
Introduction

Not since the publication in 1949 of James Lee Peters' *Checklist of the Birds of the World*, which included the order Strigiformes (owls), has any detailed checklist of owls been compiled. Later checklists, such as those of Amadon and Bull (1988) and Sibley and Monroe (1990), listed primarily only species names, and did not include important data such as subspecies, synonyms, terra typica (type locality), or details of first description of type.

The primary objective in preparing the present list has been to provide clear, concise and up-to-date information on all living or recently extinct owl taxons. Hence, the taxonomy of all species and subspecies is described. In addition to the scientific names, the common names of each owl species in English, German, French and Spanish are listed. For each taxon, the name of the author who first described it and the year of publication are given, followed by aids to identification such as the first known location (type locality/terra typica), and scientific synonyms. Geographical distribution and preferred habitat are then briefly described. For each species, a detailed list of hitherto unpublished measurements is provided, including body length and mass, wing and tail length, as well as tarsus and bill length, the latter particularly in the case of the tribe Otini. These measurements were collected by visiting museums, aviaries, and zoos, as well as from the available literature. This is the first taxonomic checklist to include information on the location of museums housing collections of skins and mounted specimens.

To further address the interests of the ever increasing number of professional and amateur ornithologists and owl enthusiasts, references to figures, paintings, early lithographs, etchings and woodcuts from the period of 1700–1920 as well as a critical selection of recent journals and books containing paintings, line drawings, prints or photographs of live owls have been included. Last but not least a list of publications – journals, field guides, monographs and handbooks – complements each description.

Naturally, gaps are inevitable when compiling such a checklist. Such omissions mainly concern the measurements of body masses of numerous taxons, since a great number of collected and labelled skins lack data on the weight of the freshly killed bird. Because several species are extinct or known only from a few skins, data on the body masses of such owls are probably lost for all time.

While superspecies are generally not considered, comments on taxa are given in cases where the species or subspecies status is unclear, or where the synonym or taxon has notable morphological aspects.

The shortfall of each primary tip, measured from the wingpoint of the longest primary, is significant in determining the wing formula, i.e. whether the wing

is pointed or rounded in shape. Furthermore, such measurements can be helpful in establishing the degree of relationship of species within a genus. An extensive list of measurements of such shortfalls, mainly of the complex tribe Otini but with some examples of other genera and species, is given in Table 1. The table is complemented by around 100 line drawings of flying owls with upward wingstrokes, showing both the wingshape (to scale) and the underwing pattern.

Besides the line drawings of owls in flight and numerous drawings of different owl species, the book includes several colour plates illustrating owl species that have been newly described within the last 20 years or have been recently rediscovered. In most cases, these owls are depicted together with species with similar plumage, or which have overlapping territories, and which therefore can easily be confused. Two colour paintings showing the subspecies and colour variations of the American Great Horned Owls complete the collection of watercolours.

The motivation to create this list was first inspired by the excellent booklet *Eulen* by Eck and Busse (1973), a real treasury of information. The checklist is not intended to be used as an identification guide, but rather offers information not usually published in monographs or handbooks. For the owl enthusiast seeking further information, I can recommend for further reading the handbooks of König, Weick and Becking (1999) and Del Hoyo, Elliott and Sargatal (1999). The statement by Edward C. Dickinson (1991) that “*Every new checklist stimulates the work that later outdates it*” will surely also be the fate of this checklist.

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