



## A new generic name for the Cuban Bare-legged Owl *Gymnoglaux lawrencii* Sclater and Salvin

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The two species of Antillean "screech" owls, notable for having unfeathered tarsi and lacking erectile "ear" tufts, have a rather complicated early history because specimens were at first very rare in collections so that for a long time no investigator was able to compare the two side by side. The first to be described was *Strix nudipes* Daudin (1800), now known as the Puerto Rican Screech-Owl *Otus nudipes* (American Ornithologists' Union [AOU] 1983, 1998). Bonaparte (1854) proposed the monotypic genus *Gymnasio* for the Puerto Rican bird with *Strix nudipes* Daudin as the type.

The Cuban bird now called Bare-legged Owl (AOU 1983, 1998), was first recorded by Lembeye (1850), based on a specimen in the Gundlach collection. He considered this to be the same as the Puerto Rican bird and listed it under the name "*Noctua nudipes* Daud." (Lembeye 1850: 23). Thus, there is absolutely no basis for considering Lembeye's use of *nudipes* to be a different name from that of Daudin, as it has been erroneously treated by numerous authors (e. g. Ridgway 1914, AOU 1983, 1998).

The species was next treated by Cabanis (1855), again using material from Gundlach's Cuban collection, whereas Puerto Rican specimens were not then available to him. Cabanis was doubtless unaware of the existence of Bonaparte's name *Gymnasio*, published only in the previous year, and proposed the new genus *Gymnoglaux* as follows (Cabanis 1855: 465):

21. *Gymnoglaux nudipes* Cab.

*Strix nudipes* Daud.—*Strix nudipes* Vieill. Ois. Amer. sept. sp. 16.—*Noctua nudipes* Lemb. Aves de Cuba, tab. 4 fig. 2—Sijú cuco ó Cotunto.

In referring to himself as author on the first line, Cabanis was following his practice of citing the author of the binomial combination, not the author of the specific epithet. As had Lembeye, Cabanis unequivocally considered the Cuban bird to be referable to the Puerto Rican species and the only included species in his new genus *Gymnoglaux* was *Strix nudipes* Daudin, which becomes the type species by monotypy. That Cabanis was looking at specimens of the Cuban species when he proposed the genus *Gymnoglaux* is irrelevant, because the type of a genus is a specific epithet, not a specimen. Thus, *Gymnoglaux* Cabanis 1855 is a straightforward junior objective synonym of *Gymnasio* Bonaparte, 1854, despite the fact that practically no one in the last 153 years has treated it as such.

Lawrence (1860), also with Gundlach's Cuban specimens before him, made comparisons with published illustrations of birds from the Virgin Islands (Newton and Newton 1859) and concluded that two distinct species were represented but still listed the Cuban birds under *Gymnoglaux nudipes* (Daudin) while naming those from the Virgin Islands as a new species *Gymnoglaux newtoni*. Sclater and Salvin (1868) were finally able to sort out the confusion by borrowing specimens of the Cuban birds from the Smithsonian Institution and comparing them with their specimens from the Virgin Islands, which they had previously compared with the types of *nudipes* in Paris. They concluded that the birds from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands were same species to which they applied the name *Gymnoglaux nudipes* (Daudin) and that the Cuban bird, being yet without a name, they called *Gymnoglaux lawrencii*. Lawrence (1878) was the first to assemble specimens of all three populations and argued for the distinctiveness of the Virgin Island birds, so that he recognized three species of *Gymnoglaux*, although those from the Virgin Islands are now considered only subspecifically distinct from *nudipes*.

Sharpe (1875) resurrected *Gymnasio* Bonaparte, in which he included *Gymnoglaux* Sclater and Salvin as a synonym, erroneously giving *lawrencii* as the type of the latter. Other authors (e.g. Ridgway 1914, AOU 1983, 1998) have cited the type of *Gymnoglaux* as "*Noctua nudipes* Lembeye (not *Strix nudipes* Daudin)," but as we have already seen, this is

erroneous and Lembeye's name is absolutely the same as Daudin's.

Various authors placed both *nudipes* and *lawrencii* in *Gymnasio*, while at the other extreme both have been subsumed in screech-owls of the genus *Otus* Pennant (e.g. Marshall and King in Amadon and Bull 1988). AOU (1983) recognized *Gymnoglaux* as a monotypic genus for *lawrencii* but included *Gymnasio nudipes* in *Otus*. Later (AOU 1998) *Gymnoglaux* was sunk in *Otus* following Amadon and Bull (1988), but that decision was reversed in a supplement (Banks et al. 2003: 927) in which a "monotypic genus *Gymnoglaux* is reinstated on the basis of strong differences in morphology and vocal patterns, and because no justification was given for the merger of this species into *Otus*." Although no source was cited for the "strong differences," the taxonomic distinctiveness of the Cuban Bare-legged Owl is not at issue here, as those wishing to differentiate it nomenclaturally need to have a valid generic name. *Gymnoglaux*, as we have seen, is a pure synonym of *Gymnasio*. Because no other generic name is available for *Gymnoglaux lawrencii* Sclater and Salvin, we propose the following as a replacement.

## Family Strigidae

### Genus *Margarobyas* Olson et Suárez, nomen novum

pro "*Gymnoglaux* Cabanis" auctorum.

*Type and only included species*—*Gymnoglaux lawrencii* Sclater and Salvin, 1868.

*Etymology*—Gr. f. *margarites*, a pearl, plus Gr. m. *byas*, an owl, in allusion to Cuba, Pearl of the Antilles. The name is masculine in gender.

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