

SPECIAL REVIEW--MARSHALL ON SCREECH OWLS

by Byron E. Harrell

Marshall, Joe T., Jr.--"Parallel Variation in North and Middle American Screech-owls." Monographs of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology No. 1, 72 pp., frontispiece, 31 figures, 1967. (Available for \$3.50 from Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, C. V. Duff, Business Manager, 1100 Glendon Ave., Los Angeles, California 90024.)

The genus Otus is widespread and is divided into numerous species. To the ornithologist who has had to make taxonomic decisions on the basis of small samples it is a confusing and difficult genus. At last for North and Middle America one can turn to this excellent account in which one can see the reasons for earlier confusion. Since much confusion arose from worn-plumaged birds or from post-mortem changes, Marshall had to base most of his work on newly collected birds in fresh plumage. At the same time he collected much information on habitat, voice, and certain aspects of behavior. Tape recording and sonograms added essential data.

Marshall places the 27 forms he recognizes into seven species: Otus asio (14 subspecies in four groups), O. trichopsis (3 subspecies), O. flammeolus, O. choliba, O. guatemalae (4 subspecies), O. barbarus, and O. clarkii. The four groups of Common Screech Owls approach the level of full species; he recognizes that others would split them. His full discussion allows the reader to judge for himself. One of the many interesting evolutionary conclusions is that character displacement has had no role in racial adaptation. Indeed the opposite occurs, for convergence in coloration is quite common. Parallelism, as indicated by the title, is very important in this genus.

Treatment of each form and abundant discussion make up about half of the large size pages (about 23 x 30 cm). There are 20 pages of specimen photographs, diagramatic representation of sonograms, sketches of feet, sketches of feathers which show color patterns in different forms, a synopsis, a table of synonyms, comments on type specimens, some important suggestions on specimen preparation, and maps, as well as an index. The colored photograph frontispiece is delightful.

The style is more informal than usual in taxonomic papers, but the language is vivid and descriptive and the anecdotes amusing and pertinent. One minor point is my personal dislike of the form of common name as Screech-owl, which however is preferable to the alternative he had considered of Scops-owl. He does not justify this orthography which I feel detracts from the handy lumping of all owls in indexes under one term. Joe Marshall's long time interest in owls and his extensive travels studying them have made one of the most interesting taxonomic papers in a long time.