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Accepted for publication 12 July 1971.

A NORTHERLY WINTERING RECORD OF THE ELF OWL (*MICRATHENE WHITNEYI*)

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Ligon (Misc. Publ., Mus. Zool., Univ. Michigan, No. 136, 1968) investigated the winter range of the Elf Owl in México, chiefly by playing sound recordings of their calls at various point of suitable habitat from Arizona to Guerrero. Wintering Elf Owls were recorded at localities from the Sierra del Sur in central Guerrero, east to northern Oaxaca, west to southwestern Michoacan, and north to the edge of the Mexican Plateau near Cuernavaca, Morelos. Negative results were obtained at one locality on Nayarit and two coastal localities in Sinaloa.

On the night of 10-11 January 1971, Ely collected an adult male Elf Owl (NOF 3007) 11 mi. N of México Highway 15 on the Consala Road in central Sinaloa. This locality (about 65 mi. SE of Culiacan)

is more than 500 mi. NW of the nearest reported wintering locality.

The bird was mist-netted in second-growth thorn forest near a harvested corn field. It was retained alive and taken to Tucson, Arizona. It appeared to be in good health and fed freely on insects given it on the nights of 12-13 and 13-14 January, but suddenly fell dead from its perch late on the night of 13-14 January. Upon skinning the specimen, Crossin noted a circular area about 10 mm in diameter on the lower stomach. The area was a dark bluish-green in color and resembled dermal tissue which has received a severe bruise. The cause of the affliction was not determined, but may possibly have resulted from the intake of some chemical poisoning during feeding. The owl might have been afflicted before its capture, which could account for its wintering far north of the recorded winter range.

Insects and other arthropods appeared to be abundant at this locality and Ridgway's Whip-poor-will (*Caprimulgus ridgwayi*), also a nocturnal insect feeder, was collected here. Although not a requisite for winter roosts (Ligon, op. cit.), large cacti (*Lemaireocereus*) with woodpecker holes were present nearby. Future investigation of the coastal Sinaloa locality is needed to determine if the specimen collected represents an isolated, aberrant individual or whether the area serves as a regular wintering site for the Elf Owl.

Accepted for publication 11 May 1971.

DIE-OFF OF COMMON MURRES ON THE ALASKA PENINSULA AND UNIMAK ISLAND

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This paper reports on massive mortality in a pelagic population of Common Murres (*Uria aalge*) in Bristol Bay during April 1970. The first evidence of mortality appeared on 23 April when local residents found three weakened Common Murres and brought them to the Aleutian Islands and Izembek Refuge headquarters at Cold Bay, located near the tip of the Alaska Peninsula (fig. 1). Other murres soon were found on land, and it became apparent that the previous day's storm had blown many birds inland from the Bering Sea. The next day Ken Manthey, an Alaska Department of Fish and Game biologist conducting stream surveys from a helicopter, reported hundreds of dead and dying birds along the Bering Sea beach in the vicinity of the Black Hills, 50 miles north of Cold Bay. Later reports from the helicopter crew related an oil slick, dead sea otters with oil on their fur, and a herd of 450 lethargic hair seals. Believing that a major oil spill had occurred, an aircraft

was chartered the following morning at Cold Bay to investigate. About 60 miles of coastline north of Cold Bay were inspected. Dead Common Murres were strewn along the beaches, and weak or ill birds were staggering about on the sand and floundering in offshore waters. Trails in the sand showed that after washing ashore many waddled short distances and collapsed. A curious, discontinuous black sheen was noted along the high tide line in some areas. The recent storms obviously had churned up a tremendous surf, for debris was piled high up on the beach and was deposited 1000 ft up some streams. No oil or aberrant sea mammals were seen. Subsequent efforts were directed toward determining the extent and causes of the observed mortality.

AERIAL COUNTS

Aerial surveys were conducted by Alaska Fish and Game biologists enroute to Cold Bay from Kodiak Island on 25 April. They crossed the Alaska Peninsula near Port Heiden and encountered increasing numbers of dead murres from Ilnik Lake southward. Aerial counts were taken randomly for 1-min intervals, representing 2-mile samples of beach, as the plane's speed was approximately 120 mph. Total counts of dead birds from one geographical location to another were computed from averages at different locales. Between Ilnik Lake and Izembek Bay the number of dead and dying murres on 20 counts ranged from 2 to 415 per mile of beach and averaged 91 (table 1). Dead murres declined significantly south of Moffet Point, the beginning of the Izembek National Wildlife Range.