

# ÆGOTHELES NOVÆ-HOLLANDIÆ, Vig. and Horsf.

## Owlet Nightjar.

- Crested Goat-sucker*, Phill. Bot. Bay, pl. in p. 270.  
*Caprimulgus Novæ-Hollandiæ*, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 588. Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 265. Ib. Man., t. i. p. 412.  
 Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., t. x. p. 234.  
 ——— *cristatus*, Shaw in White's Voy., pl. in p. 241.  
*New-Holland Goat-sucker*, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 261. Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. x. p. 170. Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. vii. p. 341.  
*Bristled Goat-sucker*, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. vii. p. 342.  
*Caprimulgus vittatus*, Ib. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. lviii.  
*Banded Goat-sucker*, Ib. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 262, pl. 136. Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. x. p. 152, pl. 17. Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. vii. p. 342, pl. cxv.  
*Egotheles Novæ-Hollandiæ*, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 197. De la Fresn. in Guerin, Mag. de Zool. 1838, p. 21, pl. 82.  
 ——— *lunulatus*, Jard. and Selby, Ill. Orn., vol. iii. pl. 149.  
 ——— *Australis*, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 338.  
 ——— *cristatus*, G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, p. 7.  
*Little Mawepawk*, colonists of Van Diemen's Land. *Teringing*, Aborigines of the coast of New South Wales.

THIS very interesting little Nightjar is subject to great variation in the colour and markings of its plumage, a circumstance which has tended to produce much confusion, and greatly to increase the list of synonyms.

It possesses a great range of habitat, being found in every part of Van Diemen's Land, and throughout the southern portion of Australia, from Swan River on the western coast to Moreton Bay on the eastern; time, and the continued exploration of that vast country, can alone determine how far it may be found to the northward: it is a stationary species, inhabiting alike the densest brushes near the coast, and the more thinly-wooded districts of the interior.

While rambling in the Australian forests I had the good fortune to meet with more than an ordinary number of specimens of this curious bird. I also procured its eggs, and considerable information respecting its habits and actions, which differ most remarkably from those of the true *Caprimulgidæ*, and on the other hand assimilate so closely to the smaller Owls, particularly those comprised in the genus *Athene*, as to form as perfect an analogical representative of that group of birds as can possibly be imagined, for which reason the English name of Owlet Nightjar has been assigned to it.

During the day it resorts to the hollow branches or spouts as they are called, and the holes of the gum-trees, sallying forth as night approaches in quest of insects, particularly the smaller *Coleoptera*, upon which it chiefly subsists. Its flight is straight, and not characterized by the sudden turns and descents of *Caprimulgus*. On driving it from its haunts I have sometimes observed it to fly direct to a similar hole in another tree, but more frequently to alight on a neighbouring branch, perching across and never parallel to it. When assailed in its retreat it emits a loud hissing noise, and has the same stooping motion of the head observable in the Owls; it also resembles that tribe of birds in its erect carriage, the manner in which it sets out the feathers round the ears and neck, and in the power it possesses of turning the head in every direction, even over the back, a habit it is constantly practising. A pair I had for some time in captivity were frequently leaping to the top of the cage, and had a singular mode of running or shuffling backwards to one corner of it.

While traversing the woods, the usual mode of ascertaining its presence is by tapping with a stone or a tomahawk at the base of the hollow trees, when the little inmate, as represented in the upper figure of our Plate, will almost invariably ascend to the outlet and peep over to ascertain the cause of disturbance. If the tree be lofty or its hole inaccessible, it will frequently retire again to its hiding-place, and there remain until the annoyance be repeated, when it flies off to a place of greater security. In these holes, without forming any nest, it deposits its eggs, which are four or five in number, perfectly white, nearly round, and about one inch and a line in length and eleven lines in breadth. At least two broods are reared by each pair of birds during the year. I have known the young to be taken in Van Diemen's Land in October, and in New South Wales I have procured eggs in January.

Specimens from Van Diemen's Land, Swan River, South Australia, and New South Wales, all present considerable difference in the colour and markings of the plumage, but none of sufficient importance to justify their separation into distinct species: in some the nuchal band and the circular mark on the head are very conspicuous, while in others scarcely a trace of these markings is observable; these variations do not depend upon habitat, but are constantly found in specimens from the same localities.

Little or no difference is apparent in the size or plumage of the sexes.

Adults have the patches above the eyes, a semilunar mark at the back of the head, a band round the neck, and all the under surface grey, finely sprinkled with black, and tinged with buff; ear-coverts reddish buff, the remainder of the head blackish brown; all the upper surface and wings dark brown, sprinkled with grey in the form of irregular bars; primaries brown, sprinkled on their outer webs with lighter brown and grey; tail dark, regularly barred with numerous narrow lines of grey sprinkled with black: irides hazel; feet flesh colour.

In immature birds the lunulate markings are much richer in colour and more distinct than in the adults, in many of which they are nearly obliterated, and the irides are nearly black.

The figures are of the natural size.