SPIZAËTUS ALBONIGER, *Blyth*

J. Wolf and H. Richter del et lith.

Walter & Cohen, Imp.

SPIZAËTUS ALBONIGER, Blyth.

Nisaëtus alboniger, Blyth, Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. xiv. p. 173.

Spizaëtus alboniger, Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 26.

——— *borneonensis*, Gray, List of Birds in Coll. Brit. Mus., 2nd edit. part 1, *Accipitres*, p. 16.

THERE is no one section of the Falconidæ respecting the habits and economy of which we know so little as of the Crested Eagles forming the genus *Spizaëtus*; the synonymy, too, of the various species has not been so clearly defined as might be desired; I have not hesitated, therefore, to seek the aid of a gentleman (J. H. Gurney, Esq.) who has devoted much of his attention for many years to the birds of the Raptorial order; and this aid has been most courteously accorded to me, in the form of a monograph of the Indian species, which I consider I may most appropriately publish as an accompaniment to my illustration of the *Spizaëtus alboniger*. I must, at the same time, thank Mr. Gurney for permission to copy Mr. Wolf's spirited sketch, which represents the adult and young of this species as nearly three-fourths the natural size as may be.

The following are Mr. Gurney's observations:—

"*Spizaëtus alboniger*, Blyth; *S. borneonensis*, Gray.—This very distinct species, the smallest of the Asiatic *Spizaëti* with which we are at present acquainted, was first described by Mr. Blyth (A. D. 1845) in the fourteenth volume of the 'Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal,' p. 173, in the following terms:—'A smaller species than either of those from India, measuring about $21\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length; wing 13 inches, and tail $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches; tarsus 3 inches; occipital crest $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Adult:—black above, with a purple gloss; the large alars embrowned, and distinctly banded with black; tail black, with a broad, light greyish brown bar occupying about its third quarter from the base; the longer upper tail-coverts have each two cross-bands of the same; lower parts pure white, with a black mesial line on throat; large intense black drops on the breast. The belly, vent, lower tail-coverts, tibial plumes, and short tarsal feathers are throughout closely barred black and white; beak black, and toes wax-yellow. A younger specimen has the drops fewer and smaller on the breast, an admixture of rufous about the head, several unmoulted brown feathers among the wing-coverts, and one unmoulted tail-feather which has three narrowish dark bars, with two or more at the base, closer and less defined: a remarkably handsome species from Malacca, the Tenasserim provinces, and Borneo.

"The two specimens now figured are in the collection of the Norwich Museum; the adult was obtained from Singapore through the intervention of H. F. Barclay, Esq.; the immature bird was presented by the late Captain Glasspoole, who obtained it in the course of one of his voyages to the East, but the exact locality from whence it was procured is not recorded.

"The following species are also found on the continent of Asia and in the adjacent islands:—

"*SPIZAËTUS LANCEOLATUS*, Temminck & Schlegel, Fauna Japonica, p. 7.

"——— *fasciolatus*, Schlegel, Muséum des Pays Bas, p. 9.

Professor Schlegel, though citing the above synonym for this species, appears to doubt its being specifically distinct; it is, however, a very well-defined species, differing from *S. alboniger* in its larger size, in the absence of a crest, and in the strong rufous colouring of the upper portion of the breast in the adult bird. It inhabits the Celebes, and, according to the authors of the 'Fauna Japonica,' is also found in Borneo. This species, of which the British and Norwich Museums contain fine examples, brought from the Celebes by Mr. Wallace, has not yet been figured.

"*SPIZAËTUS KIENERI*, De Sparre, Magasin de Zoologie, 1835, pl. 35 (adult).

"A specimen in immature plumage, said to have been killed on the coast of Scotland, near Aberdeen, in the year 1828, is figured in Jardine and Selby's 'Illustrations of Ornithology,' pl. 66. This species has been observed in Northern and in Central India, and it also occurs in the islands of Java and Borneo; but both there and in India it appears to be a bird of considerable rarity.

"*SPIZAËTUS PHILIPPENSIS*.—This specific name I would propose for a species of *Spizaëtus* inhabiting the Philippine Islands, which appears to me to be undoubtedly distinct, though not admitted as such by Professor Schlegel, who is disposed to consider it as referable to *S. Kieneri* (*vide* Muséum des Pays Bas, p. 12), an opinion in which I am unable to agree. As this *Spizaëtus* is at present unfigured, I add the description of a specimen in the Norwich Museum, which I suppose to be an adult female:—

"Total length 25 inches; wing, from carpal joint, $14\frac{3}{4}$; tail $11\frac{1}{4}$; crest $2\frac{1}{4}$; tarsus $3\frac{1}{4}$; middle toe and claw 3.

"The general colour of the upper surface in this species is a dark umber-brown; but the base of the feathers of the crest is white, and the margins of the other occipital feathers are of a light yellowish brown. Some of the scapulars and upper alar feathers (especially the latter) are slightly tipped with the same; the tail, which is of a somewhat lighter brown than the back, is tipped with a very narrow edging of white, and is

also crossed by seven blackish-brown bars, the upper one being, however, somewhat indistinct, and the two lower being separated by an interval which is twice the breadth of the spaces between the other bars. The throat has a broad blackish band running down its centre, with two similar and nearly parallel bands proceeding from the corners of the mouth, the three bands all merging in a cluster of dark brown lanceolate marks upon the upper portion of the breast, the intervals between these markings and also the whole plumage of the lower sternal and abdominal regions being tinged with a yellowish rufous; the under tail-coverts are barred with brown and white, the former bars being much broader than the latter; and the thighs and tarsi are marked throughout their length with narrow equidistant transverse bars of the same colours.

"A second and apparently less adult specimen in the Norwich Museum resembles the one above described, except in the crest being less developed and in the colours generally being somewhat lighter, particularly on the head, and the markings, especially on the lower part of the tarsi, being paler and less distinct.

"*SPIZAËTUS NIPALENSIS*, Hodgson.—The following description of this fine species, the largest of the Asiatic *Spizaëti*, is extracted from Mr. T. C. Jerdon's excellent work on the Birds of India, now in course of publication:—"Plumage of the upper parts deep brown, very dark on the interscapulars, and verging on black on the crown and occipital crest, which is slightly tipped with white, and is 4 inches long; nuchal feathers edged tawny brown; chin blackish, continued as a median line to the breast, which is fulvous brown and with dark streaks; or in some, the chin, throat, and breast fulvous, with large blackish-brown ovate spots; and a dark moustacheal band and two similar lateral streaks, at first very broad, proceed from the corners of the gape; belly, flanks, lower tail-coverts, and thigh-coverts more or less distinctly banded with brown and white; tarsal feathers banded whitish; wings dark brown, banded with blackish; under wing-coverts banded with white; tail light greyish brown, with five dark bands, as broad or broader than the interspaces; upper tail-coverts also banded brown and white. The feathers of the tarsus cover the bases of the toes.

"Length of a male 29 inches; wing 18; tail 13; tarsus 4; mid-toe 3½.

"Another, probably a female, was 32 inches; wing 19; tail 14; tarsi 4½; mid-toe and claw 3½.

"This splendid Hawk-Eagle has been found on the Himalayas, in the Khasia Hills, and in Ceylon. I got one specimen only at Darjeeling, where, however, it is well known, though rare, and is said to kill pheasants, partridges, and other birds."

"To the above account I would add that the transverse abdominal bars which occur in this species are frequently divided by the brown centre of the feather so as to present an appearance of white ovate spots, which I have not observed in the other Asiatic *Spizaëti*. I would also remark that the '*Spizaëtus orientalis*' of Japan and Formosa, of which a Japanese example is figured in the 'Fauna Japonica,' Aves, pl. 3, is certainly closely allied to, and probably not specifically distinct from, this species.

"*SPIZAËTUS CIRRHATUS*, Gmel.—This species (the common Crested Eagle of India and Ceylon) differs from *S. Nipalensis* in its somewhat smaller and much more variable size, in the paler character of the transverse markings on the abdomen and thighs, in the entire absence of the white abdominal ovate spots, and especially in the less powerful development of its talons generally, and of the inner and hinder claws in particular, these being very decidedly smaller and feebler in this species than in *S. Nipalensis*.

"*S. cirrhatus* is figured in the Planches Coloriées, pl. 282, under the name of '*Falco cristatellus*.'"

"*SPIZAËTUS CALIGATUS*, Raffles.—This species is very nearly allied to the preceding (with which many ornithologists consider it to be identical), but appears to differ from it in the following particulars, viz., first, by the non-development of the crest, which is a marked feature in most specimens of *S. cirrhatus*, but which is entirely absent in the great majority of specimens of *S. caligatus*, and when it does appear is much less elongated than it usually is in *S. cirrhatus*; second, by the bill being somewhat deeper and more powerful, and the tarsi somewhat shorter, in *S. caligatus* than in *S. cirrhatus*, the comparison being, of course, made between individuals of equal general size; third, by the wider geographical range of *S. caligatus*, which is found not only in India and Ceylon, but also in Burmah, the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Borneo, and Java; fourth, by the tendency to melanism, which is of constant occurrence in *S. caligatus*, while in *S. cirrhatus* such a variety is very rare. This black variety of *S. caligatus* has been observed in Java to be permanent and hereditary, and to be commoner in that island than the paler race. Some naturalists have, indeed, considered it as specifically distinct; and such is the opinion expressed by Dr. Bernstein (a resident in Java) in a very interesting paper published in Cabanis's Journal of Ornithology, vol. viii. p. 417. The adult of the paler race is figured by Temminck in the Planches Coloriées, pl. 127, under the title of '*Falco niveus*;' and the same work contains a figure, in pl. 134, of the dark variety, under the name of '*Falco limnaëtus*;' the latter is also figured in Horsfield's Zoological Researches in Java, Aves, pl. 3.

"In conclusion, I may recapitulate the species of Asiatic *Spizaëti* which I have above enumerated, and which, in my opinion, may be considered as distinct:—

"*Spizaëtus alboniger*, Blyth; *S. lanceolatus*, Temminck; *S. Kieneri*, De Sparre; *S. Philippensis*, nobis; *S. Nipalensis*, Hodgson; *S. cirrhatus*, Gmelin; *S. caligatus*, Raffles."

Gould, John. 1863. "Black-and-white Crested Eagle, *Spizaëtus alboniger*, Blyth. [Pl. 10]." *The Birds of Asia* 1(XV), -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323001>.

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