

A SUB-FOSSIL RECORD OF A BARN OWL IN NEW ZEALAND

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SUMMARY

Bones of *Tyto alba* subsp. are recorded from a sub-fossil deposit at Tom Bowling Beach, Northland.

DISCUSSION

There have been three occurrences in New Zealand of the Australian Barn Owl recently reported. Two specimens, a female, from near Barrytown, Westland, collected on 18/8/1947, by Mr. J. Langridge, and the other, a male, from Runanga, Westland, on 12/8/1960, by Mr. A. Flanagan. AV.2346 and AV.19,597 respectively, are in the Canterbury Museum collection. The third was struck by a car near Haast in November, 1955 (Notornis 7, 208).

In January 1966 Dr. Jack Grant-Mackie and some friends collected a number of sub-fossil bones from sand-dunes at Tom Bowling Beach, Northland, which were sent by Dr. Grant-Mackie to me for identification, and most of which were presented to Canterbury Museum. Among them were a few bones of an owl which were obviously not of Morepork or Laughing Owl. I suspected they might be from a Barn Owl, and while in Australia this year Mr. Alan McEvey kindly allowed me to measure bones of various members of the Tytonidae held in the National Museum, Melbourne. This confirmed that the Northland bones were of a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) and probably those of the sub-species *delicatula* from Australia. (I am aware that the species is in need of revision and the name *delicatula* may be superseded but I use it until this happens.)

The New Zealand material consists of a left tibio-tarsus, 1 right and 2 left tarso-metatarsi, all a little sand-worn at the extremities.

Comparable measurements follow:

Tyto castanops (Gould)

(Tasmanian Masked Owl) National Museum of Victoria - W.5084 -

	L.	P.	M.	D.	C.M.
R. tibio-tarsus	12.0	1.5	0.65	1.5	
R. tarso-metatarsus	7.35	1.65	0.7	1.6	

Tyto novaehollandiae (Stephen)

(Masked Owl) National Museum of Victoria - W.4851 -

R. tibio-tarsus	11.3	1.4	0.6	1.4	
R. tarso-metatarsus	7.3	1.4	0.65	1.5	

Tyto alba delicatula (Gould)

Australian Barn Owl. National Museum of Victoria - B.8652 -

R. tibio-tarsus 9.925 1.0 0.45 1.0

R. tarso-metatarsus 6.75 1.0 0.5 1.2

B.6597 male -

R. tibio-tarsus 9.7 1.0 0.45 1.0

R. tarso-metatarsus 6.7 1.4 0.45 1.0

R.7531 -

L. tibio-tarsus 9.6 1.1 0.415 1.0

R. tarso-metatarsus 6.7 1.0 0.4 1.2

B.6357 -

R. tibio-tarsus 9.4 1.0 0.45 1.0

L. tarso-metatarsus 6.5 1.0 0.5 1.2

W.1498 -

R. tibio-tarsus 9.4 0.95 0.42 1.0

R. tarso-metatarsus 6.4 0.9 0.45 1.0

C.M. AV.20,876 -

L. tibio-tarsus 8.6+(worn)--- 0.4 0.9

R. tarso-metatarsus(B) 5.7[±](est.)0.9 0.45 1.0+R. tarso-metatarsus(A) 5.8[±](est.)0.85 0.4 ---

L. tarso-metatarsus 5.85 --- 0.4 0.9+

Where no measurements are given the bones are too worn for one to be taken. Although the measurements for the New Zealand bones are somewhat smaller than those I was able to measure in Australia, the tarso-metatarsi fall well within the range of those given by Witherby et. al. (Vol. 2, p. 345) for the British sub-species (*Tyto alba alba* Scopoli) measured on the skin ("tarsus 55-62"). The same tarso-metatarsal measurements are also given (Vol. 2, p. 347) for the Dark-breasted Barn Owl (*Tyto alba guttata*) (Brehm). As the bones from Tom Bowling Beach conform in every way except smaller size with those of *Tyto alba delicatula* in the National Museum, Victoria, the species is not in doubt, and they probably belong to the Australian sub-species.

REFERENCE

H. F. WITHERBY, et. al., 1943: The Handbook of British Birds, Vol. 2.

[The Polynesian Barn Owl (*T. alba lulu*), which is common in Fiji, might be carried to New Zealand in a steady northerly blow.—Ed.]