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Sumba Boobook

The strip of mangrove forest along the east coast of Sumba held a few saltwater crocodiles. Local farmers warned us about one territorial male who, they said, was bad-tempered. At night, down near the tidal edge, he grumbled as we returned through tall grass to the car. An impoverished corn farmer said that local boys teased this crocodile and this teasing made him irritable. On the wall of the corn farmer's bamboo hut were the dried sex organs of another male crocodile that had lived in the mangrove swamp until, the farmer said, he had dived into a pool and killed it with a knife. He promised to dive into the lagoon and kill this one if we photographed him doing it. We declined.

This patch of tall forest near the swamp held a pair of Sumba Boobooks *Ninox rudolfi*, a hawk-owl cousin of the Southern Boobook. They hunted through forest, swamp and nearby grassland, and we fought oppressive humidity each night trying to see them.

After two weeks of study we guessed, from patterns of calling, that two pairs lived in this swamp. The species had not been photographed or videoed before, and clear stills and video could help settle arguments about the owl's taxonomy and character. Video of calling adults would contain audio data to convert into sonograms, visual pictures of the owls' calls that could be analysed. Some writers thought that Sumba Boobooks and Southern Boobooks were the same species, and comparing sonograms would sort this out. If they had the same calls, they were the same species. If they had different calls, they were different species.

What is a species? Following the Biological Species Concept, a full species is said to be a reproductive community that has evolved different patterns of