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THE PYGMY OWL OF THE DISTRICT OF  
SOCONUSCO, CHIAPAS

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FOR some time it has been evident that there was an undescribed dark subspecies of pygmy owl inhabiting the humid District of Soconusco, in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. As adequate material is now at hand, this form is herewith described.

*Glaucidium brasilianum saturatum*, new subspecies

TYPE.—University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, No. 101962; male; Finca Esperanza, Chiapas; December 28, 1938; collected by Gregorio Gómez.

DIAGNOSIS.—Nearest to *Glaucidium brasilianum ridgwayi* Sharpe, but size larger; darker above and tending to be somewhat more heavily streaked below; tail apparently always banded with brown and rufous.

Seven males measure: wing, 97–100.5 mm. (against 86–94 in *ridgwayi*), tail, 57.5–62 (against 58–62.5); eight females, wing, 101–107.5 mm. (against 89–102.5 in *ridgwayi*), tail, 61.5–68.5 (against 59–66).

RANGE.—Pacific lowlands of the District of Soconusco in Chiapas and the adjacent part of Guatemala.

REMARKS.—Specimens from Pijijiapan, Tonalá, and Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, are to be referred to *ridgwayi*, since they are very pale, although in size they approach *saturatum*.

Males from those places measure: wing, 94–101.5 mm., tail, 59–64.5; females, wing, 98–103, tail, 61–65.5. Three are in the grayish brown phase and have black and white bands on the tail.

*Glaucidium brasilianum cactorum* van Rossem, which ranges from Arizona to Nayarit, is even shorter winged and paler than is *ridgwayi*. It agrees with *saturatum*, however, in apparently always having brown and rufous tail bands.

In the present series of *saturatum* there are two extremes of coloration—a rufous-backed bird with brown and rufous tail bands, and a brownish-backed bird with the tail similarly banded. The first pattern of coloration undoubtedly corresponds to the rufous phase of *ridgwayi*, since it differs only in intensity of pigmentation. The second pattern of coloration differs from the brown [or, as it is sometimes called, gray] phase of *ridgwayi*, not only in intensity of pigmentation, but also in having the tail banded with brown and rufous, instead of with black and white. There are two possible interpretations of the second pattern of coloring in *saturatum*, viz., either it represents the brown phase of *ridgwayi*, but with the tail very differently colored; or it represents the so-called mongrel or intermediate phase of *ridgwayi*, in which case the true brown phase must be absent or very rare in Soconusco. For *cactorum* van Rossem has concluded that similar birds represent the brown phase. Whichever interpretation may be adopted is not now of great moment. The fact remains that birds with black and white tails are not known to occur within the ranges of *cactorum* or of *saturatum*.

Ridgway's statement<sup>1</sup> that the type of *ridgwayi* was based on British Museum material from Mexico has been accepted by subsequent authors as a restriction of the type locality to Mexico. The only two British Museum Mexican birds which Sharpe had at the time were from "W. Mexico" (pages 46 and 47 of his article).<sup>2</sup> In his list of specimens examined<sup>3</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> "Birds of North and Middle America," *Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus.*, No. 50, Pt. 6 (1914): 803, in synonymy under *Glaucidium ridgwayi*.

<sup>2</sup> "Contributions to a History of the *Accipitres*. The Genus *Glaucidium*," *Ibis*, 3d ser., 5, No. 17 (1875): 35–59.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

locality is given simply as Mexico, as it also is in the *Catalogue of Birds*.<sup>4</sup> The source is not stated, beyond the fact that the skins were purchased. It is highly probable that Sharpe's birds came from one of the west coast ports, Acapulco, Manzanillo, San Blas, or Mazatlán. If from one of the latter two, they would represent the form which van Rossem<sup>5</sup> recently described as *cactorum*. It is exceedingly unlikely that they were collected in Chiapas, as that state was *terra incognita* from an ornithological standpoint at the time.

In my opinion, however, *Glaucidium ridgwayi* Sharpe is nothing but a new name for Ridgway's<sup>6</sup> misapplication of *Glaucidium gnoma* Wagler. Sharpe<sup>7</sup> introduced the name in the summary of his criticism of Ridgway's paper, as follows:

5. That, viewing the differences which are exhibited by most specimens from the northern and southern ranges of the birds, it is convenient to keep them separate; and as Mr. Ridgway has incorrectly called the Central-American bird *G. gnoma*, the latter [i.e., of Ridgway, not of Wagler] will require a new title, which I propose shall be *Glaucidium ridgwayi*.

On account of the manner in which the name was proposed, it is immaterial that on previous pages of the article Sharpe gave the characters of the form. Therefore, the six specimens in the U. S. National Museum mentioned by Ridgway,<sup>8</sup> rather than those which Sharpe used, are to be treated as cotypes. It is significant in this regard that Sharpe<sup>9</sup> did not claim any of the British Museum specimens as the type. I have discussed the nomenclatural status of *ridgwayi* with Dr. Carl L. Hubbs, who agrees with my interpretation.

In order to preserve the current concept of the races, I formally designate Mérida, Yucatán, as type locality of *Glau-*

<sup>4</sup> *Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum* (London: Printed by order of the Trustees, 1875), 2: 207.

<sup>5</sup> "The Ferruginous Pygmy Owl of Northwestern Mexico and Arizona," *Proc. Biol. Soc. Wash.*, 50 (1937): 27.

<sup>6</sup> *Glaucidium infuscatum* var. *gnoma* "Wagler" Ridgway, *Proc. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist.*, 16 (1873): 93 (in key), 103.

<sup>7</sup> "Contributions to a History of the *Accipitres* . . .," p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 103-4.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum*, 2: 207.

*cidium ridgwayi* Sharpe. This locality is based on U. S. National Museum specimen No. 37876, one of the two specimens which Ridgway described in detail.

MATERIAL EXAMINED.—*G. b. saturatum*: 15 specimens from Chiapas (Colonia Soconusco, Cruz de Piedra, Acacoyagua, Finca Jalapa, Finca Esperanza, and Unión Juárez) in the University of Michigan, and 3 specimens from Guatemala (Hacienda California) in the Museum of Comparative Zoology.

*G. b. ridgwayi*: 84 specimens in the two above named institutions from Texas, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas (Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Tonalá, and Pijijiapan), Guatemala (Finca Volcán and Progreso), British Honduras, Honduras, Salvador, and Costa Rica.

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