

Species of the Month 12/2018 || Large-tailed Nightjar

17 December 2018 || TO NUS Community

NUS Students Against Violation of the Earth (SAVE) and the Office of Environmental Sustainability present “Campus in a Tropical Rainforest”, an initiative that aims to create awareness of the biodiversity that surrounds us in NUS. In each monthly issue, we will be featuring a species that can be spotted or found in NUS to help us get to know them better. So, if you happen to be travelling around campus between classes, remember to stop and look around your surroundings, for you may be surprised to come across some of the other inhabitants of NUS.

ISSUE #35 | DECEMBER 2018

CAMPUS IN A TROPICAL RAINFOREST

SPECIES OF THE MONTH



Photo by: Spencer Yau

LARGE-TAILED NIGHTJAR

Species: *Caprimulgus macrurus* | Family: Caprimulgidae

APPEARANCE

Measuring at up to 33 cm from beak to tail feathers, the Large-tailed Nightjar is longer than the Javan Myna! Its cryptic patterning allows it to blend in with the leaf litter or branches while its large eyes provide superb vision under the cover of night. The white patches on its throat, wings and tail feathers are most likely used as a warning display to potential threats. Their feet, while too short for running, are mainly used for perching.

HABITAT

Found from East India to Northern Australia, the Large-tailed Nightjar is very widely distributed. In Singapore, it's very active at night and often makes a repetitive "tchoink-tchoink-tchoink" call. They can be found within forests, woodlands, parks and even near urban dwellings. During nighttime, they can be seen flying, hunting or roosting on the ground or branches. In the day, they are asleep on the leaf litter or in tree branches and thanks to their camouflage, are very difficult to spot. In NUS, they can be sighted along Kent Ridge Road and FASS from dusk onwards.

DIET

With the ability to open its mouth widely and numerous bristles surrounding its mouth, the Large-tailed Nightjar can easily catch and consume insects in mid-air while flying. They hunt from a perch before flying low to the ground and swooping down on their meal. Their long, pointed wings and elongated tail feathers gives them extra maneuverability and a quiet flight, allowing them to chase down or ambush flying insects in the dark.

FUN FACTS

Instead of twigs, the Large-tailed Nightjar lays eggs on shallow, shaded depressions on the ground, with both parents taking turns in protecting the nest. When an intruder is spotted, the parent bird flies towards the intruder and feigns a broken wing. As the intruder approaches, the parent flies off, returns and repeats this distraction to lure the intruder away from the nest until the intruder is far enough. Both the eggs and chicks are very inconspicuous, looking like pebbles and dead leaves respectively.

When exposed to artificial light, be it street lamp or torchlight, the Large-tailed Nightjar gives off a reddish eyeshine. This eyeshine is due to the light bouncing off light receptors in the retina deep in the eye. That reflective surface aids in letting in more light into the eye, enabling the Large-tailed Nightjar to see well at dawn, dusk and under the moonlight.

Initiative by:



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Check out other sightings of NUS biodiversity on the Campus Creatures Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/campuscreatures/>

You can also join the community in spotting the flora and fauna in NUS by sharing your sightings with pictures on the Campus Creatures Facebook page and Instagram the photos with #NUSCiTR and #NUSbiodiversity.