

Take a moment to click on the following link to hear a familiar sound in Winding Cypress. Close your eyes and listen to the song of a [loud, local bird](#). The first few times hearing this sound at dusk or dawn in the neighborhood one might be inclined to think it's a car alarm and feel sorry for the neighbors who live next door! This boisterous bird is called the Chuck-will's-widow. The common English name "chuck-will's-widow" is an onomatopoeia from the bird's song.

Chuck-will's-widow belongs to a family of birds with the folk name "goatsuckers." The family name, *Caprimulgidae*, literally means "milker of goats" and is based on an ancient belief that the birds milked goats with their enormous mouths each night. (Image 1) They are also members of the nightjar family. Chucks have a Jabba the Hutt look about them and are shaped kind of like a child-sized football. [Watch this v ideo](#) to get a close look at this elusive bird.

During the day, Chucks will silently lurk in the leaf litter or on a tree branch, unmoving. They're so well camouflaged that only the luckiest birders can spot them. You'll have to wait until nightfall in spring to get a sense of just how many there are nearby, because they'll fill the evening with their loud, annoying songs. At night they dart around treetops hunting insects for food, which classifies them as aerial insectivores. They typically feed on moths, beetles, and other insects, but there's solid evidence that, when opportunities arise, they're game to gulp down much larger winged prey; there are several records of the birds swallowing whole various warblers, sparrows, flycatchers, and bats. So cool. Unlike owls, which have fine-tuned hearing that allows them to pinpoint prey even in total darkness, nightjars must hunt by sight. Their big eyes help them see insects in low light.

Chuck-will's-widows do not build nests, instead they lay their eggs on the ground among dead leaves, pine needles, or on bare dirt. Incubating adults are almost invisible against the forest floor and only flush off their nests when closely approached. (Image 2)

Soon, these birds may be impossible to see—or hear. Like many woodland species, Chuck-will's-widows are declining, and populations are estimated to be down more than 60 percent since the 1960s. This is most likely because of loss of proper habitat and insecticides affecting their food sources. So, be sure to get out there and listen for the Chuck-will's-widows being chucked before it's too late. Only then will you be able to decide what crazy name you can give them yourself.

(Image 1)

(Image 2)

