

# Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler

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## NIGHT PARROT REDISCOVERED

Of course it was a dark night! Three months ago in the Queensland Museum auditorium naturalist John Young showed a spectacular set of photos and movies that proved conclusively that the Night Parrot had survived for one hundred years without us knowing! This was the first occasion since 1912 that incontrovertible evidence of the Night Parrot was publicly available. Exactly where John took the photos is being kept a secret; except that we know the site is in western Queensland.

It was known that the Night Parrot spends the daytime hidden in clumps of spinifex grass and then in the cool of the night it cautiously emerges onto the open stony ground to feed on seeds and insects and to drink. It is a ground bird, only resorting to low flights when alarmed or in search of water. It was widespread across the dry centre of Australia until the early 1900's when it apparently disappeared – probably because of the feral cats that invaded its habitat. It was not for lack of trying

that it has remained hidden from us. Since 1912 many have gone in search of the Night Parrot. However, in the last few years another set of extended night-time vigils, always fruitless in the past 100 years, drew this wonderful result – perfect digital photos of this wondrously elusive bird.

This miraculous rediscovery is worth celebrating because it shows the continuing mystery of life in Australian landscapes, the resilience of life-forms and the value of persistent exploration. But it simultaneously presents our social and political processes with complex quandaries! How is the conservation of the Night Parrot to be managed? It has been proven to exist in Queensland but suitable habitat exists in Western Australia, could it still be there also? To ensure this bird continues to live with us an informed generous response is now required.

Happy Birding!

~ Jim

Image: Spinifex habitat that could contain a Night Parrot!

