



# The Sixth Extinction

A website about the current biodiversity crisis

A republication by The Sixth Extinction. No. 001/2011.

## Description of a new subspecies of Ostrich from Syria (First scientific description of the Arabian Ostrich)



Image: An 14<sup>th</sup> century image of an Arabian Ostrich has been taken from *The Book of Animals of al-Jahiz, Syria*.

This is a republication by [The Sixth Extinction website](#) of the first scientific description of the Arabian Ostrich (*Struthio camelus syriacus*), originally published in the Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club in 1919 by Walter Rothschild.

Citation: "Rothschild, W. (1919). Description of a new subspecies of Ostrich from Syria. Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club 39: 81-83. Republished by The Sixth Extinction website, No. 001/2011."

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**BULLETIN**  
OF THE  
**BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB.**

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No. CCXLIII.

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The two-hundred-and-fortieth Meeting of the Club was held at Pagani's Restaurant, 42-48 Great Portland Street, 42-48 Great Portland Street, W., on Wednesday, May 14th, 1919.

*Chairman:* William L. Sclater, M.A.

*Members present:* E.C. Arnold; E.C. Stuart Baker; D.A. Bannerman (*Hon. Secretary*); G.K. Baynes; C. Borrer ; H.D. Bradford; P.F. Bunyard; C. Chubb; A. Ezra; Dr. E. Hartert; G.C. Lambert; Dr. H. Langton; C.W. Mackworth-Praed; H. Munt; H.R. Munt; T.H. Newman; M.J. Nicoll; C. Oldham; Col. R.E. Wardlaw Ramsay; C.B. Rickett; Lord Rothschild; D. Seth-Smith (*Editor*); E. Fraser Stanford; C.G. Talbot-Ponsonby; S.L. Whympers; J. Wilkinson; H.F. Witherby; W.H. Workman.

*Guests:* A.H. Borrer; Col. Delmé-Radcliff; C.L. Fagan; H.G. Hole; C.B. Horsbrugh.

Lord Rothschild described a new subspecies of Ostrich, and made the following remarks :

The fact that Ostriches inhabited the Syrian Desert and Arabia has been known for a long time - in fact, there are several passages in the Bible relating to this bird. Some years ago, Mr. J. Aharoni received a number of Ostrich eggs from his Arab hunters from the Syrian Desert, and sent them to Tring. These eggs agree with those of the North-African Ostrich in being smooth and not pitted, but are much smaller and more highly polished than those of that bird. I at once urged Aharoni to procure for me some adult Syrian Ostriches. He managed to procure a pair of nearly full-grown young ones alive, and as soon as they were fully adult he skinned them and sent them to me.

These birds agree with the so-called *Struthio camelus* Linn. in having the neck and legs light red, and they have the black and white (♂) and brown (♀) plumage peculiar to all Ostriches; but they are distinctly smaller. The bill, though not much shorter, is much narrower, while the tarsus and tail are distinctly shorter. They have the same naked shield on the head as in *S. camelus*, but not a horny shield as in *S. molyhdophanes*.

The measurements, as compared with an adult female from Northern Nigeria, are as follows:

	♂ Syrian Desert.	♀ Syrian Desert.	♀ Nigeria.
Tarsus	400 mm	400 mm	530 mm
Bill from gape	132 mm	111 mm	140 mm
From front of skull	75 mm	65 mm	83 mm
Tail	330 mm	440 mm	540 mm

Two eggs measure 144 x 112 mm. and 143 x 112 mm. and are more highly polished than those of the North African Ostrich. 13 eggs of the latter are as follows: 175 x 128; 175 x 126; 153 x 127; 153 x 127; 153 x 125; 153 x 132; 153 x 120; 145 x 122; 3 eggs Algeria (Wed Rhin =? Oued Rhir), H.B. Tristram, 152 x 128; 142 x 121; 142 x 125; 2 eggs, Tebba, Niger, 155 x 130; 152 x 130.

## The Sixth Extinction - Description of a new subspecies of Ostrich from Syria

Though some of the eggs in this series are even shorter than the Syrian eggs, their great thickness makes their cubic contents still considerably larger.

In the 'Systema Naturae', edit. 10, 1758, Linnaeus says of his *Struthio camelus*, "Habitat in Syria, Arabia, Lybia, Africa." Therefore, as Syria is placed first, according to modern nomenclatorial ideas, the Syrian Ostrich should be the typical *Struthio camelus* of Linnaeus. However, Linnaeus does not appear to have described his Ostrich from any given locality and, moreover, all the authors whom he quotes, viz., Aldrovandus, Dodart, Seba, Willoughby, and Ray, can only have seen specimens from North Africa. On account of this doubt, I therefore think it advisable to continue to call the North African Ostrich *Struthio camelus* Linn., and give a new name to the Syrian bird.

I therefore name this form

***Struthio camelus syriacus***, subsp. nov.

Type, Syrian Desert (J. Aharoni Coll.), in the Tring Museum.

I exhibit eggs of *Struthio camelus camelus* Linn., *S. camelus syriacus* Rothsch., *S. australis* Gurney, and *S. massaicus* Neum.

The following is a key to the males of the five known forms of Ostriches:

1.	Neck and legs red	2.
	Neck and legs leaden blue	4.
2.	Head on top hairy, size large	<i>S. massaicus</i>
	Head with naked shield	3.
3.	Size larger	<i>S. camelus camelus</i>
	Size smaller	<i>S. camelus syriacus</i>
4.	Size larger, top of head hairy; red on front of tarsus reaching well in to larger toe	<i>S. australis</i>
	Size smaller ; top of head with horny shield; red on front of tarsus only reaching end of tarsus	<i>S. molyhdophanes</i>

Key to eggs:

1	Eggs smooth, not pitted	2.
	Eggs pitted	3.
2	Eggs larger, not so highly polished	<i>S. camelus camelus</i>
	Eggs smaller, highly polished	<i>S. camelus syriacus</i>
3	Eggs closely pitted, pits smaller	<i>S. australis</i>
	Eggs closely pitted, pits large	<i>S. molyhdophanes</i>
	Eggs with pitting more scattered, pits large	<i>S. massaicus</i>



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[June 4th, 1919.]

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| 3. Size larger .....  | <i>S. camelus camelus</i> .  |
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| 4. Size larger, top of head hairy; red on front of<br>tarsus reaching well on to larger toe .....           | <i>S. australis</i> .        |
| Size smaller; top of head with horny shield;<br>red on front of tarsus only reaching end of<br>tarsus ..... | <i>S. molybdophanes</i> .    |

Key to eggs:—

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| 1. Eggs smooth, not pitted .....                | 2.                           |
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| Eggs closely pitted, pits large .....           | <i>S. molybdophanes</i> .    |
| Eggs with pitting more scattered, pits large .. | <i>S. massaicus</i> .        |

Dr. ERNST HARTERT exhibited specimens of *Melanocorypha bimaculata* and *Corvus cornix* collected by Col. Meinertzhagen, with their allied forms, and communicated the following notes and descriptions of two new subspecies, on behalf of Col. R. Meinertzhagen:—