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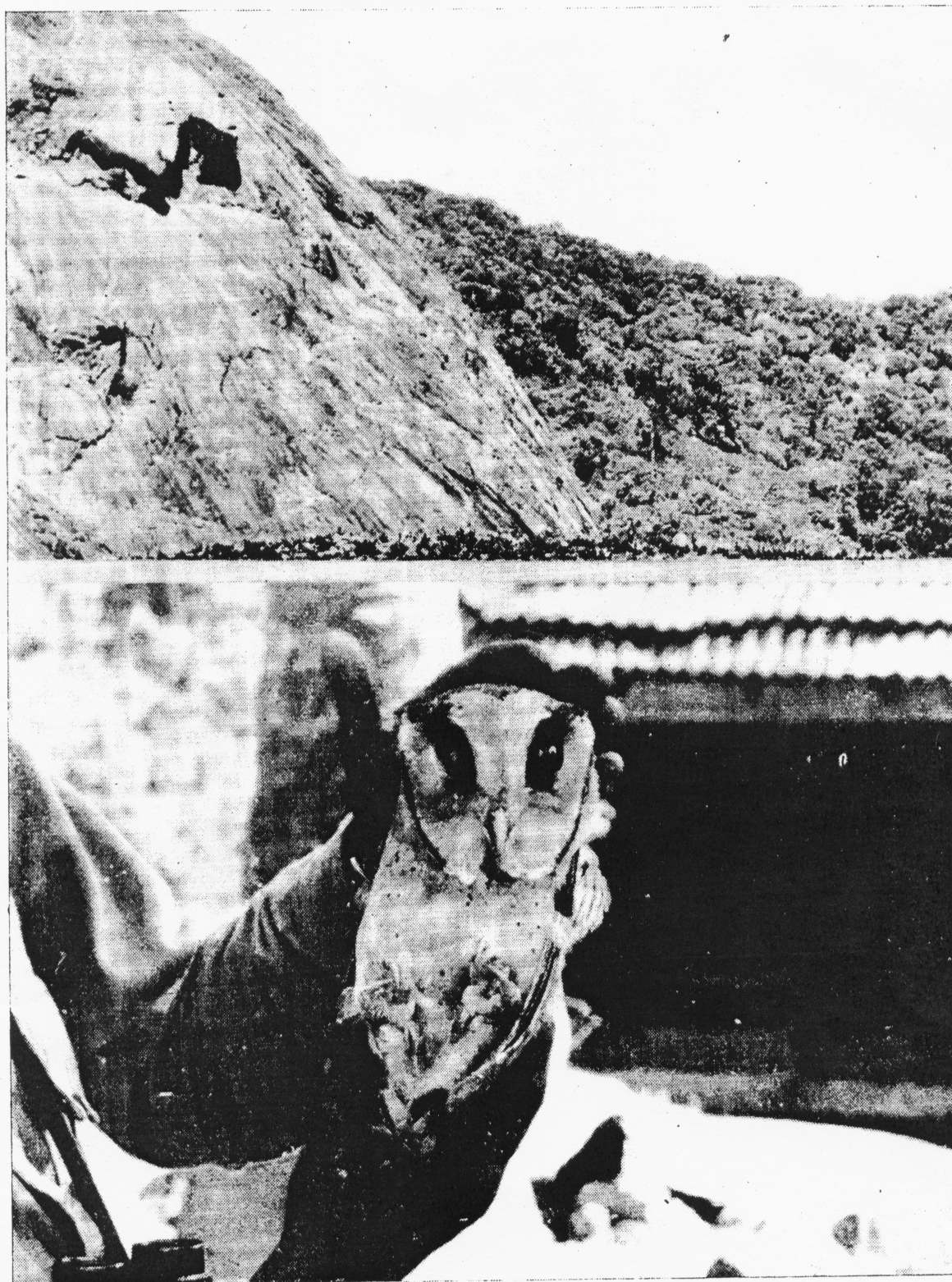
A NEW SUBSPECIES OF BAY OWL [*PHODILUS BADIUS* (HORSFIELD)] FROM PENINSULAR INDIA

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(With a plate)

Two races of Bay owl (*Phodilus badius*) occur in the Indian sub-continent. The Sikkim Bay Owl (*P. b. saturatus*) ranges in the northeastern Himalayas from Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and then on to Burma and Malaya, intergrading with the nominate race. The second race, Ceylon Bay Owl (*P. b. assimilis*) is confined to Sri Lanka. Both subspecies are considered to be rare in their respective habitats and so far as the available literature is concerned (Hume 1873, 1875, 1876, 1877; Fairbank 1877; White 1877; Ferguson & Bourdillon 1903-04; Kinloch 1920-1923; Baker 1929; Ali 1935-37; Ripley 1961; Ali & Ripley 1969 and Henry 1971) this owl has not been recorded from peninsular India.

Recently one of us (M.A.R.K.) along with Dr V. S. Vijayan (presently Head of the Wildlife Division, Kerala Forest Research Institute, Trichur, Kerala), while on a survey of the Parambikulam sanctuary environs in the Western Ghats, obtained a specimen of a Bay Owl which, apart from being a new record for the region, appears to be distinct from the Himalayan and Sri Lanka birds. The specimen was sent to Dr S. Dillon Ripley at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, U.S.A., who very kindly compared it with specimens of *saturatus* and *assimilis* obtained by him from the American Museum of Natural History, New York, and the British Museum, London, and has confirmed our diagnosis. Considering the morphological differences and the ecological isolation of this bird from the other races, we hereby name it as

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Above: Forests of Nelliampathy, habitat of the owl. Below: Southern Bay Owl,  
*Phodilus badius ripleyi* subsp. nov.  
(Photos: Reza Khan)

## NEW DESCRIPTIONS

### ***Phodilus badius ripleyi*<sup>2</sup> subsp. nov.**

**Type:** ♀ collected by M. A. Reza Khan and V. S. Vijayan at Periasolai Coffee Estate, Nelliampathy Hills (c. 10°36' N; 76°40' E), Palghat Dist. Kerala, S. India, on 30 April 1976 and now in the Bombay Natural History Society's collection bearing Reg. No. 24232.

**Taxonomical notes:** The specimen, in general appearance, is dark brown to chocolate brown dorsally. Upper breast to abdomen and back from head to rump has dark brownish to blackish spots. Crown, back and wings deep chocolate. Bastard wing and outermost five primaries barred with black, gradually fading on the fourth and fifth. Secondaries barred with black bands, darker and complete on the inner webs and lighter and incomplete on the outer webs. Seven distinct black bars on the rectrices, fading gradually towards the tip.

The main differentiating character is the spotting on breast. Dr Ripley, after examining a series of specimens of *saturatus* and *assimilis*, comments (*in litt.*) as follows: "... The single south India bird is darker above than the single male from Ceylon with much finer spotting, the white spots very much reduced all over as well as in size, reduced about one half the width of those of the single specimen of *assimilis* (AMNH coll.). The crown is dark chocolate-brown with only occasional black spots, lacking the black and white droplets found in *assimilis*. The pale buffy lilac feathers in the centre of crown exist but they too have a tiny black spot in the centre of each feather

only 2 mm in width rather than the larger spots in the Ceylon bird which are 4 mm in width. Below the bird is darker, richer lilac, with similarly reduced spotting on the breast feathers, 1.5 mm in width rather than 3 mm in width. The outline of these droplets show a single droplet rather than double droplet..."

The Himalayan subspecies is much larger and paler than south Indian and Sri Lanka birds. There is, however, no difference in size between *assimilis* and *ripleyi*.

**Ecological notes:** The Periasolai area represents the southern section of the Nelliampathy hills, south of Palghat and contains the typical wet evergreen forest, a biotope similar to the heavy evergreen submontane hill tracts of the eastern Himalayas. The presence of the Bay Owl here may strengthen the recent theories put forward by Hora (1950), Mani (1974), Ripley (1977) and others that the patchy distribution of certain Indo-Malayan and east Himalayan species of the flora and fauna in equivalent biotopes of the southern peninsula are relicts of a once continuous distribution between these areas which was disrupted by geotectonic action marooning disjunct populations in isolated pockets of appropriate country.

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### Measurements (in mm):

	<u>Wing</u>	<u>Bill</u>	<u>Tarsus</u>	<u>Tail</u>
		(from feathers)		
<i>saturatus</i> ♂ ♀	214-237	30-32	47-48	92-97
<i>assimilis</i> ♂ ♀	197-203	c.30	c.47	81-89
		(from skull)		
<i>ripleyi</i> ♀	208	33	51	81

<sup>2</sup> The bird is named as a tribute to Dr. S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution, in recognition of his contributions to the ornithology of the Indian subcontinent.

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- \* Not seen in original.