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A NOTE ON THE DIET OF THE AUSTRALIAN OWLET-NIGHTJAR *Aegotheles cristatus*

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Australian Owlet-nightjars *Aegotheles cristatus* (Aegothelidae), unlike true nightjars (Caprimulgidae), which feed only on the wing, feed both on the wing and on the ground (Blakers *et al.* 1984, Frith 1969, Schodde and Mason 1980). Schodde and Mason (1980) suggested that the foraging techniques of Owlet-nightjars varied according to season and habitat. During summer they mostly hawk on the wing, while during winter they perch and pounce. Analysis of stomach contents has shown a preponderance of ground-dwelling and often wingless invertebrates (Lea and Grey 1935, Rose 1973), which supports the contention of previous authors that ground-feeding or perch and pounce are the most frequently used techniques.

In January 1985, two adult Owlet-nightjars were caught in pitfall traps in Coolangubra State Forest, 40 km south-east of Bombala, New South Wales. Coolangubra State Forest is primarily montane tall open eucalypt forest of *Eucalyptus fastigata, E. obliqua, E. cypellocarpa* and *E. viminalis* with an understorey of primarily *Acacia* spp. Both Owlet-nightjars died in the traps, providing an opportunity to examine the food of these birds in the heavily timbered country of south-eastern New South Wales.

A wide range of food items was found in the two stomachs (Table 1). Ants and beetles were the dominant food groups with moths, grasshoppers, centipedes and spiders also present. The inclusion of ant pupae suggests that the adult ants were probably carring the pupae at the time of capture. Two small stones in one bird's stomach were probably ingested with food. These results are not dissimilar to previous studies (Lea and Gray 1935, Rose 1973). Rose (1973) recorded spiders, beetles and moths from the stomachs of two birds from Sydney, New South Wales, while Lea and Gray (1935) found beetles, bugs, ants, spiders, grasshoppers and unspecified caterpillars from the stomachs of six birds from various locations in South Australia. Schodde and Mason (1980) also recorded cockroaches, earwigs and millipedes as food.

TABLE 1

Stomach contents of two Owlet-nightjars from Coolangubra State Forest.

Specimen	No. and length of food item	
	1	2
Coleptera		
Chrysomelidae	2× 8 mm	–
Curculionidae	2×12 mm	1×10 mm
		1×12 mm
Tenebrionidae	–	1×18 mm
Hymenoptera		
Formicidae (adults)	5×15 mm	5×12 mm
		1×14 mm
(pupae)	4× 5 mm	
Lepidoptera		
adults	–	1×10 mm
larvae	–	2×35 mm
Orthoptera	–	2×*c.* 40 mm
Chilopoda	–	3×18 mm
Aranea	1×12 mm	–
Stones	–	2× 3 mm

Food items recorded during this study were characteristic of both aerial and terrestrial foraging. Most invertebrates recorded could have been hawked in the air or gleaned from foliage or bark. The presence of a single centipede in one bird's stomach and the large number of ants and any pupae suggest that some time was spent by both birds foraging on the ground. From this and previous studies it would appear that Australian Owlet-nightjars are opportunistic feeders taking whatever food is available.

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OCCUPANCY OF LAND-BASED TERRITORIES BY CLAMOROUS REED-WARBLERS IN CANBERRA DURING A DROUGHT YEAR

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During the breeding season, Clamorous Reed-Warblers *Acrocephalus stentoreus* inhabit the reed belts in wetlands and along watercourses, 'living entirely within the cover of reeds and feeding on insects and small aquatic animals there' (Reader's Digest 1986). However, at least while the adults have young in the nest, Reed-Warblers frequently leave the stands of reeds and forage on bordering dry land. Brown and Brown (1985) stressed the importance that dry habitats close to the nest sites in marshes have as sources for food for this species when rearing young in south-west Australia. Birds in Canberra, A.C.T., at the campus of the Australian National University (ANU) and at Commonwealth Park, are often encountered collecting insects in bushes and the lower parts of trees up to 30 m or more away from the reeds in which they nest, but only within the period during which they are feeding young. Occasionally, during spring migration, one can hear a bird singing out of shrubs with no water in sight. This was also noted in Armidale (S. J. S. Debus, pers. comm.).

In 1982-83, during a widespread drought in eastern Australia, the more than 30 Reed-Warbler territories along Sullivan's Creek in the campus of ANU were occupied as usual by early October (unpublished data). In late November several additional Reed-Warblers were singing at various sites scattered over the campus, each located well away from water (150-500 m). Birds settled in thickets of shrubs, either *Grevillea, Leptospermum, Cotoneaster* or mixed stands of native and exotic bushes.