

ATHENE BRODIEI.

Brodie's Owlet.

Noctua Brodiei, Burt. in Proc. of Zool. Soc., part iii., 1835, p. 152.

Athene Brodiei, Blyth, Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. xi. p. 163.—Id. Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calc., p. 40.—Gray & Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. i. p. 35, *Athene*, sp. 9.—Hutton, Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. xvii. part ii. p. 5.—Horsf. & Moore, Cat. of Birds in Mus. East-Ind. Comp., vol. i. p. 46.—Gray, Hand-list of Birds, vol. i. p. 40.

Noctua tubiger, Hodgs. Asiat. Res., vol. xix. p. 175.

Athene badia, Hodgs. in Gray's Zool. Misc., 1844, p. 82.

Teniopteryx Brodiei, Kaup, in Jard. Cont. to Orn., 1851, p. 130; 1852, p. 104.—Bulger, Ibis, 1869, p. 155.

Glaucidium Brodiei, Jerd. Birds of Ind., vol. i. p. 146.—Blyth, Ibis, 1866, p. 258.

At a first glance, this diminutive Owl would appear to be the European *Strix passerina* of Linnæus; but on comparison it will be found that not only is it quite distinct from that species, but it cannot be placed in the same genus. In size, and in size only, do the two birds at all assimilate; for, besides differing in their markings, the toes of *S. passerina* are thickly clothed with dense warm feathers, while those of Brodie's Owlet are nude, or at most have only a few hairs thinly dispersed over their upper portion.

Were I to say that Brodie's Owlet is the smallest of the Old-World Owls, I should, I believe, be stating an untruth; for I have now before me an Owlet from Assam which not only is more diminutive in size, but also differs considerably in the markings of its plumage—that is to say, in the absence of bars on the back and chest, those parts being of a uniform brown, the forehead alone being slightly spotted with fawn-colour; in all other respects it is very similar. I have compared this Assam bird with the smallest male examples I have seen of *A. Brodiei* from the Himalayas, and find it to be considerably more diminutive than either of them; and when compared with the females of the latter species it is not more than two-thirds of the size. Believing it to be undescribed, I shall provisionally name this little Owlet *Athene minutilla*, and await the arrival of other specimens, from Assam or elsewhere, before more fully characterizing it. As regards the true *A. Brodiei*, I find a difference occurs in the light portion of the throat and under surface, some specimens having those parts pure white; while in others they have a faint wash of sulphur-yellow.

Those who carefully examine this little Owl cannot fail to notice its lengthened and tubular nostrils, the why and the wherefore of which is at present unknown. By Dr. Kaup this bird has been constituted the type of his genus *Teniopteryx*; but I do not see the necessity of separating it from *Athene*.

"This pretty little Owl," says Captain Hutton, "is exceedingly common in the Himalayas, in the neighbourhood of Mussoorie and Simla, and may be heard at nightfall uttering its monotonous but not unmusical whistle of two notes oftentimes repeated. It nidificates in hollow trees, without any preparation of a nest. On the 11th of May, 1848, I found three young ones and an egg just ready to hatch, in a hole of a wild cherry-tree. The egg was nearly round and pure white, but being broken I could take no measurement of it. The young ones were clothed in a soft and pure white down. The old female remained in the hole while we cut into the tree, and allowed herself to be captured."

Mr. Jerdon informs us that this species "is found throughout the Himalayas, from 3000 or 4000 feet to a considerably greater elevation. It is not rare about Darjeeling; and its low monotonous call or whistle of two notes may frequently be heard at nightfall, whence it is called 'the melancholy bird' at some of the hill stations. It lives chiefly on beetles and other insects."

Major Bulger mentions that, while in Sikkim in the summer of 1867, he had two or three specimens brought to him, he saw the bird himself in the forests near the station, and a hollow ringing sound, said by the natives to be its call, was very common in the woods. ('Ibis,' 1869, p. 155).

It may be as well to mention that this charming little Owl was dedicated by Mr. Burton to the late eminent surgeon Sir Benjamin C. Brodie, Bart., "in token of high respect and ancient friendship."

Head, all the upper surface and wings olive-brown, crossed by numerous bands of fulvous, which are lightest or almost fawn-white on the forehead and over the eyes; primaries very dark brown, with a row of irregularly shaped spots of fulvous along the outer web; at the back of the neck a conspicuous deep fulvous collar, with a spot of black on each side; the scapularies next the wing dashed with fawn-white; tail dark brown, crossed by seven or eight narrow bands of fulvous, placed at regular intervals; facial disks spotted and striated with fulvous and grey on a dark brown ground, and edged with a ring of white; chin, centre of the breast, and margins of the feathers of the lower part of the abdomen and flanks white, or faintly tinged with yellow; under surface dark olive, banded with pale fulvous and white; bill and toes pale greenish yellow; irides pale yellow.

The figures are of the natural size.