

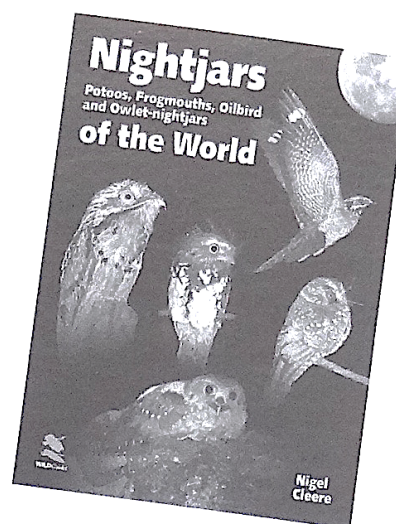
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**Nightjars of the world** by Nigel Cleere, 2010. Maidenhead: WildGuides & Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 464 pp, 580 colour photos. Hardback. ISBN 978-06-91148-57-1. UK£45.

Nightjars and their allies have long attracted the attention of ornithologists and birders throughout the world. Their secretive habits make them very difficult to study, and their camouflaged plumage renders them almost invisible at rest. There is an element of mystery to them, due to their nocturnal lifestyle, cryptic appearance and strange vocalisations, which mean that they are heard far more than seen. This photographic guide by Nigel Cleere is certainly the single most useful book for identifying nightjars, potoos, frogmouths and owl-nightjars.

It treats no fewer than 135 extant species of the traditional Caprimulgiformes, depicting also many distinctive subspecies. Cleere's new book is more a desktop work than a field guide, but its size (25.0 × 18.0 × 3.5 cm) and weight (c.1.5 kg) are acceptable, and the text and photos are well laid out. A succinct foreword by Nigel Collar opens the book, followed by an introduction to the five avian families covered herein. Distributional information for the main groups is depicted in global maps, followed by illustrated and didactic information on plumage types and patterns, morphological aspects and general biology. There are also short sections on taxonomy, extinct species and alternative English names. The text is very instructive, synthesising a huge quantity of information, meaning that it is not only an identification guide but also a valuable source of information for anyone interested in these groups.

My remarks will be directed towards the Neotropical species included in the book, in which readers of *Cotinga* will be most interested. Just a few 'flicks' into the book you will find a stunning picture of a 'yawning' White-winged Potoo *Nyctibius leucopterus* and this is only the first of hundreds of outstanding images, among them also a flycatching Long-tailed Potoo *N. aethereus*, a perched Lyre-tailed Nightjar *Uropsalis lyra* and a flying Pennant-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx vexillarius*. Each species account presents its subject in no fewer two pages, with range maps, excellent photographs and accompanying text presented consistently and clearly, more than any other book on these families (e.g. Cleere<sup>1</sup>, Holyoak<sup>2</sup>) and even photo guides for other avian groups.



Within each account, English and scientific names are followed by the main morphological aspects of the birds, key markings, similar species, vocals, habitat, breeding and conservation status, as well as the large-sized range maps. Most attractive though are the high-quality and well-sized photos. Many poorly known species, for which until recently no photos were available, are depicted, like White-winged Potoo and Roraiman Nightjar *Caprimulgus whitelyi*, among others. Very few photos can be considered below 'par', e.g. some of Great Potoo *N. grandis*. Others are not precisely identified subspecifically, e.g. the female Ladder-tailed Nightjar *Hydrospalis climacocerca*, which is probably not the nominate form. For a few species of which no good images were available, specimen photographs were used; however, their rigid appearance may bear little resemblance to a live bird and their value for identifying birds in the field is not always clear. Nonetheless, their use is sometimes interesting from a historical perspective, notably Cayenne Nightjar *Caprimulgus maculosus*, which is still unknown in life. Bearing in mind that many species are very hard to see and, thus, to photograph, it is easy to agree that Nigel has achieved the best possible book and one that greatly eases the task of identifying these species.

Voice descriptions are provided for each species. Although I am not familiar with the range of vocalisations of all species, at least for Neotropical taxa the orthography appears to be the best possible in most cases. However, sometimes the descriptions are hard to understand. It is difficult to put into 'words' the large extent of sounds made by birds, but some efforts are difficult to associate, even knowing well the species' voice (e.g. Band-tailed Nighthawk *Nyctiprogne leucopyga*, Ocellated Poorwill *Nyctiphrynus ocellatus* and Lyre-tailed Nightjar). Songs of some birds or other components of their vocal repertoire are also omitted, despite being known (e.g. Plain-tailed

Nighthawk *Nyctiprogne vielliardi*, *Hydropsalis climacocerca* flight-call and *Nyctibius leucopterus* contact-call). For those especially interested in vocalisations, the CD provided by Ranft & Cleere<sup>4</sup> is an essential companion to this and the other works on these groups.

The maps are generally accurate, and show political and some physical boundaries, making them easy to use. Two maps are included for each species, one a global map and the second showing the known range in detail, including resident, wintering and breeding areas in some cases. Apparently, the author often decided to show ranges based only on known records, using question marks or leaving blank other regions where the species probably occurs. In such cases, the result is range maps suggesting isolated or disjunct populations for widespread species, leaving the reader confused as to what is a real distributional gap and what is simply a gap in our knowledge. For instance, Spot-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus maculicaudus* occurs throughout flooded forest along main rivers and in marshy areas in northern Brazil more widely than is shown. The same is true of Rufous Potoo *Nyctibius bracteatus* and the Amazonian population of *N. leucopterus*, which are more widespread in *terra firme* throughout the Amazon than indicated here. However, in some cases, published records exist for the areas left blank and in others the depicted range is otherwise incorrect. The range map of Long-tailed Potoo shows central Brazil as most of the range of the nominate form, where it is definitely absent, rather than the Atlantic Forest of Paraguay, Argentina and south-east Brazil north to southern Bahia (the type locality!). The distribution of Silky-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus sericocaudatus mengeli* comprises most of southern Amazonia, including south-east Peru, as described in the text and proven by the photo on p. 141, but not shown on the map. Lesser Nighthawk *Chordeiles acutipennis* seems also to occur across the Brazilian Amazon more widely than shown, albeit sporadically or as a migrant. The range of some species in northern South America can be extended further south, e.g. White-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus cayanensis*, which occurs in central Roraima (Brazil), and Todd's Nightjar *C. heterurus*, which occurs on the Rupununi savanna in south-west Guyana<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, the range of some species that seems to be restricted to specific localities in the Amazon basin (e.g. Least Nighthawk *Chordeiles pusillus esmeraldae*) or in riverine habitats along major rivers (e.g. Ladder-tailed Nightjar *Hydropsalis climacocerca*, Band-tailed Nighthawk) are shown over much larger areas, including many habitats in which these species probably do not occur. In sum, however, the maps are generally accurate and it must be stated that it is often difficult to decide

the best means of plotting distribution on a map, although a 'hybrid' scheme using shading and dots is perhaps best.

Perhaps the most contentious element is the systematic rearrangement of some taxa. For example, the inclusion of some *Eurostopodus* within the genus *Lyncornis*, resurrection of *Antrostomus* for some Neotropical *Caprimulgus*, inclusion of traditional *Uropsalis* within *Macropsalis*, synonymization of *Hydropsalis climacocerca intercedens* (not *intercedans*) under *H. c. pallidior*, elevation of some subspecies of *C. longirostris* to specific status, among many others. Many of these changes are recommended and even mandatory based on available data, and I am sure that Cleere has good reason for most of them. However, even though some changes are mere reversals of unjustified former arrangements, it is still strongly recommended to publish their rationale in peer-reviewed publications, rather than merely stating that relevant literature, vocalisations and specimens have been examined. Splits and novel systematic arrangements should perhaps better have been treated like many others as 'needing further studies', which would not have compromised this work's quality.

Despite my minor criticisms, this book deserves to be owned by every Neotropical birder or nightjar fan. Any reader interested in good bird images will be enthralled by the photographs of these strange and wonderful birds. For identifying nightjars and their relatives this book can hardly be improved, given that it covers all Caprimulgiformes and it greatly enhances our expanding knowledge of these birds. Those not yet 'switched on' to nightjars will surely find this fabulous compendium of images the best stimulus yet to an interest in these superb creatures. The photographers are to be congratulated for permitting use of their terrific images, and Nigel, a brilliant specialist on these birds, deserves our gratitude for putting together this work, which sets a new standard for avian photographic guides. Highly recommended!

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## References

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