

THE IDENTIFICATION OF KENYA BIRDS OF PREY IN FLIGHT.  
PART 1, VULTURES.

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Birds of Prey in general — there are some exceptions — with their confusing sequence of immature and adult plumages form a group which the beginner finds difficult to identify in the field. Even with the aid of the various well-illustrated bird books which are available in East Africa the recognition of raptorial birds is not easy. Descriptions in such books are usually adequate when one is working out the identity of a dead hawk and helpful when one can examine a resting bird through glasses. But they fall short of the ideal where a bird of prey flying overhead is concerned. The object of this series of papers is to fill this gap in our literature.

Anyone desiring a wider knowledge of our birds of prey is strongly advised to make use of the study collections housed in the Bird Room of the Coryndon Museum, where a series of specimens of most species, illustrating age variation and dimorphism, may be laid out for inspection. It is only by studying such specimens in addition to the perusal of the literature that one can really get to know our vultures, eagles and hawks.

**The Vultures.**

The appearance in flight of vultures as a group is rather difficult to define. Briefly their smallish heads, generally broad wings and short tails are diagnostic. Vultures are also more likely to congregate in the air in numbers than is usual with most other birds of prey.

**Rüppell's Griffon Vulture.**

*Gyps rüppellii rüppellii* (Brehm). Plate 1.

Adult. Wingspan 8 feet. The two main distinguishing features are the scaly or spotted appearance of the underside of the body (formed by dark brown feathers with whitish-buff tips) and a series of narrow white lines, sometimes broken, on the underside of the wings. At close quarters the bill is seen to be pale greenish-grey.

Immature. Differs from the adult in being brown, streaked blackish below, with a narrow white streak parallel to the fore edge of the wing. In this plumage extremely difficult to distinguish from the immature White-backed Griffon, but slightly larger.

**White-backed Griffon Vulture.**

*Pseudogyps africanus* (Salvadori). Plate 1.

Adult. Wingspan 7 feet. The White-backed Griffon has uniform pale buff underparts, a dark crop patch, black head and bill and a broad white band along the fore edge of the wing. In some examples the white wing band is much broader than is shown in the illustration.

Immature. Underparts dark brown with indistinct blackish streaking. Very like the immature Rüppell's Griffon but a little smaller.



Ruppell's Griffon Vulture



White-backed Griffon Vulture



White-headed Vulture



White-headed Vulture. immature

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Lappet-faced Vulture



Egyptian Vulture



Egyptian Vulture. immature



Hooded Vulture

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**Nubian or Lappet-faced Vulture.**

*Torgos tracheliotus nubicus* (Smith). Plate 2.

Adult. Wingspan 9 feet. This is the largest and most powerful of our vultures. Underparts of body blackish-brown with two contrasting white thigh patches and a short white streak along the fore edge of the wing. The reddish head and large bill are good field characters at close quarters.

Immature. Resembles adult but thigh patches often brown, not whitish.

**White-headed Vulture.**

*Trigonoceps occipitalis* (Burchell). Plate 1.

Adult. Wingspan 7 feet. This is a very distinct species. Its field characters are white head, blackish breast, white abdomen and thighs and dark wings with a large white secondaries patch.

Immature. Differs from the adult in lacking the white secondaries patch, but has a conspicuous white line bordering the under wing coverts; abdomen and thighs usually mainly white (see plate 1).

**Egyptian Vulture.**

*Neophron percnopterus percnopterus* (Linnaeus). Plate 2.

Adult. Wingspan 5 feet. In adult plumage the Egyptian Vulture is easy to recognise, being entirely white except for black flight feathers and a yellow face, the tail is diamond shaped.

Immature. The first immature plumage is entirely brown, followed by a grey, then a grey and white dress until the bird reaches maturity. It is best identified by its diamond shaped tail and rather narrow wings. The Hooded Vulture has broad wings and a short tail.

**Hooded Vulture.**

*Necrosyrtes monachus pileatus* (Burchell). Plate 2.

Adult. Wingspan 5 feet. This is an entirely dark-plumaged vulture with broad wings and a short tail; there is sometimes a little white on the crop and thighs, and the wings have a curious silvery lustre in certain lights.

Immature. This plumage is very like that of the adult from which it does not differ in any important detail in flight.