

A record of the Great Eared Nightjar *Eurostopodus macrotis* Vigors, 1831 (Aves: Caprimulgidae) from Sri Lanka

W.C. Chamila Soysa, A.A. Thasun Amarasinghe and D.M.S. Suranjan Karunarathna
The Young Zoologists' Association of Sri Lanka,
National Zoological Gardens,
Dehiwala, Sri Lanka.

Introduction

Nightjars in general are nocturnal insectivorous birds, with owl-like, soft mottled plumage (Del Hoyo et al., 1999; Harrison & Worfolk, 1999; Henry, 1998; King, 1975; Kotagama & Fernando, 1994; Wait, 1931). They have long wings and tails, and silent, wheeling and gliding flight. All their food, which consists of flying insects such as moths and beetles, is captured on the wing. The beak is small and weak but the mouth is enormously wide, with gape extending to below the middle of the eyes; to increase the effectiveness of this wide mouth in engulfing insects, the sides of the upper mandible, below the lores, are fringed with long, stiff bristles projecting outwards and downwards (Nigel & Dave, 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005). The nostrils of species occurring in Sri Lanka are upstanding and tubular (Henry, 1998; Legge, 1880).

The eyes are large, the legs are short and weak, more or less clothed with feathers down to the feet. The hind toe and the two lateral toes are short, but the middle toe is long and, in all Sri Lankan species, its claw has comb-like flange on the inner side similar to that found in herons, some owls, and a few other birds (Harrison & Worfolk, 1999; Henry, 1998; Kotagama & Fernando, 1994). Probably owing to this structure of the foot, nightjars perch along a branch, not across it in the usual manner. They have peculiar notes, which are excellent aids to identification (Nigel & Dave, 1998). They usually roost, and always nest, on the ground, where their colour schemes

give perfect camouflage. No nest is made, the mottled eggs being laid on the soil (Henry, 1998; Legge, 1880; Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005). The young are clothed with long down, but are helpless for some time after hatching (Nigel & Dave, 1998).



Figure 01:
Distribution Patterns of
Great Eared Nightjar

The Great Eared Nightjar (*Eurostopodus macrotis*) is one of the nine Nightjar species encountered in the South Asian region. Its distribution and movements occur throughout the oriental faunal zone and in Sulawesi (Nigel & Dave, 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005). Geological variations among five races (*Eurostopodus macrotis macrotis*, *E. m. cerviniceps*, *E. m. bourdilloni*, *E. m. jacobsoni* and *E. m. macropterus*) are currently recognised, although each form is extremely variable in colour. It prefers forests and also occurs in secondary forests, along forest edges, near rivers in primary forests, in secondary growth and scrublands, in clearings and wooded grasslands (Nigel & Dave, 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005). It also

inhabits more open country 0-1,000 m (to 1,750 m on Sulawesi) (Nigel & Dave, 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005; Sibley & Monroe, 1990).

Identification

Length is 31-40 cm. It is a widely distributed and very large brown Asian nightjar. Sexes are similar. At rest they may show 'ear tufts' at rear of crown. Upperparts are brown, speckled and spotted buff, cinnamon and greyish-white, the crown is boldly spotted with blackish brown (Del



U.S.B. Hettige

Figure 02:
Face and eared fathers of the Great Eared Nightjar

Hoyo et al., 1999). Broad tawny-buff or buff collar is around the hindneck. Wing coverts brown, speckled and spotted tawny, buff and cinnamon. Scapulars brown, boldly spotted blackish brown. There is a large white spot, occasionally tinged buff, on either of lower throat. Underparts are buffish, indistinctly barred with brown (Nigel & Dave, 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005).

It flies with leisurely, deliberate wing beats. Both sexes lack white markings on the wings and tail. A similar species the Malaysian Eared-nightjar is smaller, darker, shorter-winged and has faster, more erratic flight (Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005). Heinrich's Nightjar is also smaller, darker, shorter-winged and has a distinct white or buff band around the throat. Generally, the Great Eared Nightjar is about 31-40 cm (male) in length. Wing (male) 25.3-28.1 cm, tail (male) 15.7-18.0 cm, bill (male) 1.35 cm and tarsus (male) 19.0 cm (Nigel & Dave, 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005).

Observation in Sri Lanka (first record)

On 12th March 2006, at about 0500 hrs, a large Nightjar was handed over to the first author by neighbours in the Kaluthara area (6° 57' N and 79° 95' E), in the Kaluthara District of the Western Province. The specimen was injured. It was collected around 0500 hrs while lying down, stranded and exhausted in a house. The first author

with the help of some members of the YZA identified it as a Great Eared Nightjar *Eurostopodus macrotis*. The bird was then photographed and measured.

This identification was subsequently confirmed by ornithologists Messrs. Deepal Warakagoda and Uditha Hettige. This is the first record of this species in the Sri Lanka (Warakagoda, 2006). The first author kept the bird in captivity at his home, feeding and fostering it from the 12th of March until the bird died on the 15th of March 2006. Its physical condition at the time of handing over was poor. It showed a lack of muscular coordination. Although it couldn't fly, it could spread its wings. During its period of captivity, it was fed with sardines and chicken.

We believe that the Great Eared Nightjar is a vagrant to Sri Lanka. Due to its state of exhaustion, it had just lain on the floor before capture.. According to the IUCN global red list criteria, the Great Eared Nightjar *Eurostopodus macrotis* is classified as being of low risk / least concern (Bird Life International, 2004). According to Kotagama et al., (2006) there are three species of *Caprimulgus* Nightjars in Sri Lanka, therefore the Great Eared Nightjar is the fourth species for Sri Lanka.

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U.S.B. Hettige

Figure 03:
Colour patterns and measurement of the Great Eared Nightjar

Manori Nandasena (Assistant Director of Entomology Division in National Museum), Mr. Gamini Kumara Withana (Taxidermists of National Museum), Mr. Lalith Kariyawasam (Research Assistant of National Museum) and Mr. P. Gunasekara (Collector National of Museum) for valuable help. And also wish to thank Mr. Sampath Goonatilake, Mr. Vimukthi Weeratunga (IUCN - The World Conservation Union) for the various support us.

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U. S. B. Hettige

Figure 04:
Ventral side of the Great Eared Nightjar

MEASUREMENTS	LENGTH IN MM
Bill tip to tail end (Total length)	392.4
Bill tip to vent	172.3
Vent to tail end (Tail length)	220.1
Wing	30.4
Bill tip to front eye	31.2
Orbit diameter	15.5
Head	55.4
Head width	32.6
Head depth	30.7
Bill tip to gape end	40.9
Bill tip to forehead (Culmen)	13.6
Bill width in gape area	30.2
Bill width in forehead area	9.1
Tibia	38.7
Tarsus	22.1
Inner toe + Claw	15.6 + 3.8
Middle toe + Claw	24.7 + 7.2
Outer toe + Claw	14.7 + 4.4
Hind toe + Claw	9.9 + 2.5

The specimen is placed in the National Museum (specimen number 157X). The measurements of the specimen are given above. The measurements were based on the following reference

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