Nyctibius griseus (Common Potoo)

Family: Nyctibiidae (Potoos)
Order: Caprimulgiformes (Nightbirds)
Class: Aves (Birds)

Fig. 1. Common potoo, *Nyctibius griseus.*

[http://www.ttonline.org/forum/threads/22807-Common-Potoo-(Nyctibius-griseus)-at-Caroni-Swamp-Trinidad downladed 30 October 2015]

TRAITS. The common potoo is the smallest species compared to the great potoo, long-tailed potoo and the northern potoo (Hilty, 2003). The maximum length ranges from 34-38 cm (Wetmore, 1968). Adult males appear to be a pale greyish/brown to dark brown in colour with a cryptic plumage. It is overall mottled with black, grey, and cinnamon colours which give it a buff look. Its body pattern is mottled and streaked which makes it almost invisible when perched on a dead tree. The under parts, the flight feathers and the throat display pale colours of grey-brown to pale greyish (Cleere, 1998). Black rounded spots can be usually seen in the breast area. The tail length ranges 174-196mm in both males and females and displays several black coloured bands

(Wetmore, 1968). The bill on these birds are found to be black or dusky black in colour. Mouth is wide in size and is approximately 26.4 mm in size and lacks bristles (Haverschmidt, 1968). Eyes are yellow and turn orange at night (Belton, 1984). Legs and feet are grey in colour (Cleere, 1998, Voudouris, 2015).

ECOLOGY. *Nyctibius griseus* breeds and resides in the tropical Central and South America areas. From southwestern Costa Rica to northern Argentina and northern Uruguay the common potoo can be found these ranges (Fig. 2) (Martínez-Sánchez and Will, 2010). The common potoo breeds in lowlands such as woodlands and savannahs (Parker et al., 1996). It resides in forest edges and areas that are semi open with scattered tress and hedges as well as areas with water nearby (Parker et al., 1996). The common potoos are insectivores which eat large flying insects. They are nocturnal creatures that are insectivores; hence, they feed at night (Hilty, 2003).

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. These species are solitary territorial. Potoos usually nest in enclosed areas such as a nook of a branch or a broken off stem instead of building a traditional nest that is made of sticks. The nesting location behaves as a receptacle for holding the one egg that it lays at a time. Both parents take turns in looking after the egg, by switching positions at various times of the day. They tend to select areas that are high off the ground and usually build them within 500m away from one another (Sick, 1997). Defined territories of the common potoo are unclear, since individuals maintain loose territories consisting of their residing perches (Cohn-Haft, 1999).

ACTIVTIY. Not much activity is shown in the common potoo during the day since they spend most of their time asleep. *Nyctibius griseus* are found perched upright on broken branches and are usually motionless during the day, most of the time (Fig. 1). Being nocturnal creatures, nightly activities occur shortly before dusk (Cohn-Haft, 1999). They are well camouflaged since they have a cryptic coloration which gives it great advantage to capture prey. Common potoos fly with deep wing beat action, which is considered to be strong flight action.

FORAGING BEHAVIOUR. At dusk the common potoos begin to feed on flying insects. Being perched on a branch is part of their foraging technique (Fig. 3) where they will sally or grasp occasionally to snatch flying insects such as moths. They have relatively large mouths to capture prey this way. At times the creature would some times fly over vegetation to search for insects rather than the ground. Potoos have a delicate and unique "tooth" that is located on the upper mandible that assists in foraging. However, they swallow their prey without crushing it. Some types of insects that they feed on are Hymenoptera formicidae (ants), Isoptera (termites), Lepidoptera (moths) and Orthoptera (grasshoppers, crickets and locusts) (Hilty, 2003).

COMMUNICATION. On moonlit nights, common potoos reveal their presence by filling the air with what is described as an eerie sound. The sound consist of eight lamenting descending notes, which has a high volume and then decreases in tone as it fades away. Such that the sound follows like this: "*BU-OH, BU-ou, bu-ou, bu-oo, bu-aw*…." (Hilty, 2013).

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR. They are said to be monogamous, this means that they only have one mate at a time. In the northern regions breeding occurs from January-July and in some areas, November-December (Holyoak, 2001). As stated before, the common potoo do not construct its nest but it habituates a stump that is upright or any area that contains a depression or hollow area. These areas tend to be 3-20m above the ground (Holyoak, 2001). In a situation if it is disturbed,

the adult adopts the characteristic feature of a stump or dead wood. It does this by having a still posture where its head would be raised and the bill, the neck would be outstretched and the plumage would be compressed (Voudouris, 2015). Then it would eventually relax its posture and then the female would lay one white egg. No more than one egg is laid at a single reproduction stage. The egg is white in colour with lilac markings. The incubation period is approximately 30-33 days (Wetmore, 1968; Skutch, 1970). Both sexes take turns incubating; males incubate the egg during the day and the task is shared at night (Sick, 1997). For 19 days after hatching, sitting occurs both day and night; after the 19th day sitting only occurs during the day, and ceases when the nestling is approximately 25 days old (Skutch, 1970).

JUVENILE BEHAVIOUR. Hatching occurs approximately after one month. Nestling then takes two months, which is the same length of time for an average land bird. The chick has a plumage of white and has a dark bill along with a dark eye line (Voudouris, 2015).The nestling grows at a rapid rate and once it is too large to hide under its parents, it will adopt the same posture and freeze position as their parents. Elaborated slow movements are done by the parent in order to conceal the chick along with a vocal distraction display at night to ward off predators. Since it is white in colour, it is camouflaged to resemble a clump of fungus. The chick is fed by both parents and it is done by regurgitation for the first couple days (Fig. 4). The young potoo begs for food by making a buzzing call that has a hoarse tone (Wetmore, 1968; Skutch, 1970).

ANTI-PREDATOR BEHAVIOUR. Their still position and camouflage technique makes it very difficult to see. This makes their natural state an anti-predator behaviour (Voudouris, 2015). They remain motionless, and move slowly if they have to. They slightly close their eyes to give a fine aperture, to view when a predator is close by. This is because they have large eyes, which can reflect at night which could be conspicuous to potential predators (Borrero, 1974). Potoos have unsual slits in the eye lids which allow them to sense movement when eyes are closed (Borrero, 1974).

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Fig. 2. Common potoo geographic distribution.

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/map/?cn=Common%20Potoo&sn=Nyctibius%20griseus&species=693936, downloaded 3 October 2015]

Fig. 3. Common potoo, *Nyctibius griseus*, perched and alert at night.

[http://www.oiseaux-birds.com/card-common-potoo.html, downloaded 5 October 2015]

Fig. 4. Common potoo feeding its chick.

[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/gallery?p_p_spp=693936, downloaded 26 October 2015]