

## Observation of White-throated Nightjars at Tahlee, New South Wales

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A group of at least six White-throated Nightjars *Eurostopodus mystacalis* was observed for a brief period on the north shore of Port Stephens on 7 April 2011. Given that the birds were very obviously detected using spotlights and had essentially 'disappeared' minutes later it is considered likely that the birds were on migration. To the authors' knowledge, this behaviour has not been documented in the Hunter Region previously and it is considered likely that migratory movements within the Region are later than those previously published.

The White-throated Nightjar *Eurostopodus mystacalis* is a breeding summer migrant to south-eastern Australia, predominantly east of the Great Dividing Range. Populations spend the austral winter in central / north east Queensland and New

Guinea, with some birds resident in Queensland (Higgins 1999). Information on the migratory movements of this species is scarce, though Carter & Bright (2011) have suggested that it may make diurnal movements on migration so as to maximise

nocturnal feeding. Locally, the species is listed as a “Summer Migrant” (Stuart 2010).

On the evening of 7 April 2011, the authors gathered on the foreshore at Tahlee, on the northern shore of Port Stephens (32°40'03"S 152°00'38"E). We were positioned within 50m of the high-tide mark where a mix of mangrove and saltmarsh vegetation occurred. We were situated on a gravel road just to the north of the mangroves and immediately south of a large paddock area with scattered trees and small sections of inundated land.

At 1810 hours one of us noticed a dark figure fly into the paddock area and alight on the ground. A spotlight was put onto the bird and it rose off the ground, revealing large ‘eyeshine’ on the eyes and it was immediately identified as a White-throated Nightjar. Moments later a second, then a third bird rose off the ground behind the first bird. One bird flew over from the paddock and circled the observers almost directly overhead. Then the spotlight was scanned across the paddock, revealing even more nightjars flying over the land. It was difficult to estimate numbers but the most birds visible at any given time was six, though it was agreed by us at the time that there were probably at least ten birds on the paddock.

Although no direct observations were made of the birds taking food, their flight pattern suggested that they were hawking for insects over the paddock. No calls were heard at any stage. We were present at the site until 1845h, though no observations of the nightjars were made after 1815h.

Although the migration period for White-throated Nightjars north from the Central Coast of NSW has been stated to be the end of February (Higgins 1999), it is considered likely that these birds seen in early April were on migration. It is said that this species may form loose foraging groups of up to 20 birds on passage (see “Social Organisation” in Higgins 1999).

It is probable that the migration period for this species within the Hunter Region is later than that stated in Higgins (1999). This is supported by a number of records of the species in the Region in April, as well as a record in May (Stuart 1994-2010). Furthermore, given that an adult bird with dependent young was observed by one of the authors in the Sugarloaf Range (west of Newcastle) on 5 April 2011, only two days prior to this sighting of multiple birds, it is probable that birds depart the Region in April and May.

## REFERENCES

- Carter, M.J. and Bright, B. (2011). White-throated Nightjar *Eurostopodus mystacalis*: Diurnal over-sea Migration in a Nocturnal Bird. *Australian Field Ornithology* **28**: 32-37.
- Higgins, P.J. (Ed.) (1999). ‘Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbird’. (Oxford University Press: Melbourne.)
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