

Record of Australian Owlet-nightjar Breeding February 2010

Round the Bend Conservation Cooperative -149 Skyline Rd. Bend of Islands

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INTRODUCTION

Breeding Owlet-nightjars were detected on 31/1/2010. Three eggs were seen in the nest, 900mm below the top of a flue, where it was blocked at roof level, on a house at the Round The Bend Conservation Cooperative, located in the Environmental Living Zone, 33km north-east of Melbourne.

The nest site was intermittantly monitored. 2 of the 3 eggs successfully hatched with 2 juveniles fledging on 8/2/10. Refer to Appendix 1 for a photographic record with observation notes.



**The Flue  
(Nest at roof level)**



**Chick at Top of Flue 3/3/10**

RESEARCH

HANZAB was referred to at the BOCA library. Although it states that little is known, there is a review of the current literature and the following can be summarised regarding Owlet-nightjar breeding: -

- Breeds mainly Sept. – Nov; but can be July – Feb.
- Nest usually tree hollow but can be fence post and a vertical water pipe has been recorded
- Same site can be used for many seasons (also for replacement clutches)
- Possible double-brooding in one season but evidence is inconclusive.
- Depth of hollow 300 – 1000mm but can be up to 3500mm
- Diameter of hollow entrance 100 – 150mm
- Size of cavity 99 x 128mm but with big variation
- Clutch size 2 – 5, usually 3

- Incubation 18 – 29 days
- Eggs hatch on successive days.
- Young
  - Hatch in white down with eyes closed, soon move actively and start gaping
  - Eyes open at 4 -5 days
  - At 2 weeks covered with soft dark-grey juvenile plumage
- Fledging 21 – 29 days but can be up to 35

### ANALYSIS

We know that the 3 eggs were present on 31/1/10 and 2 chicks were present on 18/2/10.

On 18/2/10 both chicks were inactive to the extent that I thought they were dead until I noticed slight body movement from breathing. A video was taken which demonstrates this movement and shows the smaller chick partially opening its eye.

The smaller chick only partially opened its eye, so it could be assumed that it hatched about 5 days previously on 13/2/10, and the larger chick hatched on 12/2/10

With incubation of 18 to 29 days, laying would have occurred between 14/1/10 and 25/1/10.

With fledging period of 21 to 29 days, fledging would be expected between 5/3/10 and 13/3/10.

### CONCLUSION

Fledging in fact occurred on 8/3/10, so the above estimate seems to be within the normal range.

The timing is later than normal but not outside previously recorded ranges.

The late timing raises the possibility of double-brooding or a replacement clutch.

### FURTHER ACTION

If possible the site should be left undisturbed and monitored next season to record any further breeding activity

**Appendix 1: PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD**      **OBSERVATION NOTES**



All photos by Frank Pierce unless noted

Photo 3/2/10

Nesting in flue above Parris's Kitchen.  
Nest 900mm below top of 90 ID Fibre  
Cement flue.

3 eggs seen in nest on 31/1/10, when  
adult was first observed on top of the flue  
at 5.30pm, and flushed when the nest was  
approached



Photo 18/2/10

Chicks thought to be dead until slight  
breathing movement observed. (See  
video)



Photo 21/2/10

Both chicks active.



Photo 25/2/10

Both chicks active.



Photo 28/2/10

1 chick 350 below top (using wings &  
claws),

2nd at nest level 900mm below top.



Photo 2/3/10

One 200 from top of flue. The other just  
below.

Note foot support from end of pipe at  
splice.



Photo 3/3/10

One at top of flue with head out, it scurried down to about 200 below top as I approached.

The other one was about 600 below the top.



Photo 3/3/10

One at top of flue with head out, it scurried down to about 200 below top as I approached.

The other one was about 600 below the top.



Photo 4/3/10

Both 200mm from top of flue but one scurried down to bottom before I could take a photo



Photo 7/3/10. (Photo by Pierre Noirjean)

Both 200mm from top and looking healthy. Obviously active.



Photo 8/3/10. (Photo by Pierre Noirjean)

Both 200mm from top and moving wings.



Photo 12/3/10

Chicks at nest 8/3/10 but gone on 9/3/10.

Note: Grasshopper and part of beetle.

Also leaves have gone