



BEARDED VULTURE OR LEMMER GEYER.

*Gypaëtus barbatus; (Storck)*



## Genus GYPAËTUS, Storr.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* straight, its base covered with setaceous feathers tending forward, rounded above; the *under mandible* furnished at the base with a fasciculus of stiff and elongated feathers. *Cere* clothed with feathers. *Tarsi* short, feathered.

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*Gypaëtus barbatus*, Storr.

Le Gypaëte barbu.

ORNITHOLOGISTS have had no little difficulty to contend with in clearing up the confusion which the numerous synonyms of this bird have occasioned; in fact, as far as our observations have extended, there is but one species comprehended in the present genus,—a genus distinguished by characters which place it intermediate between the Vultures and Eagles. The descriptions of Bruce the African traveller, and of the writers on Indian Ornithology, are all referrible to this species, whose habitat appears to extend to a certain range of elevation over the vast continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. We have ourselves received it from the Himalaya, where it was discovered in very considerable abundance. In Europe it is confined to the highest ranges of mountains, such as the Alps and Pyrenees, but more especially those of the Tyrol and Hungary.

The habits and manners of the Læmmer-geyer, also point out its true situation in nature to be intermediate between the Vultures and Eagles; and Authors have, according to their respective views, referred it to each of these groups. The first who pointed out its true situation was the eminent naturalist Storr, who advanced it to a genus with the expressive name of *Gypaëtus*, i. e. Vulture Eagle. The genus thus established has become now, with justice, universally adopted. Unlike the typical Vultures, which are distinguished by their bare necks, indicative of their propensity for feeding on carrion, the Læmmer-geyer has the neck thickly covered with feathers, resembling those of the true Eagles, with which it also accords in its bold and predatory habits; pouncing with violent impetuosity on animals exceeding itself in size: hence the young Chamois, the Wild Goat, the Mountain Hare, and various species of birds find in it a formidable and ferocious enemy. Having seized its prey, the Læmmer-geyer devours it upon the spot, the straight form of their talons disabling them from carrying it to a distance. It refuses flesh in a state of putrefaction unless sharply pressed by hunger; hence Nature has limited this species as to numbers, while on the other hand to the Vultures, who are destined to clear the earth of animal matter in a state of decomposition, and thus render the utmost service to man in the countries where they abound, she has given an almost illimitable increase.

M. Temminck informs us that it incubates on the summits of precipitous and inaccessible rocks, making no nest, but laying two eggs, on the naked surface, of a white colour marked with blotches of brown.

The adult birds offer no sexual differences of plumage, and less of size than is usual among rapacious birds.

The head and upper part of the neck are of a dull white; a black line extends from the base of the beak and passes above the eyes; another beginning behind the eyes occupies the ear-coverts; the beard is black; the lower part of the neck, the breast and under parts are of an orange-red; the upper surface of a dark greyish brown, the centre of each feather having a white longitudinal line; the quill- and tail-feathers grey with white shafts; tail long and graduated; tarsi, beak, and nails black; irides orange.

The young of the year have the head and neck dull brown; the under parts dark grey with spots of white; the upper parts blackish, with lighter spots; the irides brown, and feet olive. In this state it has been called *Vultur niger*.

We have figured an adult male one third its natural size.



Gould, John. 1837. "Bearded Vulture or Læmmer-geyer. Gypaëtus barbatus, Storr. Le Gypaète barbu. [Pl. 4]." *The Birds of Europe* 1, <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.317173>.

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