FALCO PEREGRINATOR.

J. Gould and W. C. Richter. del. et lith.

Hillman & Weller. Imp.

FALCO PEREGRINATOR, *Sund.*

Shaheen Falcon.

Falco peregrinator, Sundev. Physiogr. Sellsk. Tidsk. 1837, 1838, p. 38.—Kaup, Isis, 1847, p. 74.—Jerd. Ill. Ind. Orn., pl. xxvii.—List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., Part I. 2nd edit. p. 50.—Cat. of Sp. and Draw. of Mamm. and Birds pr. to Brit. Mus. by B. H. Hodgson, Esq., p. 44.—Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. i. p. 19, *Falco*, sp. 5.—Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 14.—Ib. Consp. Orn. Ind. &c. Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng. 1850, p. 321.

— *Shaheen*, Jerd. Madr. Journ. Lit. and Sci. 1839, p. 81.—Ib. Ill. Ind. Orn., pl. xii.

— *Aldrovandi*, Ib.

— *Sultaneus*, Hodgs.—Gray, Zool. Misc. 1844, p. 81.

— *rhombus*, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. i. p. 35?

— *ruber indicus*, Aldrovand. (Blyth).

Bahari-bacha of the Indian Falconers.

Sháheen (Royal) Female, } Hindustanee.

Koila (Charcoal) Male, }

Javolum, Telugu.

Wálliér, Tamul.

This species offers so many points of close resemblance to the Peregrine Falcon, that by the casual observer it would be considered identical with that bird; but notwithstanding its similarity, it will be found, as shown by Sundevall, Kaup, and other writers, to possess characters sufficiently different to warrant its being considered distinct: it is very widely dispersed over the greater part of India, but does not appear to be abundant in any particular locality.

Not having had the advantage of seeing the bird in its native wilds, I have ventured to extract the greater portion of the very interesting account of its habits and economy published by Mr. Jerdon in his "Illustrations of Indian Ornithology."

"The Shaheen," says Mr. Jerdon, "appears to be spread throughout the whole of India, from the Himalayas to the extreme south of the Peninsula. Of its range out of India we have at present no correct information, but in several works on Falconry I have seen in this country, Persian, Toorkish and Arabic names are assigned to it, so that it may occur in other parts of Asia. It is far from being a common bird, but I have had few opportunities of observing it in its wild state. It is, however, well-known to the native falconers, who have from time immemorial been acquainted both with its breeding-places and its most favourite haunts. I have myself obtained it in the South of Travancore and in Malabar, and have seen it on the Neilgherries, and on the northern Ghauts, at the celebrated hill-fort of Untoor, where I had long before been informed there was an eyrie.

"The habitual resorts of this Falcon are high rocky hills in the neighbourhood of jungle and forest land, whether in a low or mountainous country, though the latter is always preferred. In the Carnatic, which is nearly devoid of forest, the Shaheen is but seldom met with, yet there are certain spots even here where individuals of the species resort to after the breeding-season, being chiefly young birds, and they are known to breed in various parts of the range of Eastern Ghauts. Its habits in a wild state vary somewhat according to the kind of country frequented. If a denizen of a forest, it watches on some lofty tree at the skirts of a glade, or hovers over it, ready to pounce on any unlucky bird that ventures to cross. In more open country it is necessitated to take a wider circuit in search of its prey, and is of course much more on the wing. Such birds are more highly prized for training than forest-bred birds, which are, therefore, seldom sought for. This Falcon destroys large quantities of game, partridges, quails, &c., and is said to be very partial to parroquets. This assertion is corroborated by the fact of my having first obtained a specimen of the rare *Alexandrine Parroquet* by the agency of a *Shaheen*, which pounced on a flock that was crossing a glade of a forest in Malabar, and carried one off, but dropped it on my firing at it. Very lately too, one belonging to me having lost a partridge at which it was flown, took a long though unsuccessful flight after some parroquets it spied high up in the air. One I shot in Travancore just after sunset was busily devouring a goatsucker it had captured.

"The *Shaheen* breeds on steep and inaccessible cliffs. It lays its eggs in March and April, and the young fly in May and June, when they are caught by the falconers.

"The *Royal Shaheen* of the East (as its Indian name implies) is very highly prized by the natives for use in hawking, and it is esteemed the first of all the Falcons, or black-eyed birds of prey as they are called in native works on Falconry, the large and powerful *Bhyree* (the Peregrine) even being considered only second to it. Although hawking is now comparatively at a low ebb in India, yet many individuals of this species are annually captured in various parts of the Peninsula, and taken for sale to Hydrabad, and other places where the noble sport of falconry is yet carried on, and they sell for a considerable price. The *Shaheen* and other Falcons are usually caught by what is called the *Eerwan*. This is a thin strip of cane of a length

about equal to the expanse of wings of the bird sought for. The ends of the stick are smeared with bird-lime for several inches, and a living bird is tied to the centre of it. On observing the hawk, the bird, which has its eyes sewn up to make it soar, is let loose, and the falcon pounces on and attempts to carry it off, when the ends of its wings strike the limed twig, and it falls to the ground. The birds usually selected for this purpose are doves, either *Turtur risorius* or *T. humilis*.

"The *Shaheen* is always trained for what in the language of Falconry is called a *standing gait*, that is, not slipped from the hand at a quarry, but made to hover and circle high in the air over the falconer and party, until the game is started, and then to make its swoop, which it does with amazing speed. It is, indeed, a beautiful sight to see this fine bird stoop on a partridge or florikin, which has been flushed at some considerable distance from it, as it often makes a wide circuit round the party. As soon as the falcon observes the game which has been flushed, it makes two or three onward plunges in its direction, and then darts down obliquely with half-closed wings on the devoted quarry with more than the velocity of an arrow. This is of course a very sure and deadly way of hunting, and, though infinitely more exciting than the flight of short-winged hawks, is certainly not to be compared in interest to the flight of a *Bhyree* (Peregrine) from the hand after the heron, or the *douk* (*Tantalus leucocephalus*). The *Shaheen* is usually trained to stoop at partridges and florikin (*Otis aurita*), and occasionally at the stone plover (*Edicnemus crepitans*) and the jungle fowl. It will not hover in the air so long as the *Lugger*, another large falcon used by the natives, which, being of a more patient and docile disposition, will stay up above an hour.

"In the works on Falconry before alluded to, the name *Shaheen* is said to be that by which it is known in Persia, as well as among the Mussulmen of India. *Kohee* is the name given to it by the Hindoos of the North of India, whence, in all probability, comes the name of the male bird in general use, viz. *Koēla* or *Kohela*,—though it is said to be called *Shaheen Bucha* in Persia; it is also said to bear the name of *Laheen* in Toorkistan, and *Kubursh* in Arabic. Among the localities given for it in the native works on Falconry are Koordistan, Khorasan, Moulton, and Cabool. Several varieties are enumerated, viz. the red, the white, the blue, and the black; but these are merely shades of difference in the colours and in the more or less distinctness of the markings. These variations, I may remark, are very considerable in this Falcon, as well as in the Peregrines found in India, and are probably in some measure owing to the long domestication, if I may so speak, of these birds, as it is well-known that birds moulting in confinement vary somewhat in the shades of their plumage from those subject to the more vigorous actions of a wild state of life."

The male has the head, line beneath the eye, the moustache, back, wings and tail dark slaty brown; the feathers at the back of the neck stained with rufous, forming a semi-collar; primaries and secondaries slightly margined at the tip with dull reddish brown, and crossed on the basal three-fourths of their inner webs with broad marks or bands of buff; rump and upper tail-coverts grey, with darker shafts; two centre tail-feathers crossed with faint bands of greyish buff, the remainder with broader and more conspicuous bands of buff, with a wash of grey on those nearest the base of the feathers; all the feathers tipped with buff; throat, breast and ear-coverts white, gradually blending with the rusty red which occupies the whole of the under surface; the feathers of the breast, abdomen and flanks with a streak of brownish black down the centre, becoming broader towards the tip, and gradually increasing in size, until on the flank feathers the marks assume a triangular or transverse form; under surface of the wing deep buff, crossed by irregular bands of blackish brown; orbits, cere, and base of the mandibles pale yellow; legs and feet deep yellow; bill dark horn-colour; claws black; irides dark hazel.

A young female in Mr. Jerdon's possession differed from the male in having the chin, throat and cheeks white, the rufous edgings of the feathers very indistinct, and the general plumage of a darker hue.

"After the first moult," says Mr. Jerdon, "the markings of the lower surface disappear, except a few on the lower part of the abdomen and legs, the plumage of the upper surface becomes of a more bluish tinge, and the edgings and barrings disappear; with further moultings the shade of the upper surface becomes still lighter, and of a slaty blue, the markings beneath vanish entirely, and the rufous tint of the breast becomes paler."

The Plate represents the two sexes of the natural size, from a spirited sketch by Mr. Wolf; the figure of the male being that of a bird not quite mature.

Gould, John. 1851. "Shaheen Falcon, *Falco peregrinator*, Sund. [Pl. 3]." *The Birds of Asia* 1(III), -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323210>.

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