

On a number of occasions I have seen Ring-bills ploughing, but I know of no previous observation of feeding by skimming in either species.

I am grateful to Dr. N. Philip Ashmole for advice on preparation of this note.—KARL ERIC TOLONEN, *Peabody Museum of Natural History, Division of Vertebrate Zoology, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut 06520, 25 September 1969.*

**A putative skeletal specimen of the Flammulated Owl with Alabama locality data.**—Several years ago Gid E. Nelson, Jr., gave me over 100 bird skeletons, among which was the complete skeleton and rhamphotheca of a fully grown, small owl. The specimen bears the locality of Shelby County, Alabama. The original label lists Montevallo, where Nelson then resided, however, no town is indicated in his catalog. The date listed is November 1953. The sex was not determined.

Although previously identified as *Otus asio*, study of its remains indicates the specimen is from a smaller species of *Otus*, which on geographic grounds must be the Flammulated Owl (*O. flammeolus*). The smooth texture of the surface of the bones indicates the bird is fully grown and thus its size can be compared with other adult specimens. Ten species of *Otus* occur in the Western Hemisphere north of South America (Eisenmann, 1955; Peters, 1940). Measurements of the culmen for the 9 species excluding *O. flammeolus* range from 10.5 to 17.5 mm (Ridgway, 1914; Wetmore, 1968). The range for the latter species is 8.5 to 10 mm. The rhamphotheca of the Alabama *Otus* is free from the underlying bone and worn slightly from the maceration cleaning process, but its culmen certainly measured less than 10 mm.

The diminutive Flammulated Owl is known to have especially small feet (Miller, 1933). To support further the identity of the specimen as *O. flammeolus* I compared its tarsometatarsal length of 22.6 mm with that of 5 species of *Otus*, including the only 3 recorded from the United States (A.O.U., 1957). A total of 100 *Otus asio* ranged from 28.3 to 37.7 mm with a mean of 32.85. This sample consists of 9 North American races including the small western *O. a. gilmani*. *O. a. floridanus* is represented by 30 individuals, 19 of which are smaller than all specimens of other races. The tarsometatarsus ranged from 28.3 to 32.8 mm with a mean of 30.69 in these *O. a. floridanus*. For the remaining 70 specimens the range is 31.1 to 37.7 with a mean of 33.77. No sexual dimorphism in tarsometatarsal length was evident. Two *O. trichopsis* measure 31.0 and 32.0 mm. Four *O. flammeolus* range from 21.9 to 24.3 (mean 23.00) which nicely encompasses the measurement of the unknown. One specimen of the Old World *O. spilocephalus* measures 28.9 mm, too large to include the unknown. However, one *O. scops*, which some workers consider conspecific with *O. flammeolus* (Eisenmann, 1955), measures 23.7 mm. Assuming the owl is a species known to inhabit North or Central America, measurements indicate it is *O. flammeolus*.

Circumstantial evidence supports the contention that the specimen, indeed, did come from Shelby County, Alabama. All but one of the 100 specimens given me were collected in the same county, Nelson never collected within the known range of *O. flammeolus* nor did he have any students that did, and no discrepancies between any of his specimens and their appended data have been noted. Alabama College, where Nelson then was employed, is a small school and most of the students came from nearby. He can think of no persons locally who kept live birds. Nelson did not shoot the owl and suspects it was found dead, although he cannot recall the specific incident (all pers. comm.).

These factors do not eliminate the possibility that the specimen came from elsewhere and was transported, intentionally or accidentally, to Alabama. Similar criticism can be levied against most specimens and the problem is going to become increasingly acute as man increases in number and mobility. I suggest as a general policy that if an investigator can find no evidence to the contrary such distribution records be published along with the circumstances and leave the decision of the validity of the record to the reader.

For those willing to accept this record, it constitutes the first Flammulated Owl from Alabama, and only the second from eastern United States. Normally the species is found in western North America from British Columbia to Guatemala, however, one was taken live at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on 2 January 1949 (Lowery, 1955). Again if accepted, this record has implications regarding the migratory status of the species which at present is controversial (Johnson, 1963). It is common for migratory birds that breed in western North America to appear in southeastern United States in fall and winter, and an above average flux occurred in 1953 (Audubon Field Notes, 1954). It seems far less likely that a sedentary land bird would stray almost 1,000 miles from its normal range.

An additional value of this record is to make people aware of the possibility of overlooking specimens of the Flammulated Owl. Nelson is an ornithologist by training yet he handled this specimen without ever realizing it was something other than the locally common *Otus asio*.

I am grateful to Sievert A. Rohwer who measured the large series of *Otus asio* in the University of Kansas Museum of Natural History, Ned K. Johnson who loaned certain specimens from the University of California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, and Norman L. Ford who corroborated my identification. The remaining measurements were taken from specimens in the Pierce Brodtkorb collection at the University of Florida, the United States National Museum, and my own collection.

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