

DESCRIPTION OF A NEW OWL FROM PORTO RICO.

By ROBERT RIDGWAY.

ASIO PORTORICENSIS, sp. nov.

SP. CH.—Above dusky brown, nearly or quite uniform on the dorsal region; the scapulars, however, narrowly bordered with pale ochraceous or dull buff; feathers of the head narrowly, and those of the nape broadly, edged with buffy; rump and upper tail-coverts paler brown or fawn-color, the feathers marked near their tips by a crescentic bar of dark brown. Tail deep ochraceous, crossed by about five distinct bands of dark brown, these very narrow on the lateral rectrices, but growing gradually broader toward the intermediae, which are dark brown, with five or six pairs of ochraceous spots (corresponding in position to the ochraceous interspaces on the other tail feathers), these spots sometimes having a central small brown blotch. Wings with dark brown prevailing, but this much broken by a general and conspicuous spotting of ochraceous; primaries crossed with bands of dark brown and deep ochraceous, the latter broadest on the outer quills, the *pictura* of which is much as in *A. accipitrinus*, but with the lighter color usually less extended. Face with dull, rather pale, ochraceous prevailing; this becoming nearly white exteriorly, where bordered, around the side of the head, by a uniform dark brown post-auricular bar; eyes entirely surrounded by uniform dusky, this broadest beneath and behind the eye. Lower parts pale ochraceous or buff, the crissum, anal region, tarsi, and tibiae entirely immaculate; jugulum and breast marked with broad stripes of dull brown, the abdomen, sides, and flanks with narrow stripes or streaks of the same. Lining of the wing nearly immaculate ochraceous. Bill dusky; iris yellow. Wing, 11.25–12.00; tail, 5.25–5.50; culmen, .70; tarsus, 1.85–2.00; middle toe, 1.20–1.30.

Hab.—Porto Rico.

In "History of North American Birds," Vol. III, p. 25, under the head of "*Otus brachyotus*," reference was made to this form of the Short-eared Owl, as follows: "A specimen from Porto Rico (No. 39643) is somewhat remarkable on account of the prevalence of the dusky of the upper parts, the unusually few and narrow stripes of the lower parts, the roundish ochraceous spots on the wings, and in having the primaries barred to the base. Should all other specimens from the same region agree in these characters, they might form a diagnosable race. The plumage has an abnormal appearance, however, and I much doubt whether others like it will ever be taken." That the latter unfortunate prediction was quite unnecessary is fully demonstrated by three additional specimens kindly sent me for examination by Mr. George N. Lawrence, all of which closely resemble the one in the National

Museum collection. In fact, the characters of the four examples are so uniform as to leave no doubt that the Porto Rican Short-eared Owl is a well marked local form, which, on account of its isolation and consequent improbability of its intergradation with *A. accipitrinus*, I propose to recognize as a distinct species.

In connection with this subject I have carefully examined a very large series of *A. accipitrinus*, and have been entirely unable to distinguish between *continental* specimens from any part of the world. Examples from Chili, the Argentine Republic, Brazil, and Costa Rica can be perfectly matched by others from North America and Asia; an example from Costa Rica is almost exactly like one from Beyrout, Syria; another from the Sandwich Islands is undistinguishable from certain American specimens, while there appears to be no constant difference between North American specimens and those from Europe and Asia. As a rule, European skins are paler than North American ones; but the palest (as well as the most deeply colored) examples I have seen are from North America. In short, I find that in a series from any given locality, on either continent, the individual variation is greater than any geographical variation in this species.

Although I have not seen the Short-eared Owl of the Galapagos (*Otus galapagoensis* Gould), I have no doubt of the validity of that species. The transverse bars on the feathers of the lower parts and the longitudinal streaks on the legs, are features never observable in *A. accipitrinus* nor in *A. portoricensis*. In other respects, however, *A. galapagoensis* appears to be quite similar to the latter, but is still darker colored, as well as smaller.

It appears, therefore, that, besides the common and nearly cosmopolitan *A. accipitrinus*, there are two * well-marked insular forms belonging to the subgenus *Brachyotus*, which, though in all probability descended from the same ancestral stock, should, on account of their geographical isolation, be considered as distinct species. Compared with *A. accipitrinus*, they differ from that species, and from each other, as follows:

a. Legs entirely immaculate; lower parts without trace of transverse bars; first primary much shorter than second.

1. *A. ACCIPITRINUS*. Dorsal region conspicuously striped with ochraceous; outer webs of primaries with ochraceous largely prevailing toward the base. Wing usually more than 12.00 inches. *Hab.*—Europe, Asia, the whole of continental America, and Sandwich Islands. (Strong's Island, West Indies?)

* A single specimen of a Short-eared Owl from Strong's Island, West Indies (No. 66235, U. S. Nat. Mus.), appears at first glance to be quite peculiar in coloration, by reason of the general prevalence of ochraceous above, the nearly uniform reddish ochraceous of the rump and upper tail-coverts, and more nearly uniform brownish of the wing-coverts, especially the smaller ones. There are also other slight differences, appreciable to the eye but difficult to define, and it may be that the specimen in question merely represents one of the many individual variations of the common species. I therefore, for the present at least, refer it to *A. accipitrinus*, since it would be unsafe to predicate a local race upon a single specimen. The measurements are as follows: Wing, 11.50; tail, 5.75; culmen, .80; tarsus, 1.80; middle toe, 1.15.

2. *A. PORTORICENSIS*. Dorsal region nearly uniform dark brown; outer webs of primaries with the ochraceous spaces scarcely or not at all more extensive than the brown ones on the basal portion of the quills. Wing, 11.25–12.00. *Hab.*—Porto Rico.
- b. Legs marked with narrow dusky streaks; lower parts with a greater or less number of transverse bars; first primary scarcely shorter than the second.
3. *A. GALAPAGOENSIS*. Dorsal region irregularly barred or transversely spotted with fulvous; outer webs of primaries with the brown spaces more extensive than the fulvous ones, on the basal portion of the quills. Wing, 11.00. *Hab.*—Galapagos Islands.

I am aware that my conclusions, as given above, are somewhat different from those of Mr. R. B. Sharpe in vol. ii as expressed in his "*Catalogue of the Striges*" in the British Museum (pp. 238, 239). Mr. Sharpe there arranges the specimens of *A. accipitrinus* in the British Museum collection under four headings, as follows: "*a. Asio accipitrinus*," "*β. Asio cassini*," "*γ. Asio galapagoensis*," and "*δ. Asio sandwichensis*"; this arrangement being based upon the examination of 39 specimens of the first, 24 of "*β*," 3 of "*γ*," and 2 specimens of the last named. He admits, however, the impossibility of always distinguishing between American and European specimens, though he states that "in America the general run of the specimens is rather darker and more ochraceous," both of which statements entirely agree with my own observations. The Falkland Island birds, says Mr. Sharpe, "seem permanently rufescent, but cannot be distinguished from some Chilian skins; and as some of the latter agree perfectly with European examples, no line for specific separation can be drawn." As for myself, never having seen specimens from the Falkland Islands, I am unable to comment thereon.

The Galapagos Short-eared Owl is referred by Mr. Sharpe to *A. accipitrinus* solely, it appears, on account of the close resemblance between a Bogota skin and specimens from those islands in general darkness of coloration; but since the former is especially stated to lack the leg-streaks, which constitute perhaps the most important character of coloration in *A. galapagoensis*, it would seem that such a view of the case is hardly warranted. That this disposition of *A. galapagoensis* was, however, made very doubtfully by Mr. Sharpe is evident from his remarks in connection with the subject, as follows: "The Owl from the Galapagos is by far the most different of any, by reason of its small size, dark coloration, golden forehead, and striped thigh-feathers. I have never seen a specimen from any other locality exhibiting the latter character; at the same time a Bogota skin in every other respect approaches it in appearance, and therefore, although I admit that at present it would appear to be specifically distinct, I should like to be sure that the New Granadan Short-eared Owl would not form a connecting link."

"The specimens from the Sandwich Islands," says Mr. Sharpe, "form

an interesting pair on account of their locality, but they cannot be separated as a species. They are rather small, and have a very dusky frontal patch; this I have found in other Asiatic specimens, and therefore the Sandwich Island Owl can only be considered a small race of *A. accipitrinus*."

The United States National Museum possesses a single specimen (No. 13890, T. R. Peale) of the Short-eared Owl from the Sandwich Islands, and this one can be exactly matched, both in coloration and dimensions, by American specimens, while many of the latter are smaller than the two Honolulu examples the measurements of which are given by Mr. Sharpe. Thus it seems that the Sandwich Island bird can be in no way separated from the common and widely distributed *A. accipitrinus*.

As to the difference in coloration said by Mr. Sharpe to distinguish the sexes in this species, I cannot substantiate it with regard to the specimens in the United States National Museum, if the determinations of collectors are to be relied upon. Two specimens from China, represent nearly the extremes of coloration, yet the lighter colored one is the female, the darker one the male (according to the labels); one of the lightest colored of North American specimens is marked as a female, while many dark colored specimens are determined as males. Neither can I agree with Mr. Sharpe in his opinion that the dark bar or spot sometimes found on the basal portion of the inner web of the outer primary is a "tolerably good indication of an adult bird," but from an examination of many specimens am inclined to regard it as merely an individual peculiarity, having no reference to either age or sex. As to the very marked variation in the depth of the ochraceous coloring (some specimens being deeply tawny and others nearly white beneath), it appears to me that the two extremes, instead of being sexual, are merely analogous to the normal and erythrismal phases of other Owls, there being every gradation in different specimens between the two extremes of coloration.

Below are given the principal synonyms and references pertaining to *A. accipitrinus* and its allies.

1. ASIO ACCIPITRINUS (Pall.) Newton.

(*Short-eared Owl*.)

Noctua major BRISS. Orn. i, 1760, 511 (excl. syn. pt.). (*Le Grande Chouette*.)

Strix accipitrina PALL. Reise Russ. Reichs. i. 1771-'76, 455.

Asio accipitrinus NEWT. ed Yarrell's Brit. B. i, 1872, 163.—SHARPE, Cat. Striges Brit. Mus. 1875, 234 (excl. syn. *galapagoensis* Gould.)—RIDGW. Nom. N. Am. B. 1881, 36, No. 396.

Brachyotus accipitrinus GURNEY Ibis, 1872, 328 (Formosa).

Noctua minor S. G. GMEL. N. Comm. Petrop. xv, 1771, 447, pl. 12.

Strix arctica SPARRM. Mus. Carls. 1786-'89, pl. 51.—DAUD. Tr. Orn. ii, 1800, 197.

Strix brachyotus J. R. FORST. Phil. Trans. lxi, 1772, 384 (Severn R., Arctic, Am.!).—GMEL. S. N. i, pt. 1, 1788, 289.—WILS. Am. Orn. iv, 1812, 64, pl. 33, fig. 3.—NAUM. Vög. Deutschl. i, 1820, 459, pl. 45, fig. 1 ("*brachyotus*").—NUTT.