

Pygmy Nightjar *Caprimulgus hirundinaceus vielliardi*

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The Pygmy Nightjar *Caprimulgus hirundinaceus* is endemic to Brazil³, where it occurs from southern Piauí and Ceará south to central Bahia. A new subspecies—*C. h. vielliardi*—was recently described from Colatina, Espírito Santo state, in south-east Brazil². Birds of this subspecies are darker overall than those in the north-east of the country, which inhabit xeric caatinga habitat and are consequently paler^{2,3}.

The birds in south-east Brazil inhabit dark rocky outcrops within the Atlantic Forest region. These outcrops are covered by xeric vegetation similar to caatinga. This habitat is characterised by several species of cacti (*Pilosocereus* sp.: Cactaceae), bromeliads (*Encholirium* sp.: Bromeliaceae), canelade-ema (*Nanuza plicata*: Velloziaceae), and thorny shrubs and trees.

In July and September 1997, we searched an area of rocky outcrops at Aimorés, c.50 km from Colatina, Minas Gerais state, south-east Brazil, for *C. hirundinaceus vielliardi*.

During daylight *C. hirundinaceus vielliardi* roosts on the dark rocky outcrops. Against the dark rocks, its plumage forms a perfect camouflage, as evidenced by the accompanying photographs. We observed two birds (probably a pair) roosting together. They were shaded from the intense sunlight by roosting under a rocky projection.

C. hirundinaceus vielliardi, in common with other caprimulgids, commences vocal and foraging activities at dusk. When foraging, the birds perch on the rocks among clusters of cacti, bromeliads and other shrubs, from where they sally to a height of c.3 m, presumably to capture insects, before returning to the ground. During our observations, vocalisation activity decreased as dusk turned to night, ceasing completely at nightfall. However, we suspect that on moonlit nights the birds may continue to vocalise throughout the night, as noted by Mills for other species¹. Another subspecies in north-east Brazil has been observed to vocalise throughout moonlit nights⁴.

Currently, *C. hirundinaceus vielliardi* is known only from the type-locality and from our observations at Aimorés. However, it appears likely that it will be found at similar rocky outcrops nearby. Ribon² reports a specimen, identified as *C. nigrescens*, from Jequitinhonha, Minas Gerais, in the Rio de Janeiro National Museum (MNRJ 31,357) that could pertain to *C. hirundinaceus vielliardi*.

Field identification of this subspecies is not difficult: attention should be paid to the small body size and blackish plumage marked with ferruginous

spots which help conceal the bird against the dark rocks. Even the belly is black, striated with ferruginous. It has a white wingbar, more prominent in males. The male also has white in the tail tip and throat. Female plumage is poorly known, due to a lack of specimens and photographs. The most common vocalisations appear to be a whistled *fuiil* and a hoarse alarm call *kurral*. One male was observed giving the first vocalisation; during this period the white throat patch became more conspicuous.

Acknowledgements

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References

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Plates on back cover:

Figures 1–4. Male Pygmy Nightjar *Caprimulgus hirundinaceus vielliardi* (Marcelo Ferreira de Vasconcelos).

Figure 5. Pygmy Nightjar *Caprimulgus hirundinaceus vielliardi* habitat (Marcelo Ferreira de Vasconcelos).

Male Pygmy Nightjar *Caprimulgus hirundinaceus vielliardi*



Figures 1–4. Male Pygmy Nightjar *Caprimulgus hirundinaceus vielliardi* (Marcelo Ferreira de Vasconcelos).
Figure 5. Pygmy Nightjar *Caprimulgus hirundinaceus vielliardi* habitat (Marcelo Ferreira de Vasconcelos).