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Range extensions of two nightjar species in Niger, with a note on prey

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Summary

We describe an extension of known range of the Golden Nightjar *Caprimulgus eximius* and the first record of Freckled Nightjar *C. tristigma* in Niger. Gut contents of two Golden Nightjars were predominantly grasshoppers.

Résumé

Nous décrivons une extension de la répartition de l'Engoulevent doré *Caprimulgus eximius* et la première observation de l'Engoulevent pointillé *C. tristigma* au Niger. Le gésier de deux Engoulevents dorés contenait surtout des sauterelles.

Golden Nightjar *Caprimulgus eximius*

On the morning of 20 November 1991, we found a female Golden Nightjar roadkill 6 km south of Ouallam, 90 km north of Niamey, Niger. The specimen was heavily damaged and the tail was missing. Approximately 6 km west of Ouallam, on the road to Tillabéry, we found a dead male of the same species, in a much better state. The absence of ant activity indicated that they had probably been killed early that same morning. The male weighed 66.3 g and had a wing length of 180 mm. The female weighed 42.1 g (tail missing), with a wing length of 163 mm.

The gizzard contents of the two birds were examined (Table 1). Remarkable are the large number of prey species found and the large proportion of Orthoptera. The largest intact grasshopper present, a *Diaboloocatantops axillaris*, measured 50 mm. Remarkably absent were remains of *Ornithacris cavroisi*, a grasshopper of 6-7 cm in length and abundant in the same general area. The latter species was the main prey of Swallow-tailed Kites *Chelictinia riocourii* present near Ouallam between October and December 1991 (Mullié *et al.* in press). Either the size of *Ornithacris* or its lack of nocturnal

activity could be responsible for this discrepancy. A study by Moussa (1990) of grasshopper populations around Ouallam, from June to October 1990, showed that 31 species were present, of which *Oedaleus senegalensis*, *Acrotylus blondeli*, *A. patruelis*, *Pyrgomorpha cognata* and *Chrotogonus senegalensis* were the most abundant. Three of the four genera were represented in the nightjar gizzards, suggesting that the nightjars were opportunistic in their prey choice. There was little overlap in prey species between the male and female: this could be a chance effect (impossible to test statistically owing to small sample size) or it might be related to the difference in size between the two birds.

Table 1. Gizzard contents of two Golden Nightjars.

		male	female	
Orthoptera	<i>Pyrgomorpha cognata</i>	2		
	Acridinae sp.		1	
	<i>Diaboloecatantops axillaris</i>	1		
	<i>Ochridia harterti</i>	1		
	<i>O. tibialis</i>	2		
	<i>O. spp.</i>	4	1	
	cf. <i>Amphicremna scalata</i>	1		
	<i>Oedaleus senegalensis</i>	1	3	
	<i>Acrotylus spp.</i>		1	
Dictyoptera	Mantidae		1	
Heteroptera	unidentified		1	
	Cydnidae		2	
Homoptera	unidentified		1	
Coleoptera	unidentified	1		
	Elateridae	1	1	
	Scarabaeidae	1		
		Scarabaeinae		
		Dynastinae	1	
	Cerambycidae		1	
TOTAL		16	13	
Orthoptera	(by numbers)	75%	46%	
	(by weight, estimated)	>85%	>85%	

In an earlier study in Senegal, Keith & Mullié (1990) found that gizzards of the Longtailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus climacurus* and the Plain Nightjar *C. inornatus* both contained predominantly grasshopper prey, 87 and 62 per cent by numbers respectively. Nightjars may apparently be important predators of grasshoppers.

Our finds fill a gap in the distribution of the Golden Nightjar, indicated by a question mark in Fry *et al.* (1988). These authors also state that the species may move locally or be a short-distance migrant in Mali (cf. Lamarche 1980). Our finds tend to confirm this for the Ouallam area: they were made during the dry season and JB has not encountered the species there before on about six trips in October 1990, February, August and September 1991, in spite of finding killed, or spotting at night, a large number of Plain and Standard-wing *Macrodipteryx longipennis* Nightjars.

Freckled Nightjar *Caprimulgus tristigma*

In the early afternoon of 16 October 1991, JB and B. Murphy flushed a nightjar from a roadside gully with some bushes at the edge of a laterite plateau, 15 km south of Ouallam. The bird landed on a laterite boulder further up the gully, facing JB at about 45°, affording good views with 10 x 40 binoculars for about half a minute at a distance of perhaps 30 m. When approached, it flew back down the gully. It was flushed twice more, giving reasonable views in flight, but no further views while sitting. It was a largish nightjar, all dark brownish grey with no white throat patch evident. The head was particularly dark looking, with a slaty sheen. When flying, white patches showed in the wings and corners of the longish tail (not noticeable when tail folded in flight).

According to Fry *et al.* (1988), the nightjar species with white wing and tail spots which occur in the Sahel are the Red-necked *C. ruficollis*, Golden, Plain, European *C. europaeus* and Freckled Nightjars, and possibly the Rufous-cheeked Nightjar *C. rufigena*. Red-necked, Golden and Plain can be eliminated because they have a different general coloration, Rufous-cheeked because it has spotted wing coverts (it would also be out of range, in a 400 mm rainfall area during the dry season) and European because it is moderately variegated and has a pale line across the forewing. The bird in question showed many characteristics (coloration, habitat, habit of perching on a rock) of the Freckled Nightjar. The only argument against this identification is that it had no evident "broad white patch across throat" (cf. Fry *et al.* 1988). On the other hand, the plate in Fry *et al.* (1988) shows that the throat patch is not necessarily all that noticeable.

The conclusion is reached that the bird in question was indeed a male Freckled Nightjar. According to Giraudoux *et al.* (1988) and J. Newby (unpublished checklist of the birds of Niger), this is a new species for Niger. It has, however, been observed only about 300 km westward in Mali, and also about 500 km south-eastward in Nigeria (Fry *et al.* 1988): the species can reasonably be expected to occur in suitable habitat in western Niger.

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