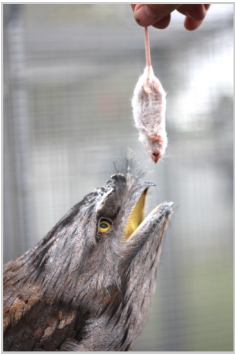


## “HOOT”

By Matt Burdon



“HOOT”

If you have ever been lucky enough to see a Tawny Frogmouth, *Podargus strigoides*, out in the bush you must have a very good set of eyes as these birds are the “Chameleons” of the bird world, being able to blend into their perch as they sit motionless with their heads slightly tilted looking perfectly like a broken limb or stump.

Frogmouths are quite common in South Eastern Australia and most people that see them make the mistake of calling them an owl, when they are in fact more closely related to nightjars than owls. For starters, they don't possess the talons an owl has to capture its prey, Frogmouths catch moths and other insects on the wing and also ambush their prey by sitting motionless and waiting for their meal to be “home delivered”!

I often see frogmouths when engaging in another hobby of mine, spotlighting for foxes during the middle of winter. I sometimes see up to a dozen birds per night, and they never cease to amaze me just how confident they are in their ability to blend into their surroundings, you can often drive within a few meters of them perched on a fence post, without them taking flight.

A fellow member had two frogmouths in an aviary, which were rescued, and hand-raised from juveniles. When visiting their property the frogmouths were always a favourite of mine, so when I received a phone call, in October last year, saying a baby frogmouth had been found in a backyard after falling from its nest during a wild storm, I jumped at the opportunity to care for it. We went and picked up this tiny little bundle of fluff that had two huge eyes, and an even bigger mouth. My kids gave him the nickname “Hoot” which confused visitors completely when I explained he WASN'T an owl!!

Having only raised a few Conures and Quakers before, I had no idea what to feed a frogmouth. I obtained a very good recipe for an insectivore mixture from the carers I picked Hoot up from. This formed the basis of his diet, which we supplemented with mealworms and small diced up pieces of beef heart (which is high in iron).

I also obtained a few “pinkie” mice, and as it was the breeding season any poor little quail that succumbed in my aviaries were never wasted. Basically, if it could fit in this guy's HUGE mouth he would pretty much eat it!

He gradually grew and would sit and watch TV in the evenings and settled into our family life quite well, he was a big talking point with any visitors, as most people have never seen a frogmouth before and he was pretty cute too.

So next time you are out and about try and spot one of these intriguing little guys for yourself, they are very difficult to see, but sometimes they will give their position away by trying to keep an eye on you!

Photo: Matt Burdon

