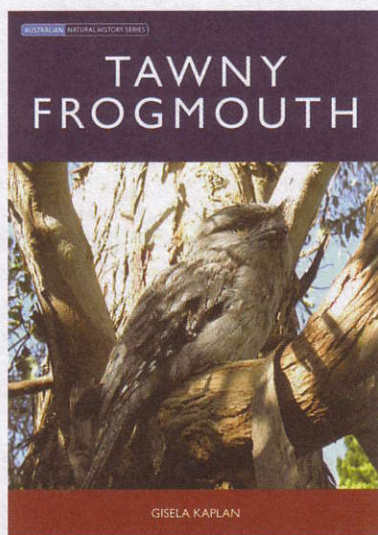


BOOK REVIEW



Tawny Frogmouth

Gisela Kaplan 2007. CSIRO Publishing. 168pp, coloured and black and white photos. ISBN 9780643092396. RRP \$39.95.

The Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides* is one of Australia's most enigmatic birds and this monograph is a recent addition to the excellent titles in the Australian Natural History Series published by CSIRO. *Tawny Frogmouth* is the result of over ten years of observation of both wild and captive birds by the author, supported by extensive data gathering and literature research and as a result, I can think of no one better qualified to have undertaken such a project.

The book is a relatively slim volume covering 168 pages that is nicely laid out and easy to use. I especially liked that where zoological terms and nomenclature are used they are explained in simple language so that there is no need to consult dictionaries to understand the text. The main body of the book comprises eight chapters that cover the bird's taxonomy, biology and ecology. Each chapter is broken into sub-headed sections dealing with a particular topic relevant to the chapter. For instance, Chapter 6 'Bonding and breeding' has six sub-headings that deal with 'Partnerships', 'Mating', 'Nest-building and the problem of Tawny Frogmouth nests', 'Laying the eggs', 'Parental role in incubating the eggs', and 'Brooding trance?' The text is liberally notated with links to the 'Endnotes' section at the rear of the book, which finishes with an extensive list of references. The book is adorned with many photographs, mostly taken by the author, but disappointingly, the majority are in black and white. There are 7 sonograms in the chapter dealing with vocalisations but only 3 tables and 1 map in the whole volume.

Chapter 1 is entitled 'What and where are they' and deals with taxonomy, nomenclature, geographical variation and distribution. I noted some very minor mishaps that surprised me a little. The Oilbird, a South American relative of the Tawny Frogmouth, is stated to find its way home by using echo-location which isn't strictly true. It returns from feeding areas outside roosting/breeding caves by sight and only echo-locates once inside. The owl-nightjars (Aegothelidae) are referred to as owl-nightjars (for the Australian species) and owl frogmouths (for the species found on New Guinea), which is terminology that I am not familiar with. I would like to have read more about the taxonomic history of the Tawny

Frogmouth and a synonymy would have been simple to produce. The lone map in the book appears in this chapter and shows the world range of the frogmouths. A more detailed map showing the known range of just the Tawny Frogmouth would have been a useful (necessary?) addition.

Chapter 2 deals with anatomy and Chapter 3 'the senses' and both are well structured, nicely illustrated and very informative. Chapter 4 is headed 'Daily life and adaptations' and covers subjects such as life span, predation, roosting and thermoregulation. A generalisation on page 53 regarding roosting behaviour of nightjars and owl-nightjars could have been written a little clearer. My reading of the sentence suggests that both sometimes still regularly roost on the ground. Whilst the Australian Owllet-nightjar is sometimes known to roost amongst long grass or rocks, all species usually roost in holes and most species of nightjar almost always roost on the ground. The topic of Chapter 5 is 'Feeding and territory'. There is a lot of original data here, such as the chewing of eucalypt leaves by young birds and its possible effect of building tolerance to toxins found in Christmas beetles, a known prey item, which may be poisonous to other birds. However, I get a little uncomfortable about discussions relating to artificial weights and food consumption of captive or released birds. One such item refers to a bird fed only on laboratory mice when data from the stomachs of free ranging birds suggest that vertebrates, including mice, make up only about 4 per cent of a normal diet. Chapter 6 'Bonding and breeding' covers the behaviour of the adults up to the egg laying stage and Chapter 7 'Development' documents the breeding biology from the egg stage to the chicks fledging. A small hiccup occurs on page 97, which would not have arisen had a synonymy been produced in Chapter 1 (see above). In discussing egg size, a reference is made to Wilson (1912), who observed that the eggs of *Podargus rossi* were smaller than those of *P.strigoides*. Obviously *P.strigoides* is the nominate form *P.s.strigoides* (see Chapter 1, page 6), but *Podargus rossi* is a synonym of *P.s.brachypterus*. The final chapter 'Emotions, vocal behaviour and communication' discusses the signalling mechanisms employed during various stages of the life cycle.

Finally, I would like to bring up two points. Although food is discussed in some detail in Chapter 5 'Feeding and territory', I would have liked a thorough list of known prey items, data that are readily available in published works elsewhere. Plumage abnormalities and their possible effects on survival are not discussed despite the inclusion of a colour photograph of an albino bird on page 94. Two recent notes on aberrant and melanistic plumages (Cleere 2002, 2005) are not listed in the references.

Minor omissions and quibbles aside, I found this an extremely informative and easily readable monograph, written by an author who clearly knows, understands and loves her subject.

Cleere, N. 2002. Aberrant plumage in the Tawny Frogmouth, *Podargus strigoides*. *Emu* **102**: 195.

Cleere, N. 2005. An example of melanistic plumage in the Tawny Frogmouth, *Podargus strigoides*. *Corella* **29**: 22.

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