

A New Genus for the Extinct Late Pleistocene Owl *Strix brea* Howard (Aves: Strigiformes) from Rancho La Brea, California

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ABSTRACT. We review all of the fossil specimens from the upper Pleistocene Rancho La Brea asphalt deposits previously referred to the extinct owl *Strix brea*, and all newly identified specimens referable to that species. This review and emended description of *Strix brea* have provided a clearer picture of this species, and we find that it is more appropriately placed in a new genus, *Oraristrix*, whose affinities remain unclear. We provide a variety of morphometric data and more detailed osteological descriptions of this extinct owl based on 138 specimens from the Rancho La Brea collections in the George C. Page Museum that represent a minimum of 23 individuals. An additional nine specimens of this extinct species were confirmed in collections from the upper Pleistocene asphalt deposits of Carpinteria, California. *Oraristrix brea* is interpreted as being more terrestrial in habits than forest owls because, compared to available species of the genera *Bubo* and *Strix*, it had longer legs relative to its wingspan.

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A large, extinct owl from the upper Pleistocene asphalt deposits of Rancho La Brea, California was described as *Strix brea* Howard, 1933. In addition to the holotypic tarsometatarsus, several other elements of the skeleton were briefly described and referred to this species by Howard (1933). However, since its original description, with the exception of being included in faunal lists (e.g., Howard, 1962), this species, which is known as the Brea Owl, has not been revisited. Herein we reevaluate the characters Howard (1933) used to distinguish the species, describe additional characters, illustrate bones not previously illustrated, and add to the list of elements and specimens referable to this

extinct species. We offer suggestions as to the size and life habits of the Brea Owl based on its osteology and limb bone proportions. *Strix brea* is found to be a valid species, but one best placed in a new genus.

This study is part of an overall review of all of the fossil owls in the collections from Rancho La Brea maintained at the George C. Page Museum by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (LACM). At least nine species of owls are represented in the collections by a total of over 7500 specimens. In the course of this review we found that the post-cranial elements of the genera of owls could be fairly easily distinguished by osteological characters, at least for the

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