



## Comments to López de Aquino and Garza de León (2008) on the Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) in the Yucatan

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### Abstract

We discuss several points of view presented in López de Aquino and Garza de León (2008) and update status information on the Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) relevant to McAndrews *et al.* (2006).

**Key words:** distribution, *Asio flammeus domingensis*.

### Comentarios a López de Aquino y Garza de León (2008) sobre el búho cuerno corto (*Asio flammeus*) en Yucatán Resumen

En esta respuesta discutimos varios puntos de vista presentados por López de Aquino y Garza de León (2008) y actualizamos la información referente al búho cuerno corto (*Asio flammeus*) presentada en McAndrews *et al.* (2006).

**Palabras claves:** distribución, *Asio flammeus domingensis*.

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López de Aquino and Garza de León (2008) presented the discovery of a missing 45-year-old specimen and opinions on the value of specimens, and frequently referenced our paper “First confirmed record of the Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) for the state of Yucatan, Mexico” (McAndrews *et al.* 2006). We wish to take this opportunity to clarify several comments in referencing our and other publications in their paper. Additionally, we outline relevant new information on the Short-eared Owl since the publication of McAndrews *et al.* (2006).

López de Aquino and Garza de León (2008) stated “the Antillean populations [of Short-eared Owl] have been recorded recently in Florida and major islands (like Cuba) since 1970”, citing Hoffman *et al.* (1999) and McAndrews *et al.* (2006) as their sources. While Antillean Short-eared Owl had previously been considered rare on Cuba and was not documented as breeding until December 1981, it was first recorded on the island in 1850 (Holt *et al.* 1999). In the 1970s, the Antillean Short-eared Owl expanded rapidly across Cuba presumably due to increased agricultural practices resulting in more suitable habitat and greater food availability (Garrido 1984, 1995, 2007). Neither Hoffman *et al.* (1999) or McAndrews *et al.* (2006) described Antillean populations of the Short-eared Owl having only recently been recorded in Cuba. López de Aquino and Garza de León (2008) additionally cited Hoffman *et al.*

(1999) for “the wing length in Antillean Short-eared Owls (subspecies *portoricensis* and *dominguensis* according to Dickinson 2003) differs from nominate *flammeus* in having shorter wing (<300 mm)”. While we agree with López de Aquino and Garza de León (2008) that the nomenclature of the Antillean populations is confusing, including here both subspecies as considered by Dickinson (2003) does not accurately reflect the work of Hoffman *et al.* (1999) who presumed the Antillean individuals they examined originated from Cuba, and thus pertained only to the subspecies *domingensis*, following Dickinson (2003). Note here the variation in spelling between *domingensis* and *dominguensis*, the latter found to be used only by Garrido (1984, 1995, 2007) and within the above quote by López de Aquino and Garza de León (2008). Based on differing opinions of the current classification of the Short-eared Owl complex, Wiggins *et al.* (2006) recommended taxonomy and nomenclature of the group is in need of review.

Lastly, López de Aquino and Garza de León (2008) cited McAndrews *et al.* (2006) for the recent Yucatan Peninsula colonization hypothesis of the Antillean Short-eared Owl. To clarify, we suggested the presence of Antillean individuals of Short-eared Owl on the Yucatan Peninsula was a *possibility*; we believe the potential for future colonization of Mexico by this taxon exists based on increasing numbers of dispersing individuals in the Caribbean and the presence of suitable

breeding habitat on the Yucatan Peninsula. We never stated that the Antillean Short-eared Owl had established populations in Mexico. Based on the possibility of Antillean Short-eared Owl occurring in Mexico we concluded the origin of the owl we observed was ultimately unknown. It is of great interest to note that an Antillean Short-eared Owl was photographed in late spring of 2007 in northeastern Quintana Roo (Gómez de Silva 2008).

Antillean Short-eared Owl is expanding its range throughout the Greater Antilles to include most islands (Garrido 2007). Since the publication of Hoffman *et al.* (1999) reporting 17 Antillean Short-eared Owl records in southern Florida, at least 16 additional

Antillean Short-eared Owl records have accumulated through spring 2006; to date, however, there have been no confirmed breeding records (Bill Pranty, Florida Bird Records Committee, pers. comm.). The observation of Antillean Short-eared Owl in Quintana Roo supports our decision to treat the Yucatan state record as of origin unknown.

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