

Extended incubation period for the White-throated Nightjar

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During early January 2005 I flushed a White-throated Nightjar *Eurostopodus mystacalis* which was incubating one egg at Green Wattle Creek, Woodville near Maitland in NSW ($32^{\circ} 40' S$ $151^{\circ} 39' E$). Repeated visits were made to determine the date of hatching as summarised in **Table 1**. In each instance an adult was incubating a single egg and flushed only if approached very closely, flying and perching in various trees, usually within 50m of the egg.

Table 1. Hatching observations.

Date	Time	Observations
03/01/05	10:00	1 egg
31/01/05		1 egg; first indications of young chipping out
02/02/05	17:00	No advance in hatching
04/02/05	07:00	Egg shell in nest; 2 adults flushed from a position 10m from the nest

Assuming that incubation had just commenced on the first visit, the above data suggests that the incubation period is greater than 30 days, which is substantially longer than a maximum of 27 days previously recorded for this species.

The following information on the breeding of the White-throated Nightjar is summarised from HANZAB (Higgins 1999, p.1004). In NSW eggs have been recorded from August to early February with the clutch size invariably being one. Usually only one brood is successfully raised each year although there is some evidence of two broods for which confirmation is required. Repeat clutches are laid in the event of egg loss with one female laying three clutches within two months. The incubation period is usually 24-26 days with a minimum 22.5 days. The longest period previously

recorded of 28 days was considered to be not greater than 27 days following recalculation. The young, which are semi-preocial, can and usually do move within a few hours of hatching. For the first few days the average distance moved is about 8m/day. Following hatching the chick is brooded and attended by both adults, which are usually found close to the chick on the ground.

Although the chick at Green Wattle Creek was not found after hatching the behaviour of the adult birds was consistent with successful hatching (i.e. they flushed from the ground about 10m from the nest site), as was the condition of the remnant shell which was cleanly broken in two, consistent with a chick having chipped out as opposed to the egg being smashed or stolen by a predator. The search for the chick was limited for fear of treading on it. It is normal for White-throated Nightjars to leave the eggshell at the point of hatching until it disintegrates.

The abnormally long incubation period may be associated with the breeding event being at the end of the known breeding season for this species. For instance it is probable that a repeat clutch was involved or even that this was a second brood.

White-throated Nightjars occur annually in the vicinity of this breeding site. The egg had been laid in an area of woodland dominated by spotted gums and ironbarks with sparse understorey. The egg was laid on leaf litter near a fallen stick with no nest structure.

REFERENCE

- Higgins, P.J. (Ed.) (1999). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbird'. (Oxford University Press, Melbourne.)