

*neyi* Tweed. from *Pseudoptynx*, but also in creating a monotypic genus for it. The bird is not at all closely related to *P. philippensis*, but is far more closely related to *Otus*. In diagnosing *Mimizuku*, Hachisuka gave only the characters that could immediately distinguish it from *Pseudoptynx*. Compared with *Otus*, *Mimizuku* stands out by reason of its larger size; bill with culmen strongly rounded, upper mandible decidedly convex in lateral outline (viewed from above) with distinct festoon or tooth on cutting edge; feet and claws relatively and absolutely larger and stronger than in even the largest species of *Otus*; wing very much rounded, longest primaries exceeding secondaries by little more than one-half the length of tarsus; outermost primary shorter than 10th, 2nd shorter than 9th, 5th longest; frontal feathers, ear tufts, emargination of primaries and tarsal feathering as in *Otus*. *P. solomonensis* on the other hand is not a bubonine owl at all, but belongs to the Striginae, characterized by a large auricular opening with well developed dermal ear flaps and crossed by a ligamentous bridge. It may be called

**Nesasio**, n. gen.

A medium sized strigine most nearly allied to *Asio* Birsson, but body plumage more decomposed and silky; feet and claws extremely large and powerful; tarsi feathered; toes naked; middle toe three-fourths length of tarsus (about one-half in *Asio*); claw of inner toe longer than claw of middle toe (reverse in other species of *Asio* except *madagascariensis*); bill very stout and heavy with culmen arched and strongly decurved; nostril more rounded less oval; wing much rounded; the longest primaries exceeding the tips of the secondaries by less than 20 mm; 4th? primary longest (by a strange coincidence the distal portion of 5th primary is missing in both wings of the single specimen available); outer primaries weakly emarginated; bristles at base of bill strong, though relatively not as well developed as in *Asio*; no trace of ear tufts. Two other characters noted may be due to the preparation of the skin, namely, facial disc not clearly defined; eyes much larger.

Type, *Pseudoptynx solomonensis* Hartert.

This genus is probably derived from an offshoot of *Asio flammeus* stock, the underlying color pattern of both suggesting this probable ancestry; its sedentary habits and insular habitat have resulted in a considerable shortening of the primaries, at the same time there has been a development in size of bill and feet, these members greatly exceeding in strength the corresponding parts of those representatives of the genus *Asio* characterized by strong bill and feet, namely *abyssinicus*, *madagascariensis* and *helvola*. *A. madagascariensis*, which is undubitably an offshoot of *A. asio*, also exhibits a tendency towards larger bill and feet and more rounded wing, but the characters are not sufficiently marked in this instance to warrant generic separation. An even closer parallelism is found in *Pseudoscops*, a monotypic genus confined to the Island of Jamaica. This bird, originally of *A. asio* stock, also

has the increased size of bill and feet coupled with much shorter wing tip and weakly emarginated primaries.

In concluding I feel that a word of explanation is in order concerning feathering on tarsi and toes as a generic character in owls. Especially as regards the toes, my feeling is that this character is of subspecific importance, but no more. Of the genera confined to the tropics, practically not a single species has feathered toes, though in many cases the dense tarsal feathering ends abruptly at the base of the toes. On the other hand all the olaretic genera invariably have feathered toes, *Nyctea* being an example of extreme development in this direction. Where a genus is widely distributed with representatives in both temperate and tropical regions the feathering on the toes of the tropical forms varies from sparse to bristly and in some species of *Otus* for instance, the toes are quite bare. Among the Strigidae it therefore seems best to drop the feathering of the toes as a generic criterion, since it not only is of no generic significance, but its use in the past has resulted in the wrong allocation of species in their systematic position.

Thanks are due to Dr. Witmer Stone of the Academy of Natural Sciences for the loan of a specimen of *Mimizuku gurneyi* (Tweedd.) and to Dr. Ernst Mayr for the loan of a specimen of *Nesasio solomonensis* (Hart.).

## Obituary

FREDERICK VERNON COVILLE, botanist in the U. S. Department of Agriculture since 1888, and an ex-president of the Academy, died of coronary thrombosis at his home, 1836 California Street, on January 9, 1937, after a brief illness. Dr. Coville was born at Preston, N. Y., on March 23, 1867. He received his A.B. at Cornell University in 1887, and the honorary degree Doctor of Science from George Washington University in 1921. After serving as instructor in botany at Cornell in 1887-88, he entered the U. S. Department of Agriculture as assistant botanist in 1888, becoming botanist in 1893 on the death of Dr. George Vasey, senior botanist in 1924, and principal botanist in 1928. When the present Bureau of Plant Industry was established in 1901, he became the head of the Office of Botanical Investigations and Experiments (later, after various transient changes in title, the Office of Economic and Systematic Botany, still later the Division of Botany), a position he held until the office was merged in 1934 into the Division of Plant Exploration and Introduction. He became curator of the National Herbarium in 1893, and so continued after its transfer to the custody of the Smithsonian Institution in 1896. He was active in promoting the establishment of a National Arboretum, and was acting director from 1929, when the project took definite form.

Dr. Coville's first professional field work was as botanical assistant in the Arkansas Geological Survey in 1887, resulting in the publication of *A List of the Plants of Arkansas* (by J. C. Branner and F. V. Coville) in 1891, which is still the only list of the plants of that state. His most important field work was as botanist of the Death Valley Expedition in 1891, the results of which were published in 1893 as *Botany of the Death Valley Expedition*. For several years prior to his death he had again been active, in cooperation with M. French Gilman, in the collection and study of the plants of Death Valley,