

The Montane Nightjars (Family Caprimulgidae) of Eastern Africa

Ruppell was first to describe *Caprimulgus poliocephalus* from the Ethiopian highlands in 1840, followed by Olgilvie-Grant with *C. ruwenzorii* from the Ruwenzori Mountains in 1908, and Grote with *C. pectoralis guttifer* from the West Usambara Mountains, NE Tanzania in 1921. They inhabit all montane areas above 1500 m and in some places reach as high as 3000 m. Where sympatric with other nightjar species their shrill trilling whistle easily separates them from the harsher, 'churring' calls of other nightjars.

Treatment of the three montane forms has varied considerably over the years: Grant & Mackworth-Praed (1937) agreed with Sclater & Moreau (1932) that *guttifer* was worthy of specific status and not as a race of *pectoralis* (Fiery-necked Nightjar) as had been proposed by Grote. Regarding *ruwenzorii*, both Sclater (1930) and Chapin (1939) felt it was closely related to *poliocephalus* as were *guttifer* and *koesteri* of the Angolan highlands, a view later supported in Peters (1940), White (1965) and Britton (1980), but contrary to Grant & Mackworth-Praed (1937) and Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1957) who felt that *ruwenzorii* like *guttifer* should be treated as a full species. Taxonomic treatment of the montane nightjars was later reviewed by Fry (1988), and in Fry *et al.* (1988) it was proposed that while *guttifer* and *koesteri* should remain within *poliocephalus*, *ruwenzorii* was better treated as a distinct monotypic species.

While most authorities had based their recommendations on mainly morphological features, little attention had been paid to the vocalisations of nightjars. As with all nocturnal birds, calls are distinctive and play an important role in species identification, and the montane nightjars in particular possess some of the most melodious of all nightjar whistled songs. Following extensive comparison of the calls of all three East African montane forms, Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire (1993) firmly believed that the vocal and morphological evidence of the *C. poliocephalus* complex clearly showed all to be conspecific, and that the slight variations in the calls of *poliocephalus*, *guttifer* and *ruwenzorii* were purely dialectal. Similarly the morphological character relating to the amount of white in the outer tail appeared to be clinal as showed by Louette (1990).

Later Cleere (1995) examined the morphology, vocalisations and distribution of all forms of the 'Mountain' Nightjar group concluding (contrary to Fry *et al.* 1998) that *poliocephalus* was best regarded as a monotypic species and *ruwenzorii* as a polytypic species with *guttifer* as a valid southerly race *C. ruwenzorii guttifer*. With regard to the Angolan form *koesteri*, Cleere felt this was best treated as a synonym of the Ruwenzori Nightjar. With regard to English names, Cleere (1995) further confused the issue by proposing the name Abyssinian Nightjar for *C. poliocephalus* and Montane Nightjar for *C. ruwenzorii*. All the above recommendations were later followed in Cleere &

Nurney (1998), Cleere (1999), and Dickinson (2003).

Meanwhile Zimmerman *et al.* (1996), while noting the recommendations of Louette (1990), Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire (1993), and Cleere (1995) and following an extensive examination of specimens held in several museums, together with a detailed overview of numerous sound recordings of all three forms, considered the entire montane nightjar group as comprising a single polytypic species. While the field identification of nightjars is complex and difficult at all times, calls are a vitally important identification component when separating nightjar species at night. The calls of all the East African montane forms are clearly sufficiently similar to each other, and to regard either *ruwenzorii* or *guttifer* as separate species only further confuses an already complex arrangement.

Throughout northern and eastern Tanzania montane nightjars are widespread, with *poliocephalus* occurring from the Crater Highlands east to Mt. Meru and Mt. Kilimanjaro. Elsewhere *guttifer* occupies the high montane grasslands from the West Usambara mountains south through the rest of the Eastern Arc Mountains to the southern highlands around Njombe and west to the Ufipa Plateau. This smaller and darker form has over the years been treated as a race of either *poliocephalus* or *ruwenzorii*, or as a distinct species. It clearly occupies the same ecological niche as *poliocephalus* and *ruwenzorii*, and its calls are similar or identical to both, albeit with slight dialectal variations (Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire 1993). Its close links to both *poliocephalus* and *ruwenzorii* are not disputed, and while reasons for treating it as a race of *ruwenzorii* (Cleere 1995, 1999, Dickinson 2003) are somewhat puzzling, the similarities in calls of all three forms must surely suggest a close relationship more worthy of sub-specific recognition rather than anything else.

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Swamp Nightjar *Caprimulgus natalensis* in the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem

In 2005, I documented the presence of a previously unknown population of Swamp Nightjar *Caprimulgus natalensis* in Tanzania's northeast Serengeti in the Klein's Camp area (Kilpin 2006). The area where the birds were found, and where they are regarded as being resident throughout the year, is adjacent to the formal Serengeti National Park (SNP), where much more extensive areas of apparently suitable habitat are found. As a result of the presence of such suitable habitat, I had been hoping to locate more birds inside the national park and perhaps even further north into the Masai Mara.

In due course, on the evening of 27 February 2007 as I was on the Lobo Road just 5.1 km from the exit of the SNP at Klein's Gate, I heard the characteristic 'chop-chop-chop' call of the Swamp Nightjar. It was getting dark and I was unable to see the bird, but noted the habitat: a gently sloping area leading