

the survey, indicating earlier breeding than reported by Rathburn and Montgomerie (2003) for either *M. l. leucopterus* or for *M. l. leuconotus*. Earlier breeding is consistent with a noted peak in breeding of landbirds on Barrow Island after rainfall events (Ambrose and Murphy 1994) following exceptional late autumn and early winter rains on the island prior to the survey.

We conclude by suggesting that current management decisions for the protection of *M. l. edouardi* that focus on protecting *M. cardiophylla* specifically as nesting habitat may be misdirected. The birds on Barrow Island are more generalists than previously believed in their use of vegetation and use *M. cardiophylla* for foraging and nesting along with other plant species in their environment.

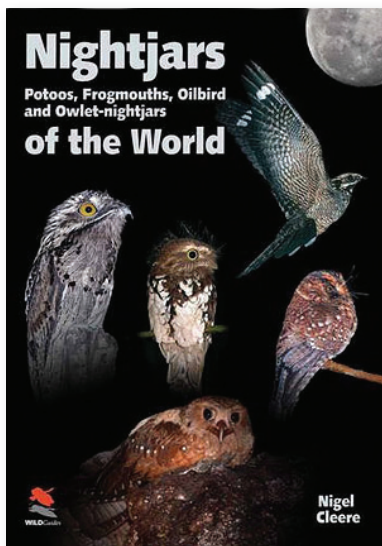
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## Book Review



### Nightjars, Potoos, Frogmouths, Oilbird and Owlet-Nightjars of the World.

Cleere, Nigel, 2010. WildGuides Ltd. Hardback, 464 pp, 580 colour illustrations. ISBN 978-1-903657-07-2. RRP \$65.

*Nightjars, Potoos, Frogmouths, Oilbird and Owlet-Nightjars of the World* offers a remarkable compilation of high quality glossy photographs of all currently known species of Caprimulgiformes. It represents a remarkable effort and includes photos of little known species, threatened or near

threatened species and recently described species taken in the wild. For several species of nightjar only described from a single specimen and not subsequently observed, photos of museum specimens are presented to offer a complete collection. The author must be commended for his effort in compiling an entire index of photos of an order of birds that, due to their cryptic and nocturnal nature, present a challenge to photographers.

Nigel Cleere is one of the world's foremost experts on nightjar taxonomy and biology and published the first comprehensive text on nightjars and their relatives in 1998 (Cleere and Nurney 1998). The current text is not an update to or a substitute for his previous book, but rather serves as an excellent accompaniment. This book is described as "the first comprehensive photographic guide to the nightjars". Like most field guides, brief details are provided for species identification, but a comprehensive account of each species is not presented. If readers are looking for detailed text describing habitat, behaviour, ecology and morphology of nightjars they should refer to Cleere's *Guide to Nightjars and Related Nightbirds* and David Holyoak's *Nightjars and their Allies*.

In the book's introduction Cleere indicates that "the principle aim of this book is to present an easy-to-use guide to help identify nightjars and related birds". However, I can't help but feel the book falls in the realm between a field guide and a glossy coffee table book. Although the brief species descriptions are written as such, it is certainly not a pocket field guide. And the global coverage of the guide makes it of limited use to the average regional bird watcher. For example, only seven of the

135 species covered in this book are found in Australia. The camouflaged plumage of nightjars does not possess the colourful attraction of parrots or finches, and may reduce the book's appeal for the general bird enthusiast as some readers may feel they are looking at the same species page after page. Unfortunately, I fear this book may interest a rather limited audience.

I found the general layout of the book to be very pleasing and information is easy to access. In addition to the excellent photos, one of the true highlights of this book is the large species distributions maps that clearly show resident, summer and wintering ranges. Where applicable, migration routes are also shown. Another excellent feature is the presentation of the 2009 International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red list Category in a clear, colour-coded box at the top of each species description. This is very useful for identifying threatened species, but also those species for which data is deficient.

In addition to the photographic guide, a brief introductory section covers distribution, plumage and structure, general biology and taxonomy. Reader's familiar with the shifting classification of the Caprimulgiformes will be interested in the recent taxonomic change of the order, including an increase in the number of species from 117 to 135, the introduction of a new subfamily Velinae under the Caprimulgidae, and the removal of the Aegothelidae (owlet-nightjars) from the order Caprimulgiformes altogether. Cleere has included the Aegothelidae in his book on historical grounds and they are treated as family *incertae sedis* (taxonomic group of uncertain placement). In their new taxonomy of Australian birds, Christidis and Boles (2008) have placed Aegothelidae with Apodiformes (Swifts and Hummingbirds) based on recent DNA evidence (e.g. Dumbacher *et al.* 2003). Nonetheless, physiological and behavioural evidence suggests strong similarities between owlet-nightjars and other families of nightjars (e.g. Doucette and Geiser 2008). I believe the omission of owlet-nightjars would have been to the detriment of this book and am grateful to the author for their inclusion.

Nightjars represent a remarkable order of birds: Caprimulgiformes are one of only two orders of birds known to enter deep torpor, reducing their body temperature to less than 30° C to save energy (at least nine species); the order includes the only species of bird said to hibernate (Common Poorwill *Chordeiles acutipennis*); and the only species of bird known to echolocate (Oilbird *Steatornis caripensis*). While these characters, amongst others, are mentioned very briefly in a point form list in the general introduction, they deserve greater attention. The inclusion of these characteristics in the descriptions for the relevant species would have greatly enhanced the guide, and reader interest. Another option may have been to provide weightier descriptions introducing each genus rather than the very brief characteristics listed. Some genera exhibit impressive morphological features, such as the elongated tails of *Macropsalis* and the extremely long second primaries of male *Macrodipteryx*, and left me wanting more details of their mating displays and breeding biology.

In many respects the species descriptions are too brief to prove especially useful. The vocalisation accounts do not encompass the breadth and complexity of known calls for most species. Far too many of the habitat descriptions are simply 'wooded country' or 'open country'. While I realise the difficulty in describing

habitat for species with large ranges to a global audience, the very brief habitat descriptions are not especially useful. It also irked me throughout that the identification information for each species starts with 'small' or 'large' immediately after presenting the length of the bird. This is redundant and in some cases inconsequential. For example, the Savanna Nightjar *Caprimulgus affinis* has 10 subspecies and is described as "small (lists 7 subspecies) to medium-sized or large (lists 3 subspecies)". Given the size range for this species providing the length (and weight range) beside each subspecies name in the initial list would have served better. However, the presentation of the 'Main Confusion Species' in the descriptions is very useful, especially for an order of birds as cryptic as the nightjars.

Australian readers should be largely pleased with the presentation of the seven species of Caprimulgiformes found in Australia. Two to three photos of each of the three nightjars (White-throated Nightjar *Eurostopodus mysticalis*, Spotted Nightjar *E. argus*, and Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*) are presented, including photos of two of the six subspecies of *C. macrurus*. The distribution of the White-throated Nightjar is particularly well presented showing resident, summer and wintering/non-breeding range of the species. Photographs of the three Australian species of frogmouths are plentiful. Four full-page photos of the Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides* are provided, showing two of the four subspecies and the chestnut phase. Six excellent photos of the lesser-known Papuan Frogmouth *P. papuensis* are offered and the book contains no less than seven full-page photos of the Marbled Frogmouth *P. ocellatus*, including photos of two of the five subspecies. I was less impressed with the three photos of the Australian Owlet-Nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus*. The author describes this species as highly variable in colour, yet presents three photos of what could literally be the same individual. Given how common this species is throughout Australia it would have been possible to obtain photos showing the different colour phases, including the striking rufous morph.

In summary, this book offers a tremendous opportunity to clearly view in detail species that are challenging to view in the wild. I welcome this book as a much needed addition to the limited texts available on Caprimulgiformes. For nightjar aficionados, this book is a rare treat, offering a single resource for excellent images of all species of nightjar, including many that have never appeared in print before. For those less familiar with nightjars, this book will definitely peak reader's interest in this remarkable order of birds.

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