

# BRACHYOTUS PALUSTRIS.

## Short-eared Owl.

- Strix brachyotus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 289.  
— *ægolius*, Pall. Zoog. Ross. As., tom. i. p. 309.  
— *ulula*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 294.  
— *accipitrina*, Pall. Itin., vol. i. p. 445.  
— *caspia*, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. vii. p. 272.  
— *palustris*, Bechst. Vög. Deutsch., tom. ii. p. 344.  
— *brachyura*, Nils. Faun. Succ., tom. i. p. 62.  
— *arctica*, Sparm. Mus. Carls., pl. 51.  
*Otus brachyotus*, Steph. Cent. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. pt. 2. p. 57.  
*Brachyotus palustris*, Gould, Birds of Europe, vol. i. pl. 40.  
— *europæus*, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., tom. i. p. 51.—*Brachyotus*, sp. 1.

THERE are in nearly every group of birds certain species which are eminently cosmopolitan—wanderers, as it were, over the whole (or nearly the whole) surface of our globe; and the present bird may be regarded as the cosmopolite among the Owls, since it ranges so widely that there are few countries which it does not inhabit. It is true that the ornithologists of the United States consider their bird to be distinct from the Short-eared Owl of the Old World; but the difference between them is, in my opinion, too slight to warrant their being regarded in that light.

Wherever a bird breeds, that country may justly claim it as one of its indigenous inhabitants: hence this Owl may be so considered in the British Islands; for although there is an immigration from the north about the end of October, and a corresponding diminution in spring, yet considerable numbers did formerly, and many now, remain to breed in England, Scotland, and Ireland. We have abundant evidence that this bird inhabits the African continent, from north to south. Mr. Jerdon states that it arrives in India at the beginning of the cold weather, and leaves again about March, spreading itself in the interval over the entire Peninsula, from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas, and being often flushed and killed by the florican-hunters. Every country of the European continent enumerates it in the list of its avifauna. It is common on the Amur, and doubtless in every part of China. In America, it frequents the fur-countries in summer, and at other seasons the whole of the northern States, from east to west. When speaking of this species in my 'Birds of Europe,' I stated that I had seen examples from other portions of the New World, even as far as the southernmost parts of Chili; and although I cannot now refer to the specimens, I am inclined to believe that I was correct in so saying. In Australia, New Zealand, and Polynesia it has never been found; neither have I any reason to suppose that it is a native of any of the Indian Islands, such as Borneo, Java, the Philippines, and Japan; everywhere else this flapping diurnal Owl appears to be either a constant resident or a migrant.

In England, this bird is known to sportsmen as the Woodcock Owl, from the circumstance of its numbers being greatly augmented about the time of the arrival of that bird in November; in all probability, both species are under the same influence, and compulsorily leave the coast of Norway with the first favourable wind. In November, then, great accessions to the numbers of this bird are observed to take place on our eastern shores, whence they spread themselves over the entire country, and are frequently to be met with, in the latter part of the Partridge-season, among the great turnip-fields and low sedgy flats of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Cambridge and Huntingdon shires. Certain districts are occasionally overrun with the common Field-Mouse to such an extent that the young plantations would be entirely destroyed, were their numbers not kept down by the Short-eared Owl. Instances are on record of from ten to twenty being seen together; and hence it has been regarded by some as a gregarious bird, which indeed it is, so long as there is an abundance of this kind of food, but no longer: the mice failing, it feeds upon any other small quadrupeds and birds it may be able to obtain. Colonel Montagu found the remains of a Skylark and a Yellowhammer in the stomach of one he examined, Mr. Thompson the legs of a Tringa, and Mr. Yarrell a half-grown rat and portions of a bat.

These terrestrial habits will inform my readers that this is not a woodland bird, like the Long-eared Owl; and this difference in the situations they frequent, together with certain variations in their structure, induces me to consider them as generically distinct.

Sir William Jardine states, "On the extensive moors at the Head of Dryfe, a small rivulet in Dumfriesshire, I have, for many years past, met with one or two pairs of these birds; and the accidental discovery of their young first turned my attention to the range of their breeding. The young was discovered