



## Rufouscheeked Nightjar

### Rooiwangnaguil

#### *Caprimulgus rufigena*

The Rufouscheeked Nightjar is a breeding summer migrant to southern Africa, occurring from the southern Cape Province northwards, avoiding the coastal regions in the southeast and west, and the high-altitude grasslands in the southeastern highveld. Its nonbreeding distribution is centred in Cameroon and possibly the western Congo Basin, but extends from Nigeria in the west eastward to Sudan (Fry *et al.* 1988). Clancey (1980b) recognized an eastern and a western race in southern Africa; the ranges appear continuous on the present map.

In southern Africa it is widespread in the drier parts of the central Cape Province, rarely extending into the winter-rainfall region of the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989). There is a small population in coastal scrub in the De Hoop (3420AD)–Cape Infanta (3420BD) area, and it may also occur in the Robertson Karoo (3319C,D) (Hockey *et al.* 1989; Allan *et al.* 1995a). It also occurs in the western and southern Free State where it is said to be rare (Earlé & Grobler 1987); much of the Transvaal, except the southeast (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b); the whole of Botswana (Penry 1994) where the Kalahari is the core of the distribution; the Zimbabwean highveld, mainly 1000–1600 m (Jackson 1975, 1978); and most of Namibia, except for the extreme Namib Desert. It has not been confirmed to occur in KwaZulu-Natal, Swaziland or Lesotho (Clancey 1964b; Cyrus & Robson 1980; Bonde 1993; Parker 1994). Clancey (1971c) regarded its status in southern Mozambique as 'currently unknown'; it is likely to be very rare there, if it occurs at all, although it has been collected occasionally nearby in the Kruger National Park (Clancey 1971c; Kemp 1974).

Identification of this nightjar, as with most species, is easiest by vocalization: a prolonged, unvarying trill preceded by three or four gulping notes. It is easily overlooked and may be commoner than records show.

**Habitat:** It tends to avoid forest, dense bush and high mountains, so is largely absent from the moister eastern parts. Skead (1967b) correctly regarded it as 'a dry inland bird'. It prefers well-drained watershed soils, avoiding river valleys and vleis (Colebrook-Robjent 1984). The stronghold in the region is on Kalahari sands. In Zimbabwe it is most abundant in *Acacia* savanna, but can be found in almost any woodland, grassland, semi-desert bush and scrub where the ground is either gravelly (Jackson 1978), stony or covered with sparse, dry-leaf litter. It is usually associated with trees and bushes, even in

otherwise open grassland. These habitat preferences are reflected in the habitat analysis, with biomes where trees are sparse (Sweet and Sour Grasslands, Succulent Karoo and Fynbos) being least favoured. Its absence from Succulent Karoo relative to Grassy Karoo may also be related to lower insect prey during summer in the largely winter-rainfall Succulent Karoo. It nests on the barest areas, especially when outside woodland habitats.

**Movements:** The models show a clear abundance peak from late August to early April. It is largely absent from southern Africa in winter, May–August, though small numbers were recorded during this period, particularly in Zimbabwe. It migrates to the savannas north of the equator (Fry *et al.* 1988).

**Breeding:** Records were September–January, and as late as March in the Karoo (Zone 3). Peak egg-laying is September–October in the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) and September–November in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981; Colebrook-Robjent 1984).

**Interspecific relationships:** All six nightjar species breeding in the region are primarily separated by habitat; this species prefers open arid bushveld. In Chobe National Park it was present in open scrubby areas, while the Fierynecked Nightjar *C. pectoralis* occupied more heavily wooded areas (Tree 1975d).

**Historical distribution and conservation:** The distribution has probably changed little. The apparent increase in range in Zimbabwe compared to Jackson (1975, 1978) can be attributed to greater observer awareness and effort. Special conservation measures appear to be unnecessary for the Rufouscheeked Nightjar, since it shows a wide habitat tolerance and can survive in hot semi-desert regions of Namibia. Its persistence in more settled areas, however, could be threatened by disturbance.

G.L. Maclean

Recorded in 1162 grid cells, 25.6%  
Total number of records: 3011  
Mean reporting rate for range: 6.3%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



