

STRIX CANDIDA, *Tickell.*

Grass-Owl.

Strix candida, Tickell, in Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. ii. p. 572.—Jerd. Ill. Ind. Orn., pl. xxx.—Id. Birds of India, vol. i. p. 118.

— *longimembris*, Jerd. in Madras Journ. of Lit. and Sci., vol. x. p. 86.

Scelostrix candida, Blyth in Ibis, 1866, p. 251.

Strix Walleri, Diggles, Orn. of Aust., part 7. pl. 1.

I AM indebted to Mr. Waller, of Brisbane, for the loan of a specimen of this fine Owl, which has lately been added to the list of the Queensland fauna; and I very much regret that the specific name of *Walleri*, assigned to it by Mr. Diggles, cannot be retained, but must sink into the rank of a synonym, the bird having long previously been described by Tickell as *Strix candida*, and by Jerdon as *Strix longimembris*. I make this affirmation after a careful comparison of two fine Indian examples with the specimen sent by Mr. Waller from Queensland, through Charles Coxen, Esq., in the course of which I found no sufficient difference to warrant my regarding them as distinct. In size, markings, and, indeed, in every particular the Indian and Australian examples are closely alike. When we remember that the bird is strictly a grass-frequenter, and that the grassy plains of India and Australia are of a very similar character, we need not feel surprised at its being found in both countries, although they are so wide apart. It is now clearly established that the White Herons or Egrets, and many of the Plovers and Sandpipers, of the two countries are specifically identical; and their avifaunas may be regarded as still more closely united by the discovery that this fine Owl ranges from the base of the Himalayas (through, perhaps, the intervening countries of Java and the Philippines, as suggested to me by Mr. Blyth) to Australia.

As I have no information of my own to offer respecting this bird, I take the liberty of transcribing Mr. Diggles's account of it from his work above quoted, which comprises all that is known of it in Australia. "It does not often happen in a country so well searched since the visit of Mr. Gould in the years 1838, 1839, 1840, that so important and interesting a bird is brought to light; and the fact of its having been shot in the immediate neighbourhood of Brisbane may serve to encourage others interested in the study of ornithology, more especially in the newly settled districts where novelties are mostly to be looked for, to endeavour to add to our knowledge of the fauna of their adopted country.

"The habits of this bird doubtless assimilate in every important respect to those of the other members of the family. Its nearest ally is *Strix delicatula*, a much smaller species, which, like the present, has the tarsi naked for about half their length, the remainder of the Australian Owls yet known being feathered to the toes."

The following is Mr. Diggles's description of this bird, which, as it was probably taken from a recent specimen, I give in preference to one of my own:—

"Crown, back, and upper tail-coverts blackish brown, intermingled with tawny buff, each feather with a small white spot at the tip; facial disk buffy white, with a patch of blackish brown in front of the eye; fringe around the disk bright buff, the shaft of each feather marked with black; wings blackish brown, intermingled with bright tawny of a deeper tint than that of the back, and with a spot of white at the tip of each feather; from the shoulder to the body a broad space of bright tawny buff, speckled with numerous small black spots; primaries and secondaries bright tawny buff, tipped for a considerable portion of their length with brownish; the larger portion of their inner webs pure white, the former are barred with four, and the latter with three bands of blackish brown; scapularies blackish brown, with a spot of white at the tip of each feather; central tail-feathers beautiful bright buff, with four black bands; the nearest of the lateral feathers partake of the same colour; but the outer ones are much paler, being nearly white, and the bands almost obsolete; sides of the neck, chest, and upper portion of the abdomen buff, becoming gradually paler towards the tail; the whole of the undersurface marked with small brown spots near the tip of each feather; thighs buff externally, and white internally; underside of the wings white, slightly mixed with buff, and marked with arrowhead-shaped spots of blackish brown; undersurface of the quills white, banded and tipped with dark brown; tarsi long, rather slender, and feathered for about half their length, the remaining portion being clothed with short hairs; legs and feet yellowish flesh-colour; bill flesh-colour; irides dark brown.

"The female is not so bright in colour, but in other respects is very similar to the male.

The figure is of the natural size.