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BIRDS OF WESTERN AFRICA—PART I.

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A.C.G., F.R.S., F.L.S., M.W.S., ETC., AND OF SEVERAL FOREIGN ACADEMIES.

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AFRICAN SCOPS OWL.

Scops Senegalensis, SWAINS.

Variegated with grey, ferruginous, and black; ears, grey, without any marginal band; marginal base of the shoulders, whitish. Second quill-feather shorter than the fifth.

So many authors of good repute* have recorded that the little Horned Owl of Europe is also a native of Africa, that in the absence of positive proof to the contrary, we were bound to believe the fact. Every fresh examination, however, of these species, which on equally good testimony are asserted to inhabit widely different regions, diminishes the number of these supposed cosmopolites, and throws increased doubt upon the remainder. It is impossible, of course, to know whether the bird we shall now describe is that which has been mistaken for the European scops; but if so, we hesitate not to pronounce it a decidedly different species. The specimen from the south of France is now before us, together with that we here designated, for the first time, under the name of *S. Senegalensis*. It may at once be known from the former, by being smaller, by the absence of the black marginal or semicircular line behind the ear, and by the whitish colour of the shoulders. The two first might be

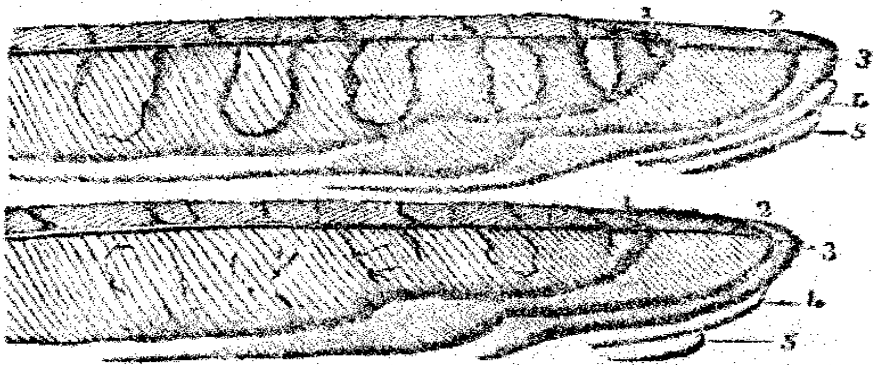
* Le Vaillant, Temminck, &c.

attributable to climate, the second to a difference of sex, but the third distinction, more especially when coupled with the others, is altogether decisive.

It is almost impossible to give a correct idea, by words, of those intricate mixtures of colours seen in the plumage of the owls and nightjars. On such occasions it appears preferable to single out two or three parts for minute description, and not attempt a laboured account of the remainder. Without, therefore, occupying more space than is necessary, we shall merely observe, that the general cast of the plumage of these two species are so much alike, that we can feel no surprise at their having been mistaken for the same. Yet, even in some of these markings, when closely examined, there is a tangible difference. The inner webs of the greater quills, for instance, on the *S. Senegalensis*, are light-brown, passing into buff, and marked across with about six well defined blackish bars, placed in an oblique direction, and extending entirely across the web; whereas, in *S. Europæus*, these bars are not entirely more obscure, but they are upon a dull blackish ground, so as to become partly undefined; the spots on the outer web of the quills are larger, whiter, and fewer. On the first quill there are nine in *S. Europæus*, and but six in *S. Senegalensis*. In *S. Europæus*, the outer half of the greater wing-covers beneath is entirely black; but in *Senegalensis*, they are entirely whitish, with two slender black transverse bands. The axillæ of the shoulders in this are cream colour, tinged with ferruginous, pre-

cisely similar, in fact, to the whitish scapular line so common among the owls; but in the European species, the axillæ, like the lesser wing-covers, are deep and uniform rufous-brown.

Finally, there is a difference in point of structure which must not be passed over. The wings are shorter than in the European, which has the second quill equal to the fourth; but in this, the second quill is not even so long as the fifth. Hence ensues a great difference in all the remainder, for in this the third and fourth are equal and longest, whereas in the *S. Europæus* the third exceeds all the others. The annexed cut will explain these differences at a glance, and will show how much more vigorous must be the flight of the European scops than that of the Senegal species.



The colouring and markings of the species of this group are remarkably alike; there are two from Java and one from Brazil, which in this respect are as similar to *S. Europæus* as is the present bird.