

THE SCOPS OWLS OF NORTHEASTERN AFRICA.

BY HERBERT FRIEDMANN.

IN connection with my studies of the East African birds in the United States National Museum and the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, I have had the occasion to become familiar with the difficulties presented by the plumage variations of the little Scops Owls. Recently, Dr. James P. Chapin has also been studying these puzzling birds, and has, I understand, prepared a paper on the forms found in the Belgian Congo. As he has pointed out to me in correspondence, the lack of adequate series in any museum renders more difficult a problem inherently complicated, and, while he has encouraged me in the description of the form presented in this paper, he has also cautioned that the describer of a new race of *Otus senegalensis* must be prepared to face a good deal of criticism from other workers. Nevertheless, I hope to show that the bird of Ethiopia (for which no name is available) is a recognizable race.

Erlanger (Journ. f. Ornith., 1905, pp. 235-237) considered Ethiopian and Kenian and Tanganyikan birds subspecifically identical but noted that the individual variation in his series was very great. Zedlitz (*ibid.*, 1910, p. 734), also "lumped" the birds of northeastern, eastern, and southern Africa as *Pisorhina capensis capensis*, but definitely stated that the birds of the northeastern part of the continent were so considered only temporarily, as further study and more material might very likely show them to be separable. He also found that a bird from Tacazzé, northwestern Tigre district, was much lighter than a specimen from Salamona, on the Danakil-Tigre border, and suggested that it might some day be shown that there were two races involved, a dark eastern one, and a light, western form.

While with the Childs Frick Expedition Dr. E. A. Mearns collected three Scops Owls at Dire Daoua and Sadi Malka, east-central Ethiopia. These are darker than any others examined in a series of some twenty birds from the rest of Africa. Dr. Chapin informs me that in 1921 the darkest specimen in the British Museum collection was a bird from Undel Wells, Ethiopia. A male from the Northern Guaso Nyiro River, Kenya Colony, in the Mu-

seum of Comparative Zoölogy (G. M. Allen coll.) agrees fairly well with the dark Ethiopian birds. It follows, therefore, that there is a dark, heavily vermiculated race in Ethiopia (except the extreme northwestern part—Tacazzé) and northern Kenya Colony. The question of names then arises. Madarasz (Orn. Monatsb., 1912, p. 81) described a bird he called *Scops königseggi*. This bird is said to be very light in color; the ground color of the upper parts white and light gray without a brownish wash, with some yellowish flecks here and there, particularly on the upper back and on the inner webs of the tertials. Fortunately I have examined three birds from the Blue Nile, and two of them agree with Madarasz' description, while the third is very much more rufous. However, *königseggi* is a light, sparsely vermiculated bird both by description and by specimens, and the name cannot be applied to the dark birds of Ethiopia. Zedlitz' light bird from Tacazzé may well be *königseggi*. I have not been able to see the description of Brehm's form *pygmaea* (Vogelfang, 1855, p. 43) but it probably refers to the same birds as does the name *königseggi* which it antedates by some 57 years. The type of *pygmaea* came from Sennar and is now in the Tring Museum. Hartert (Nov. Zool. XXV, 1918, p. 38) considers it a synonym of typical *Otus senegalensis senegalensis*, but this is not necessarily the case, as Hartert recognizes none of the various races of this Owl—a course with which I do not agree. At any rate *pygmaea* (or *senegalensis*) is the lighter owl of Tacazzé, Sennar, and the Blue Nile.

For the dark, heavily vermiculated bird of central and eastern Ethiopia, and northern Kenya Colony I propose the name

***Otus senegalensis caecus* subsp. nov.**

Type: U. S. Nat. Mus. no. 243663, adult female, collected at Sadi Malka, Ethiopia, 1 February 1912, by E. A. Mearns.

Subspecific Characters: darker, more heavily vermiculated (the light spaces between the dark marks narrower) than in any other race of the species.

Measurements of Type: wing 128, tail 56, culmen from the cere 10.5 mm.

Range: the eastern and central parts of Ethiopia south to the northern Guaso Nyiro River, Kenya Colony.

Specimens Examined: *Otus senegalensis pygmaea* (or *senegalensis* according to Hartert), Blue Nile, 3; *Otus senegalensis ugandae*, Uganda and northern Belgian Congo, 10; *Otus senegalensis caecus*, Ethiopia and Kenya Colony, 4.

Remarks: The four specimens of *caecus* examined (3 females, 1 male) vary somewhat among themselves (the darkest bird being the type) but all are darker than any other Scops Owls examined. The argument commonly advanced against subspecific entities in this species that this Owl is always extremely variable in any region may be disposed of by recording that a series of ten specimens of *ugandae* from Uganda and the Uelle district, Belgian Congo, shows little or no variation in color.

*U. S. National Museum,
Washington, D. C.*