SHORT-EARED OWL.

†OTUS BRACHYOTUS, Linn.

PLATE XXXVIII.—MALE.

Although this species is by no means scarce in almost any part of the United States, in the latter half of autumn and during winter, very few individuals spend the summer south of the Great Pine Swamp of Pennsylvania, where, however, some occasionally breed. In Nova Scotia, its nest has frequently been met with, and in Newfoundland it is as common as the Barred Owl is in Louisiana. In winter I have found it so plentiful in the Floridas, that I have shot seven in the course of a morning, while I was at General HERNANDEZ'. Indeed I was surprised to see the great number of

Short-eared Owl.

these birds which at that period were to be found in the open prairies of that country, rising from the tall grass in a hurried manner, and zig-zagging for a few yards, as if suddenly wakened from sound sleep, then sailing to some distance in a direct course, and dropping among the thickest herbage. On such an occasion, when I had observed the bird to have thrust itself into a thicket formed of tangled palmettoes, I moved towards it with caution, approached it, and caught it in my hand. I observed, however, that these birds, on being pursued and repeatedly started from the ground, extended their flight so far as to be quite out of sight before alighting. I never started two birds at once, but always found them singly at distances of from twenty to a hundred yards; and although on several occasions as many as three were seen on wing, they having been put up by my companions and myself, they never flew towards each other, but went off in different directions, as if unaware of each other's presence.

Its predilection for the ground forms a very distinctive peculiarity in the habits of this Owl, as compared with the Long-eared; for although it alights on bushes and trees, this seems more a matter of necessity than of choice; and in this respect it resembles the Barn Owls which I found on Galveston Island. I have never observed it in the act of procuring food, although it appears to see pretty well by day, or at least sufficiently to enable it to discover the nature of the spot toward which it removes for security.

In America, the Short-eared Owl has been observed as far north as latitude 67° by Dr. RICHARDSON, who mentions a female having been killed at Fort Franklin, on the 20th of May, containing several pretty large eggs, nearly ready for being laid. It is also an inhabitant of the Rocky Mountains, and of the valley of the Columbia River, from which it has been sent to me by Mr. TOWNSEND; and is by no means scarce in Kentucky, Louisiana, and along the coast as far as the Texas.

Having so frequently met with many of these birds in an extent of ground not exceeding half a mile, I have been disposed to think, that during the migratory movements of this species, those which follow in the rear of the first, are attracted by their cries, and induced to alight in their vicinity; but of this I have no positive proof, nor have I ever seen them travelling from one part of the country to another.

The only nest of this bird that I have found was placed on one of the high mountain ridges of the Great Pine Forest. It contained four eggs, nearly ready to be hatched. They were of a dull bluish-white, covered with excrement, of a somewhat elongated or elliptical form, measuring an inch and a half in length, and an inch and an eighth in breadth. The nest, which I met with on the 17th of June, was placed under a low bush, and covered over by tall grass, through which a path had been made by the bird. It was formed

of dry grass, raked together in a slovenly manner, and quite flat, but covering a large space, on one side of which were found many pellets, and two field-mice, which must have been brought there in the course of the preceding night, as they were quite fresh. I should never have discovered their nest had not the sitting bird made a noise by clicking its bill as I was passing close by. The poor thing was so intent on her task that I almost put my hand on her before she moved; and then, instead of flying off, she hopped with great leaps until about ten yards from me, keeping up a constant clicking of her mandibles. Having satisfied myself as to the species, made an outline of two of the eggs, and measured them, I proceeded slowly to a short distance, and watched her movements. Having remained silent and still for about ten minutes, I saw her hop toward the nest, and soon felt assured that she had resumed her task. It was my intention to revisit the spot, and take note of the growth of the young, but letters which came to me from Philadelphia a few days after, induced me to return thither; and since then I have had no opportunity of examining either the eggs or young of the Short-eared Owl.

On examining the pellets disgorged by this bird, I found them to be formed of the remains of bones of small quadrupeds, mixed with hair, and the elytra of various coleopterous insects. In its diurnal flight, the flappings of its wings are noiseless, as in most other species, and it is apt to sail many yards at a time before alighting. Like the rest of the family, when reposing, they stand as if crouched on the full length of their tarsi, and the slight crests or tufts of feathers on their head are, on such occasions, usually so lowered as to be scarcely perceptible.

SHORT-EARED OWL, *Strix brachyotos*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. iv. p. 64.

STRIX BRACHYOTOS, Bonap. Syn., p. 37.

SHORT-EARED OWL, *Strix brachyotos*, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 132.

SHORT-EARED OWL, *Strix brachyotos*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. v. p. 273.

Tufts inconspicuous, general colour of plumage buff, variegated with dark brown; eye surrounded by a ring of brownish-black, much broader behind; anterior half of disk white, with the tips black, posterior yellowish; anterior auricular ruff white, posterior yellowish, each feather with an oblong dark brown spot; upper parts buff, longitudinally streaked with dark brown; scapulars and wing-coverts spotted and banded in large patches, many with a large yellowish-white spot on the outer web near the end; quills buff, with two or three dark brown bands; tail similar, with five broad dark bands, the tip yellowish-white; on the middle feathers the light coloured spaces have a brown central patch; lower parts pale buff, whitish behind, the neck with oblong, the breast and sides with linear dark brown streaks; chin, feet, abdomen, and lower tail-coverts unspotted.

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Audubon, John James. 1840. "Short-Eared Owl, *Otus brachyotus*, Linn. [Pl. 38]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 1, 140–142. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319151>.

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