

The Living Valley



The Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*)

There is a ruckus in the park, the birds are going crazy with alert calls. High in the tree is one of Australia's largest and most efficient nocturnal aerial predators aptly named the 'Powerful Owl'.

Perhaps this owl, *Ninox strenua*, normally a 'creature of night', has got caught out in daylight, too far from its home, a hollow in an ancient tree deep in the old growth forest or perhaps, it's a young male venturing out to establish a new range for itself in the large fiercely defended territories held by pairs of these hunters.

These rare predators range far over forests, gullies and woodlands searching for the varied prey inhabiting their extensive territory. The *Ninox* group of owls, like the Powerful Owl, are hawk faced in appearance, lacking the smooth disk of feathers around the face that masked owls have, but both use aural clues picked up by their asymmetrically positioned ears to locate their scurrying prey in the darkness. For the Powerful Owl that prey consists mainly of possums, roosting birds, bats and ground dwelling mammals up to the size of an adolescent cat. Indeed, the Powerful Owl is one of the few Australian predators capable of keeping feral cat numbers down.

It's a thrill to see this bird active in its element, but rare due to its large range and nocturnal activity. For these reasons, the Powerful Owl is one of the Tweeds great treasures. See if you can find its image on the Treasures of the Tweed mural or hear its 'traditional' owl-like hooting call in the coming month.

Submitted by Robert Price and edited by the Earth Learning Team. Earth Learning is a not for profit environmental NGO run by local volunteers