

Yucatan Nightjar

Caprimulgus badius



Yucatan Nightjar *Caprimulgus badius*, as its name suggests, is largely endemic to Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula where it is generally common to fairly common in scrubby and brushy woodland, and forest-edge habitats^{1,5}. As with many New World nightjars, knowledge of this species' taxonomy, voice and distribution has entailed the unravelling of misconceptions and perpetuated errors.

Although traditionally considered conspecific with Tawny-collared Nightjar *C. salvini* of north-east Mexico¹, the two are clearly separate species with distinct vocalisations and plumage^{4,5}, a fact recently acknowledged by the AOU².

Confusion has also surrounded the voice of the Yucatan Nightjar. For many years, its song and that of the widely sympatric Yucatan Poorwill *Nyctiphrynus yucatanicus* have been transposed in the literature^{3,6,7}, and it was only in the mid-1980s that this mistake was realised^{4,5,8}! It is now known that Yucatan Nightjar (not the poorwill) sings a loud, clear *puc ree-u-reeeu*, recalling the song of Chuck-will's-widow *C. carolinensis*. Conversely, Yucatan Poorwill (not the nightjar) sings a loud, slightly resonant *whirr*. Both vocalisations are quite distinct from the abrupt, clipped *chi-wihw* of the Tawny-collared Nightjar^{4,5}.

Whilst Yucatan Nightjar appears to be largely resident, some move south in winter to Belize and northern Honduras, where a roosting male was photographed in mangroves near Tela on 15 December 1995, the only record for Honduras. Although the AOU¹ indicated that this form was resident in Belize, this may have been the result of confusion over the transposed songs (see above). The few published records from Belize are during January–March⁹ (winter and migration). I know of no confirmed summer records from Belize, although breeding can be expected in the extreme north. Old reports from Guatemala, perpetuated by AOU¹, are also in error and refer to misidentified specimens of Mexican Whip-poor-will *C. arizonae*^{5,11}, and a report from Nicaragua¹⁰ refers to Tawny-collared Nightjar^{1,5}.

The difficulty of detecting silent nightjars, combined with limited night fieldwork, means that this species' winter movements have been interpolated from a paucity of data, and the winter (and breed-

ing) range of the Yucatan Nightjar is probably still incompletely known.

The bird depicted here, an adult female, was recorded three consecutive nights, 29–31 January 1996, c. 10 km south-east of San Ignacio, Cayo District, Belize and is one of very few documented records from Belize. It sat on the same perch each night, c. 2 m up on the edge of a large grassy field bordered by low deciduous forest and was photographed on 30 January 1996 by Edwin Jacobson using an Olympus OM-4 with a 65–200 mm zoom lens and hand-held Vivitar TTL flash.

To identify this bird to species, note the bright tawny cinnamon hindcollar (particularly extensive on an upright-perching bird), narrow white forecollar, bold white mottling on the underparts, broad silvery scapular stripe bordered by coarse black blotches and the relatively broad pale tips to the outer rectrices⁵; the pale tips on the outer two rectrices are c. 1 cm wide on adult female Tawny-collared, and c. 1.5 cm wide on Yucatan. From above, the pale tips to the outer rectrices appear whitish, but from below they are cinnamon. Note that the illustration of a female's tail on Plate 27 of Howell & Webb⁵ shows the maximal amount of whitish, as seen from above. First-year birds (both sexes) appear to have a tail pattern similar to adult females but with narrower, more tapered rectrices that have narrower cinnamon tips. A useful distinction from Tawny-collared Nightjar, also illustrated on Plate 27 but not mentioned in the text, is that the tail of Yucatan Nightjar is more graduated: on females, from the tail-tip to the tip of the outer rectrix averages 2+ cm on Yucatan, 1.5 cm on Tawny-collared.

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Top: Female Yucatan Nightjar *Caprimulgus badius*.
(Edwin Jacobson)