

A NOTABLE OWLET FROM KENYA

Mrs. William M. Morden, who, with her late husband, has been most generous in the various causes of the Peabody Museum of Natural History, sponsored and accompanied a vertebrate collecting expedition to Kenya in early 1965. At the conclusion of the trip Andrew Williams, son of John G. Williams, curator of the National Museum (formerly the Coryndon Museum) of Nairobi, made a ten-day collecting trip to the Sokoke-Arabuku Forest on the Kenya coast. The material from this brief visit has been sent back to Yale University and includes several noteworthy bird and mammal specimens. Among the former is the following:—

Otus ireneae new species

TYPE. (YPM no. 85284) ♂ (see Plate 1), collected 9 April 1965 by Andrew Williams at Kilifi, Sokoke Forest, Kenya.

DIAGNOSIS. From the Sandy or Cinnamon Scops Owlet *Otus icterorhynchus* this specimen differs by smaller size, darker coloration, tawny greyish-brown above (instead of warm ruddy-brown to chestnut) with regular antero-posterior series of pale whitish-cream shaft spots, 3 mm. long, margined before and behind with black streaks. In *icterorhynchus* these spots are far less clearly defined with black fore and aft, and the head lacks the pronounced pattern of black shaft streaks of *ireneae*. The wings, as in *icterorhynchus*, have blackish bars with prominent whitish spots on the outer webs of the distal primaries. There are, as well, white spots on the outer webs of the greater wing-coverts. The inner secondaries and inner greater wing-coverts differ from *icterorhynchus* by being pale greyish-white with very fine brown vermiculations. The facial disks are much darker than in *icterorhynchus*, a blackish area extending from below the eyes into the auricular region. Below, this owlet, unlike *icterorhynchus*, is heavily vermiculated, the throat and breast warm blackish-brown, the abdomen and belly paler brownish-grey. The tarsi feathering is mottled with blackish-brown, the under tail-coverts are creamy, lightly barred with blackish-brown. The tail differs notably from *icterorhynchus* in being vermiculated, but has similar irregular pale spotting on either side of the shafts.

Soft parts are noted as: iris pale yellow; feet pale brown wash; bill pale pink-grey wash.

MEASUREMENTS. *ireneae* ♂ (Type): wing 112.5, tail 65.5, culmen (from cere), 9.5, tarsus 20 mm.

Icterorhynchus holorythrus ♂: wing 144, tail 85, culmen (from cere) 14, tarsus 26 mm. Measurements of *icterorhynchus* in Bannerman (1953, 'Bds. W. and Equat. Afr.' 1: 535-6) wings 126-134, tail 65-72, tarsus 22 mm. In Chapin (1939, 'Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.' 75 (2): 372) wing measurements of *holorythrus* are given as 140-144, tail 67-78 mm.

RANGE. Known only from the type taken at an altitude of 200 ft. a.s.l. in brachystegia woodland in the Sokoke Forest, near Kilifi, eastern Kenya.

REMARKS. This owlet represents a species closer in pattern to *Otus icterorhynchus* of the evergreen rain forest of West Africa and the Congo than to any other, though its vermiculation and dark colouring, with pale patch on the inner secondaries, bear a superficial resemblance to the scops group of small owls including *O. scops* and some of the southeast Asian species such as *O. balli*. If related to *O. icterorhynchus* this would place it as an isolated relict species dating back to a moister pre-Pleistocene period, perhaps a Pliocene connection with lowland evergreen forest inhabitants of western Africa, though Pliocene climatic evidence is scanty (see Moreau 1952, 'Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond.' 121 (4): 869-913). However, a continuous belt of evergreen forest reaching the eastern coast of Africa is given credibility by other zoogeographic, if not direct palaeoclimatic, evidence in the form of the distribution of several other birds, in some mammals, in land