



THE NIGHTJAR PROJECT

Conservation, art and community in the New Forest

A story about belonging. Two homes, one heart.

The Nightjar Project is a creative and community programme developed by African Activities to explore the impact climate change and biodiversity and habitat loss is having on this intriguing bird and to offer a beautiful metaphor for the human migration experience.

Just as the nightjar bird belongs to two homes, so do many people who currently live in the New Forest.

The Nightjar Project aims to raise the visibility of both long-settled and newly arrived communities across the New Forest. By sharing cultures and individual stories we create safe spaces where we can think about belonging and celebrate holding two homes and two cultures in our hearts.

Small actions protect an entire generation of birds.

WHAT IS A NIGHTJAR?

As the sun lowers over heathland and Open Forest, a strange sound begins to spin through the air, a soft, mechanical churring. **That is the nightjar.**

A migratory bird, it arrives quietly in the New Forest in late spring, having flown from West Africa. It nests on the ground and hides in plain sight.

Nightjars are creatures of dusk and darkness, living for up to 12 years in the wild. Their large eyes are adapted for low light, and their silent flight allows them to move almost unnoticed through the evening air.

Perfectly camouflaged, their plumage resembles bark, bracken, and fallen leaves, so you will often hear a nightjar long before you ever see one.

Weighing just 85 grams, the European nightjar undertakes an extraordinary journey each year, travelling more than 10,000 kilometres between Europe and Africa and crossing the Sahara Desert twice on its annual migration.

They feed on the wing, using a unique fringe of bristles around their beaks to help funnel insects into their wide mouths. They can even drink while flying, skimming the surface of ponds and lakes in one smooth motion.



Suitcase Stories: nightjar play created in partnership with Forest Forge Theatre Company © redManhattan Photography



HOW CAN YOU HELP?

As ground nesting birds, nightjars are vulnerable. They are easily disturbed by:

- People unknowingly walking through nesting areas
- Dogs running off lead in sensitive habitats
- Loss of heathland and open woodland

You can help ground nesting birds by:

- Keeping to marked paths in breeding season (March – August)
- Keeping dogs under close control in sensitive areas
- Giving birds space if you hear or see them

Visit the newforestnpa.gov.uk/dogs to read the dog walking code.

FIND OUT MORE...

About the Nightjar's habitat and how to care for the New Forest. newforestnpa.gov.uk

African Activities' work on the Nightjar Project in the UK and in Ghana. africanactivities.org.uk



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THE NIGHTJARS OF THE NEW FOREST NEED YOU

Your willingness to welcome all who call the New Forest home, whether in the sky or on the land.

Your openness to share, celebrate and enjoy the diverse cultures and gifts of the people. And your curiosity in asking yourself questions and listening to the answers of others.

Building bridges takes all of us. So, we invite you to get involved.

DID YOU KNOW?

Some nightjar species synchronize their courtship and egg-laying with the full moon, when increased illumination improves their hunting success and provides more feeding opportunities to sustain breeding efforts.

Nightjar parents are equals, both incubating the eggs and caring for the chicks who are precocial, meaning they are relatively mature and mobile shortly after hatching.

To help in times of food scarcity, they can enter a state of torpor, lowering their metabolic rate to conserve energy.

The Pied Piper of West Africa

This mysterious bird has Pied Piper folklore among the villages of West Africa.

As twilight descends, the bird's eerie, haunting call can be heard, and young children knowing that it is a ground nesting bird, challenge themselves to try and catch it.

What they don't realise is to protect its eggs, the nightjar will lure the child in the opposite direction, and if they're not careful, they can quickly become lost in the approaching dark. Mothers warn their children to beware of the nightjar at the same time as being grateful for the bird's presence, for to have nightjars nearby means good luck and abundance.

Flying alongside the nightjar through the 'soundscapes' of Ghana, from the marketplace to the frogs in Buiepe.

Take a rest stop and listen to a nightjar children's story written and voiced by one of our human New Forest Nightjars. Or enjoy a spoken word piece sharing one nightjar's personal experience of living and belonging in two places.

Follow the nightjar journey through the QR code:



Nightjars are crepuscular, meaning they are most active during dawn and dusk.

Migrating birds from Africa to the New Forest

- Nightjar
- Cuckoo
- Swallow
- House Martin
- Swift
- Willow Warbler
- Reed Warbler
- Garden Warbler
- Whitethroat
- Lesser Whitethroat
- Redstart
- Spotted Flycatcher
- Tree Pipit
- Hobby
- Honey Buzzard
- Sedge Warbler

The rhythm of nature is alive in us all.

