

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher,

Jim Butler

Tawny Frogmouth Adaptations



LAST Spring I decided to find the maximum number of Tawny Frogmouth "oom-oom-oom-" calls made without a break, at dusk; so out on the deck I listened and counted.

Unfortunately, my helpful mind continued this project into the night by waking me up counting the calls at midnight and later! The maximum was 40. I have decided to drop that project. Tawny Frogmouths do not use their syrinx (vocal organ used by the song birds) to make their calls; rather they vibrate their air sacs and hence the sounds tend to be low, simple and noisy.

Tawny Frogmouths are nocturnal birds widespread throughout Australia, prevalent in urban environments and very familiar to us. They are sedentary and pairs stay together until one of them dies so we can know the same pair for years. They feed on nocturnal insects, snails, small mammals and reptiles. Frogmouths typically pounce on prey from a roost and use their beaks rather than their weak talons; opposite to owls. In urban environments Tawny Frogmouths experience high reproductive success.

Birds at different levels in the food web have evolved different visual structures. Owls are apex predators and to capture moving prey they have evolved frontally placed eyes giving them wide binocular overlap and narrow vision field. Pigeons at the web base feed on static seeds and their eyes have the primary function of identifying attackers in any direction. Pigeons have evolved laterally placed eyes giving them omnidirectional vision field and narrow binocular overlap. Tawny Frogmouths are in the middle level of the web and they hunt mobile prey, but also have to avoid owl attacks. Hence, they have evolved eye structures to change the range of vision field and binocular overlap. When hunting, they gather their eyes to increase binocular overlap; when being vigilant they modify their eyes to enlarge their vision field.



Listen to their call on the web and then from your deck

~ Jim

Contact Jim:
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Digital Bird Guide:
<http://www.moggillcreek.org/>

Images: (Top) Tawny Frogmouth by
Carson Dron at Anstead
(below) Tawny Frogmouths in
Kenmore in May by Grace Butler