

Night Life

Nightjar or Camoufler-jour

Spot me if you can- Habitat shot of a Savannah Nightjar



Close-up of a Savannah Nightjar



Camouflage or animal colouration for concealment is one of the many spectacular examples of adaptation. It provides strong support to Darwin and Wallace's idea of evolution by natural selection. The phenomenon is wide spread in the animal kingdom and occurs through modification in the animal's appearance over evolutionary time. However, given a certain morph, the animal could potentially choose a 'suitable' background/substrate to enhance the effectiveness of its concealment against a visual predator. This strategy of background-matching would be behavioural and would require a complex combination of sensory and cognitive processing at an individual's level. Recent evidence suggests that nightjars are experts of this strategy. While nightjars are nocturnal birds, in the daytime they are exposed to predators and must find ways to avoid them. So effective is the camouflage of the adult nightjar, that it does not escape until the potential predator is right next to it. Its eggs, however, do not seem to be as well-concealed. Perhaps, the nightjar incubating them can afford this due to its own superior camouflage. The nightjar gets its name from the 'jarring' sound it makes at night. Perhaps, a name based on its camouflage in the day would do more justice to it.

Image Credits: Kunal Bamby, Punjab
Text Credit: Manjari Jain, IISER Mohali