

AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS

Kinghorn, J. R., 1933. A re-examination of two of Ramsay's types of New Guinea owls. *Records of the Australian Museum* 18(9): 451–454. [10 January 1933].

doi:10.3853/j.0067-1975.18.1933.748

ISSN 0067-1975

Published by the Australian Museum, Sydney

nature culture **discover**

Australian Museum science is freely accessible online at
www.australianmuseum.net.au/publications/
6 College Street, Sydney NSW 2010, Australia



A RE-EXAMINATION OF TWO OF RAMSAY'S TYPES OF NEW GUINEA OWLS.

By

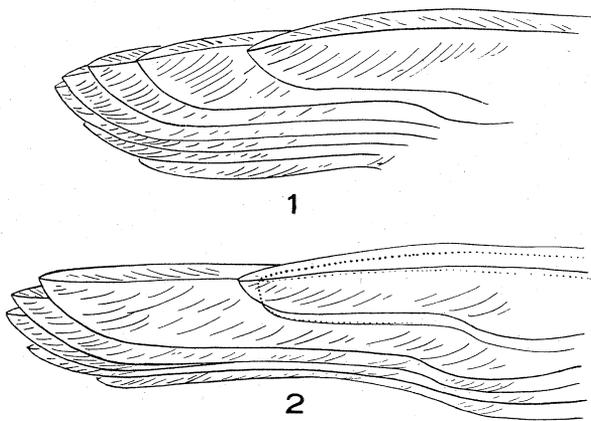
J. R. KINGHORN, C.M.Z.S.,
Zoologist, The Australian Museum.

Ninox undulata Ramsay.

(Figures 1-2.)

Ninox undulata Ramsay, Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W., iii, 1879, p. 249.

In describing this species, Ramsay referred to its close relationship to *Ninox rufa* Gould,¹ but stated that it "is altogether smaller". After examining the type and comparing it with two specimens of *N. rufa* from Cooktown, Queensland, I find that the differences between them are so minute as to be negligible. The wing formula given by Ramsay is not quite correct; in fact it is rather misleading. An examination shows that the fifth primary is the longest, followed in order by the fourth, sixth, and third, while the second and seventh are almost equal, reaching to a point about midway between the tip of the first and fifth. The secondaries extend a little beyond the level of the tip of the first primary. The wing formula of the two specimens of *N. rufa* agrees with that of Ramsay's *N. undulata*, but the secondaries are distinctly longer. One of the Queensland



Figures 1-2.

Figure 1.—Wing formula of *Ninox undulata* Ramsay, from type.

Figure 2.—Wing formula of *Ninox rufa* Gould. Specimen from Cooktown, Queensland. The second primary, half-grown, is shown by dots.

¹Gould.—Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond., 1846, p. 18.

specimens is a male, in which the second primary of each wing has been lost through moult, and is replaced by a half-grown one as shown in the accompanying figure.

The measurements of the three specimens are given below, and in making them I have followed the methods adopted by Baldwin, Oberholser and Worley,² except in one or two instances where a better comparison can be made with the type, in which case I have followed Ramsay.

| | Type. | Cooktown Specimens. | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|---------------------|-----|
| | | ♂ | ♀ |
| | mm. | mm. | mm. |
| Wing | 300 | 325 | 340 |
| First primary | 161 | 160 | 170 |
| Third primary | 230 | 240 | 270 |
| Tail | 215 | 223 | 255 |
| Central tail feather | 200 | 210 | 220 |
| Tarsus | 50 | 49 | 51 |
| Middle toe | 34 | 34 | 34 |
| Middle claw | 27 | 27 | 27 |
| Depth of bill at nostril | 20 | 21 | 27 |
| Width of bill at gape | 32 | 34 | 35 |
| Length of bill from frontal tuft .. | 34 | 36 | 40 |

Some years after describing *N. undulata*, Ramsay gave a description of characters and measurements, in inches, of a series of specimens of *N. humeralis* from Queensland and New Guinea, and preceding this was a description of *N. rufa*. An examination of his specimens, and a comparison of their characters with his descriptions were interesting, because, while he called attention to the relationship of *N. rufa* to *N. strenua* Gould,⁴ and the similarity of *N. humeralis* to *N. rufa*, he evidently did not go far enough to establish their exact status, and he left them as distinct species. Salvadori⁵ placed *N. undulata* Ramsay in the synonymy of *N. humeralis* Hombr. and Jacq.,⁶ and as the latter is now regarded as identical with *N. rufa* Gould, it follows that *N. undulata* also comes under that name.

Ninox albomaculata Ramsay.

(Figures 3-5.)

Ninox albomaculata Ramsay, Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W., iii, 1878, p. 249.

Shortly after Ramsay described this owl as new, Salvadori,⁷ who had received an early copy of the paper, wrote: "The description of this bird agrees with that of *Ninox assimilis* Salvad. et d'Alb."⁸

² Baldwin, Oberholser and Worley.—Cleveland Mus. Nat. Hist., Sci. Pub., ii, 1931.

³ Ramsay.—Austr. Mus., Cat. 4, Pt. 2 (2nd edition), 1898, pp. 27-29.

⁴ Gould.—Syn. Birds of Austr., 1838, p. 49.

⁵ Salvadori.—Ornith. Papuasie e Molucchi, i, 1880, p. 84.

⁶ Bonaparte.—Consp. Gen. Avium, i, 1850, p. 40.

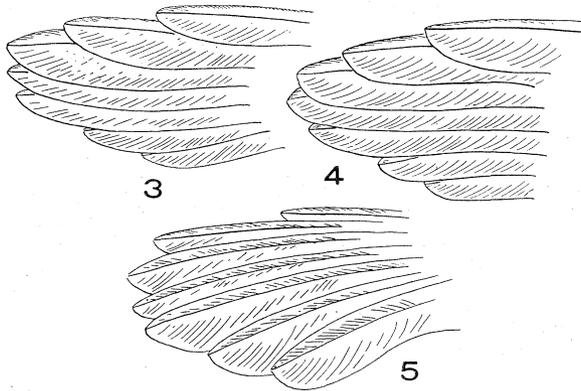
⁷ Salvadori.—The Ibis (4), iii, 1879, p. 319.

⁸ Salvadori et d'Albertis.—Ann. Mus. Civ. St. Nat., Genova, 7, 1875, p. 809.

This opinion evidently was not acceptable to Ramsay, who later included it, under the name of *N. albomaculata*, in his list of New Guinea birds collected by Mr. A. Goldie.⁹ In the year 1890 Salvadori¹⁰ placed it in the synonymy of his *Ninox assimilis* as ? *Ninox albomaculata* Ramsay; and discussed the affinities of *N. assimilis* generally, giving the differences between it and *N. boobook*; but while he queried *N. albomaculata*, he evidently entertained little doubt that it would prove to be his *N. assimilis*.

Ramsay's description was all Salvadori had to work on, and, while that description suggested a close affinity between the two species, it was not as accurate as it should have been. I admit a close relationship between *N. albomaculata* and *N. assimilis*, but after an examination of a large series of owls, I regard Ramsay's *albomaculata* as a subspecies of *N. boobook*. The colour markings from above immediately suggest *boobook*, while the more definitely streaked undersurface resembles a typical *ocellata*, but it can be quickly separated from the latter by the absence of spots on the hind neck—a character typical of *ocellata*.

It is interesting to note that the type of *albomaculata* is similar in many respects to a previously unnamed bird in the Museum collection from "Northern Territory of Australia", but Ramsay's bird has less conspicuous bars on the primaries and tail feathers, while the mesial streaks on the abdominal feathers are narrower. The under-wing coverts are identical, while the rest of the colour and markings are very similar. The north Australian bird is a little longer than the New Guinea one and has a tail of 175 mm., and wing 275 mm., as against tail 153 and wing 265 mm. in the latter. There is no doubt in my mind that the former is *Ninox connivens peninsularis* (it is larger than *N. connivens occidentalis* from north-west Australia), and that it is closely related to the New Guinea bird, which I now regard as *Ninox boobook albomaculata*.



Figures 3-5.

Figure 3.—*Ninox albomaculata* Ramsay, from type.

Figure 4.—*Ninox boobook* Latham, a typical specimen.

Figure 5.—*Ninox connivens peninsularis* Latham, *peninsularis* Salvadori, from Cape York, Queensland.

⁹ Ramsay.—Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W., iv, 1879, p. 96.

¹⁰ Salvadori.—Ornith. Papuasias e Molucchi, 1890, p. 81.

Ramsay's type specimen is far from being a good skin; the head is crammed into the neck, and cannot be straightened out, making it impossible to take a correct measurement of the total length, which Ramsay gave as 15.5 inches, but which I cannot make quite 14 inches. Figures showing the wing formula and the comparative extent of the tips of the first to seventh flight feathers in Ramsay's type of *albomaculata*, a typical *N. boobook*, and *N. connivens peninsularis*, are shown on the previous page.

RE-DESCRIPTION OF *Ninox boobook albomaculata* RAMSAY.

Above, dusky brown, head darker, uniform, some of the feathers of the hind neck having somewhat light margins. Scapulars brown like the back, some of the feathers bearing large white spots. Wing coverts brown, the greater and median series with conspicuous white spots. Primary coverts darker than the back, with no indication of lighter cross-bars. Quills dark brown, with lighter bars on the inner webs, the outer webs margined with fulvous, forming spots on the third, fourth and fifth. Rump inclined to rufous. Tail brown like the back, all the feathers being barred with a paler brown, those on the inner webs terminating in whitish spots. Lores and frontal plumes whitish, sides of head fulvous, narrowly streaked with brown; ear coverts dark brown. Breast feathers white with a broad, mesial, rufous streak.

Abdominal feathers mainly white with a narrow rufous streak extending to the tip. Leg feathers strongly rufous, some with darker streaks. Under-wing coverts dark fawn, with broad dark streaks at the tip, the whole area resembling, in colour, that of the breast.

Measurements.—Total length, 350 mm., wing 265 mm., tarsus 38 mm., tail 170 mm., bill from nostril 16 mm., bill from cere 18 mm., depth of upper mandible at nostril 11 mm., width of bill at gape 28 mm., length of lower mandible from gape 28 mm., length of upper mandible from gape 33 mm., culmen 30 mm.

Type from Laloki River, near Port Moresby, Papua, No. A 2227, Australian Museum collection. The specimen was collected by Mr. A. Morton, who accompanied Mr. A. Goldie, in 1877.
