

Naturewise
Whip-poor-wills
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Where are the Whip-poor-wills? This question was asked recently by Gene Neal. He and his neighbors have heard none this year and wondered if the destruction caused by the tornado was the reason. This type of bird is sensitive to disturbance during nesting season and I feel sure they were affected by it. We can only imagine the devastating effects the storm took on nesting birds. There is another bird called the Chuck-wills-widow that is very similar and both species occur in Pickett County. To the untrained ear their songs sound alike. Both sing at dawn and dusk and sometimes all through the night when the moon is bright. Both birds are heard more than seen.

The Chuck-wills-widow is the most common here and we have heard it this spring at our place which was untouched by the tornado.

Whip-poor-wills and Chuck-wills-widows build no nest but lay two eggs among dead leaves on the ground. The same nest site is used year after year. Egg laying is timed so that the young is hatched just before a full moon, resulting in bright moonlight for the adults to forage for the young.

Chicks are cinnamon colored, angular shaped little fuzzballs that are almost impossible to see among dead leaves. Dave and I were lucky enough to stumble upon a nest of young Whip-poor-wills with one adult present which tried to attraction our attention away from the chicks by slowly flying from one low limb to another like a giant butterfly. We watched as long as we dared and were amazed at how well the young were camouflaged among the leaves. Take your eyes away and they seem to have disappeared when you look back.

Hopefully these night birds will be back to their old nesting site next spring.

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