

NATURAL HISTORY MISCELLANEA

Published by
The Chicago Academy of Sciences
Lincoln Park - 2001 N. Clark St., Chicago 14, Illinois

No. 99

February 8, 1952

A New Race of *Otus ingens* (Salvin) from Colombia

Melvin A. Traylor*

Among recent collections received at the Chicago Natural History Museum, there have been several specimens of owls of the genus *Otus* which have remained unidentified. Four of the specimens were from the State of Cauca, Colombia, and the fifth from Chanchamayo, Peru. It seemed probable that they must belong to one of the three monotypic species from the Andean region, *O. ingens* (Salvin), *O. minimus* (Carraker), and *O. aequatorialis* (Chapman). Consequently available specimens of the latter two were borrowed, the first being known only from the unique type in the British Museum. For the loan of valuable comparative material, including the type of *minimus*, and for many helpful suggestions and descriptions of other specimens, I wish to thank James Bond, R. M. de Schauensee and Dr. J. T. Zimmer.

Bond (1951, p. 527) recently clarified the status of two of the above forms by showing that *Otus minimus* of Bolivia is conspecific with *O. ingens* of eastern Ecuador, although probably racially distinct. Including the type of *minimus*, I have before me four specimens of this species: the type, a male from Santa Ana, Rio Coroico, Bolivia; a male from Chanchamayo, Peru; a male from Cushi Libertad, Huánuco, Peru, which Dr. Zimmer writes is one of several from Peru, the others being "like it in detail except that both phases (red and gray) are in the series"; and a male from Rio Sardinias, Ecuador, also from the American Museum. The specific characters which unite these birds have not been adequately described by previous authors and are given below.

Salvin's original description (1897, p. 37) was hopelessly inadequate; he compared *ingens* only to *brasiliensis*, and stated that it was larger and darker than that form. Since *brasiliensis* at that time included the species

* Research Associate, Division of Birds, Chicago Natural History Museum, Chicago 5, Illinois.

now known as *O. choliba* and *O. watsonii*, this description gives no clear picture of the bird. Carriker (1935, p. 313) gave a detailed description of the type of *minimus*, but compared it directly only to *aequatorialis* (Chapman), a species that will be discussed in more detail below.

In size and proportions *ingens* is closest to *albo-gularis*, having long wings and a proportionately long tail. It also resembles *albo-gularis* and differs from *watsonii*, the form it most resembles in color and pattern, by having inconspicuous short ear tufts.

The underparts are "typical" of the genus and most resemble those of *watsonii*; the throat and upper breast are buff or tawny, with fine dusky shaft streaks, and narrow, dense dusky barring; the feathers of the lower breast and belly are white with buff or tawny bases, and with broad dusky shaft streaks and three or four narrow, irregular dusky bars. This pattern is most distinct from *albo-gularis*, which has a white throat patch, a dusky breast band speckled with white, and a buff or fulvous belly, streaked, but only faintly barred, with dusky. The upperparts are comparatively uniform and finely vermiculated with pale brown or buff and fuscous. The crown is usually darker than the back, and there is a well defined whitish hind collar. There is no lateral black border to the face, a well marked character of *choliba* and *watsonii*. In some individuals, possibly immature, there are well marked narrow buff bars on the upperparts.

The primaries are blackish on the inner web, with narrow buff bars, a character shared with *watsonii* but differing from *albo-gularis*, in which the inner webs are usually immaculate blackish. The outer webs of the primaries are barred with buff and dusky.

From the above description it is evident that *ingens* most nearly resembles *watsonii* in color and *albo-gularis* in size, though easily distinguished from both.

Ciccaba (= *Otus*) *aequatorialis* Chapman (1922, p. 4) almost certainly is conspecific with *ingens* also, and the name *aequatorialis* would be an absolute synonym of *ingens* since both forms were described on specimens from eastern Ecuador. The specimen of *ingens* listed above from Rio Sardinas, Ecuador, is actually the second specimen listed as *aequatorialis* by Chapman (1926, p. 248). Chapman originally compared *aequatorialis* to *albo-gularis*, but it shows little relationship to that form in color, except that the buffy barring on the inner webs of the primaries is rather faint, approaching the more or less immaculate condition of *albo-gularis*.

It is not possible to decide on present material whether *ingens* and *minimus* can be maintained as separate subspecies. Among the four specimens listed above from Ecuador to Bolivia there is considerable variation, some of which may be geographical. In the type of *minimus* from Bolivia

the buffy bars on the inner webs of the primaries are most distinct and the tips of the primaries are almost clear buff. The Ecuadorean specimen has the bars and the tips strongly mottled with dusky. The two Peruvian specimens are intermediate in this respect, but closer to the Bolivian type.

The dusky markings on the underparts are also variable. In the type of *minimus* the dark shaft streaks are narrow, hardly wider than the shaft, and the irregular dusky bars are fine and closely spaced. The ground color of the underparts is whitish. In the Ecuador male the streaking is much broader, the barring is more widely spaced, and the bases of the feathers are extensively tawny making the bird appear much darker below. The Peruvian birds are again intermediate. Whether these variations are significant must await a critical examination of the extensive Peruvian material in the American Museum.

Whatever the disposition of *minimus*, four specimens from Cauca, Colombia, whence the species was previously unknown, are sufficiently distinct to be known as:

Otus ingens colombianus subsp. nov.

Type. Chicago Natural History Museum 102125, from El Tambo, Cauca, Colombia, altitude 5000 feet. Adult female, collected December 16, 1939 by Kjell von Sneidern.

Diagnosis. Smaller than other races of *ingens*, and with the terminal half of the tarsus bare.

Range. State of Cauca, southern Colombia, on the eastern slope of the western Andes from 5000 to 7000 feet.

Measurements. One male: wing 188; tail 95; culmen 23; tarsus 34 mm.; three females: wing 182-189 (187); tail 97-104 (101); culmen 24-26 (25); tarsus 33-35 (34) mm.

Measurements of four males of *ingens* from Ecuador to Bolivia are: wing 197-206 (202); tail 102-104 (103); culmen 23-24 (24); tarsus 32-37 (34) mm. There are no females of *ingens* available for comparison.

Remarks. In color the male of *colombianus* agrees most closely with the specimen of *ingens* from Ecuador, but is even more tawny below, there being practically no white on the underparts. All the males are in the gray phase. The three females of *colombianus*, however, are all in the red phase, which is similar to the gray phase in pattern, but with a heavy rufous wash over the whole bird.

Although there are not enough specimens to make an adequate comparison of measurements between the respective sexes, the validity of the difference between the two forms is not affected in this particular case. Since females in the genus *Otus* are almost invariably somewhat larger

than males, the differences in wing length between the respective sexes of *colombianus* and *ingens* would probably be even greater than that shown above.

A bare tarsus has at times been considered a specific character within this genus, but it is a variable character which appears sporadically in otherwise unrelated species, and is at best a good subspecific character. The extent of the bare part varies somewhat among the four specimens of *colombianus*, and is foreshadowed in the specimen from Ecuador, so that there is no question that *ingens* and *colombianus* are conspecific; the latter, however, is a well marked race, occupying an apparently isolated range in the western Andes of Colombia.

From the same localities in Colombia we have several specimens of *Otus albo-gularis*, showing that both species occupy the same habitat in the subtropical zone, at least in the northern part of their range.

LITERATURE CITED

- Bond, James
1951 Taxonomic notes on South American birds. Auk, vol. 68, p. 527-529.
- Carraker, M. A., Jr.
1935 Descriptions of new birds from Bolivia, with notes on other little known species. Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Philadelphia, vol. 87, p. 313-341.
- Chapman, F. M.
1922 Descriptions of apparently new birds from Colombia, Ecuador, and Argentina. Amer. Mus. Nov. no. 31, p. 1-8.
1926 Distribution of bird life in Ecuador. Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist., vol. 55, 784 p.
- Salvin, O.
1897 (New species of owls). Bull. Brit. Orn. Club, vol. 6, p. 37-38.