



**Habitat:**

Open, dry, sparse scrub country with euphorbias and cacti; hills and ravines, near stony perennial streams, thin deciduous (teak, etc.) jungles, semiarid regions, also at the edge of fallow cropland and around human habitation in this habitat. Up to 1500 m ASL. Avoid forests.



Indian Nightjar inhabits semi-arid country with stones, sparse brush and open areas. The Nightjar is seen in flight.

**Habit:**

Nocturnal; crepuscular. Terrestrial rooster and aerial feeder. Occur in pairs or family parties just after breeding. Perch boldly on roads and mud tracts during the night, take dust bath; perch horizontally on boulders, fence posts, tree stubs; launch aerial sallies for insects.



Perching beneath a shrub



Walking amidst stones, cryptically coloured

**Food:**

Feed on the wings with wide mouth kept open. Bugs (Hemiptera), beetles (Coleoptera), dung beetles (Onthophagus sp.), moths Lepidoptera-Heterocera), crickets (*Gryllus* sp.), other flying insects and water beetles (Dysticidae) taken in flight by surface gleaning.

**The Secret Life of Nightjar:**



Two rare shots on night vision camera taken by Ela Foundation researchers show parents feeding the chicks at night. Secret life is unfolded!



Nightjar's wide mouth helps catch arial insects. Juvenile (L); Adult (R)



Parent feeding the chick in the morning - a rare shot!

**Distribution:**

India and our subcontinent (Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Tibet, Myanmar), Thailand and southern Indo-Chinese countries.

**Status:**

Commonest resident nightjar. Territorial. Seen throughout the year. Local altitudinal movements in winter in the Himalayas. Elsewhere resident.

**Key Features:**

- Incomplete white throat band.
- Rufous nuchal collar. Black streaks on head, back.
- White wing mirrors on outer four primaries.
- Tips of outer two tail feathers on either side white.
- Bristles cover the base of brown beak.
- Thin circum- orbital yellow ring.
- Iris brown. Legs, small, pinkish brown, claws pale brown.

**Morphs, dimorphism:**

- Grey, pale and sandy brown colour phases varying with locality.
- Male and female have different wing and tail patterns.

Side view : Shows horizontal position

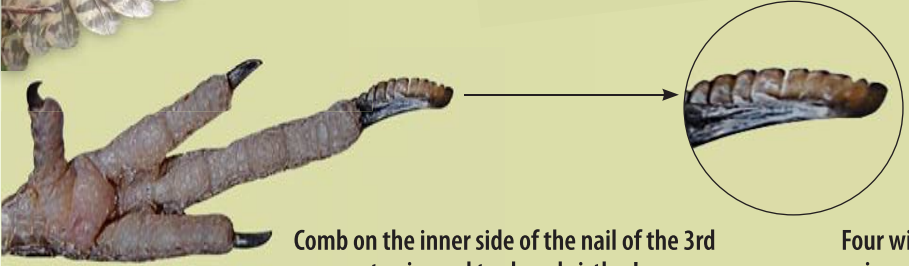
Front view : Nostrils and throat patches

Top view: Streaks on crown



Adult: wings and toes

Juvenile: wings and tail

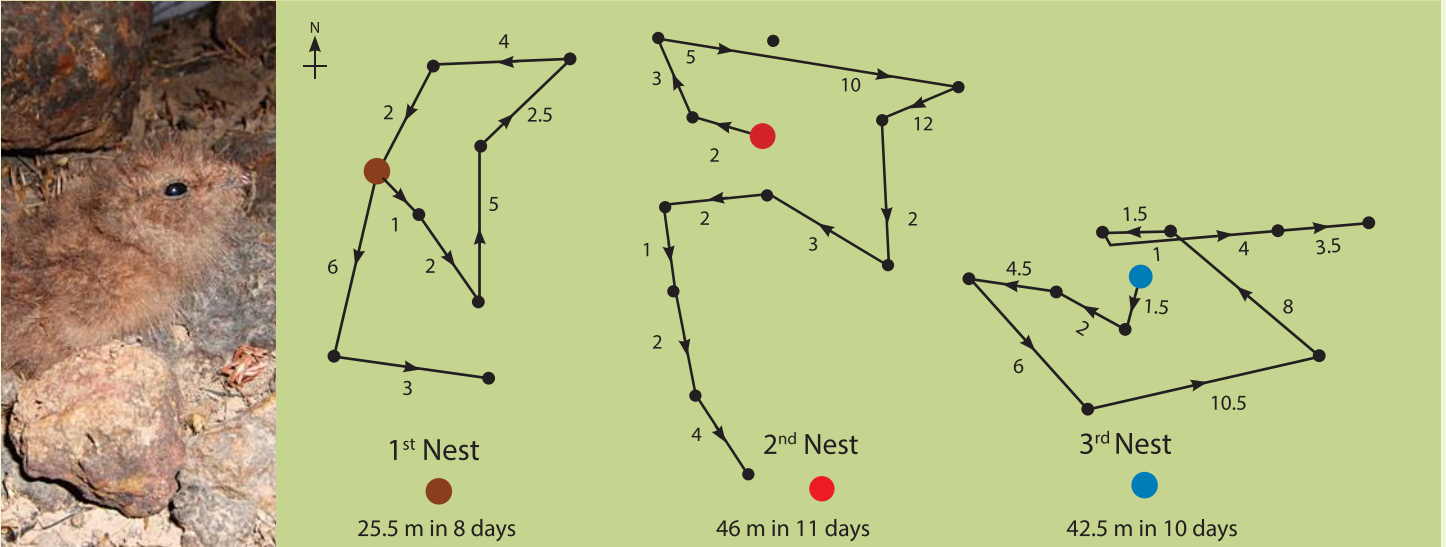


Comb on the inner side of the nail of the 3rd toe is used to clean bristles !

Four wing mirrors, and two tail bands in a pale creamy coloured morph

**Daily ground movement pattern of chicks from three nests:**

(inter-nodal distance is distance covered by chicks in meters / day; daily movement is a survival strategy)



**Flight:** Silent and accomplished flight



**Some related species:** (Calls are typical)

- **Grey Nightjar** (*Caprimulgus indicus*): In forested areas. Call *kapoo*, *kapoo*, *chuckoo*.
- **Jerdon's Nightjar** (*Caprimulgus atripennis*). Call *chuink*, *chuink*.
- **Savanna Nightjar** (*Caprimulgus affinis*). Call *chweez*, *sweesh*, *chweez*.



Savanna Nightjar



Grey Nightjar



Jerdon's Nightjar

**Cultural aspects:**

The nightjars are well known in our rural areas and are called **chakwa** (confusing birds of the starry night) in Marathi language, since they are often heard but seldom seen. In the Continent, the nightjars are called 'Goat Suckers' in the false belief that they drink goat milk! Nightjars feature in poetry by Wordsworth, Dylan Thomas and George Meredith by the names of the 'dor-hawk' and 'eve-jar'. In Europe they were also wrongly condemned as 'Lich-fowl' or corpse birds.



**Etymology:**

*Caprimulgus* ( L.) *capra*, a nanny goat; *mulgere*, to milk; *asiaticus* ( L.), Asian. (Pande, Satish. 2009).



Amazing Facts:

The flight of nightjars is silent. Prominent bristles help in baro-reception. The wing beats of flying insects produce low amplitude pressure waves that can be sensed by the bristles to aid navigation. The eyes of the night-jar are placed laterally and there are two fields of binocular vision, in front and behind! The eyes can be rolled such that the nightjar can clearly see what is happening behind the back without turning the head!! On very close approach it suddenly takes to wings to land in the vicinity.



Changing the shape of the eye using eye-lid movement    Eyes can be seen looking behind!!    Chick sheltering at noon in the shade    Camouflaged chick is concealed!

**Threats:** Habitat loss and modification, insecticides and pesticides. Eggs on ground may be trampled by grazing cattle, sheep and goats. Natural predation is by monitor lizards, civets, mongoose and fox. We have recorded forest fires to incinerate the eggs. Road traffic collisions often cause deaths of night flying nightjars that get blinded by vehicle lights.



Trampled eggs    Eggs addled by rains    Dead chick and ants    Road kills

Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus* (Latham, 1790).

**Type locality:** India=Bombay (India); Hattin, Gurgaon, Punjab=Haryana.

**Ratwa** (Marathi); **Chapka** (Hindi); **Deshi chapo** (Gujarati); **Askapprigaddu** (Telugu); **Padukai kuruvi** (Tamil) **Ra chaukan** (Malyalam).



- **Size:** 24 cm.
- **Weight:** 42-46 g.
- **Wing:** 138-158 mm.
- **Tail:** 96-119 mm.
- **Tarsus:** 20-22 mm.
- **Bill:** 17-19 mm.
- **Breeding season:** February to September.
- **Clutch:** 1 – 2 eggs. One to two clutches per year.
- **Eggs:** Long oval; smooth; salmon to pinkish with red-brown spots.
- **Egg Size:** 26.5 x 20 mm.
- **Incubation:** 16 - 18 d. Fledging: 17-18 d.
- **Nuptial displays:** Aerial flights and calling by partners at dusk.
- **Call:** *Chuck-chuck-chuck-chukrrr*, repeated at intervals, from perch or in flight. Also *chk-chuk* contact calls for chicks and in non-breeding season.. Vocal at dusk and before dawn.

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Indian Nightjar

- **Order:** Caprimulgiformes
- **Family:** Caprimulgidae
- **Status:** Resident

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Ela File 30

Phenology:



Rare site of nuptial display at night



Parent on the nest



Dark salmon and light salmon-pink eggs in two clutches



2 and 3 days chicks with egg shell



4 days chick



5 days chick



6 and 7 days chicks



12 and 14 days chicks



17 days chick



22 days chicks



26 days chicks huddled together

Nest and breeding behaviour:

The nest is an indistinct small scrape on ground in open country amidst small stones, near dry streams, on hill slopes, at edge of cultivation, etc. No nesting material is added. Both parents incubate and feed the nestlings. Such is its strong belief in self camouflage and concealment that the nightjar does not stir even on close approach; hence, the nest is difficult to find. While attending the nest, the nightjar lands away from the nest and slowly, clumsily and cautiously walks towards the eggs or nestlings. Young are fed by regurgitation and sites are changed every day after two days after the eggs hatch. (see chart on page 2).



Parent leaving the nest with eggs



Two chicks beneath the parent



Two chicks of 35 days



Nightjar is flying low to catch aerial insect

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