or buffy-white necklace. Because of the darker underparts, a more noticeable contrast between these two areas exists in the Chuck-will's-widow. In addition, the throat of the Chuck often appears finely barred, a trait not shown by the Whip.

Tail Pattern

Male Whip-poor-wills exhibit white on both webs of the three outer tail feathers. On the male Chuck-will's-widow, the white on these same feathers is restricted to the inner webs. When the tail is spread (on the upperside), the Whip-poor-will shows large, unbroken white corners. Even if the tail is folded, the white is sometimes visible, a trait never shown by Chuck-will's-widow.

On the spread tail of a Chuck, the white is discontinuous, being separated into longitudinal strips by the brown outer webs. These differences can only be seen when the tail is spread. In females of both species, the tail lacks white and is essentially brown or buffy, with dark bars.

The outer three tail feathers of the Whip-poor-will are dark with boldly contrasting pale tips. The same feathers on the Chuck are mostly buffy-brown, lacking the strong contrast.

Crown Differences

The Whip-poor-will's crown is pale gray, while that of the Chuck-will's-widow is browner and darker. Thus contrast between the crown and dark brown back is more pronounced on the Whip-poor-will.

In both species, the crown is overlaid with longitudinal black streaks, the shapes of which are often a clue to identity. On the Whip-poor-will, the streaks, especially toward the center, tend to be thick and coalesced, while on the Chuck-will's-widow they are narrower.

Bill Color

On the museum skins I examined, the bill of the Chuck was bi-colored, the pale bases of both mandibles contrasting with the dark tip. The bill of the Whip was mostly dark, although the lower mandible was sometimes pale.

Facial Bristles

Bristles, which resemble stiff curved hairs, can be used to separate the species in the hand. The bristles of the Chuck have small side branches or filaments. Conversely, the bristles of the Whip are unbranched and bare. This characteristic requires a close look, but it is diagnostic.

While bird watching in Illinois this summer, test your skill at finding nightjars during the day and determining which of the three species you are seeing.

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- 696 Irving Park Road,
Chicago, IL 60613.

