

ATHENE STRENUA, Gould.

Powerful Owl.

Athene strenua, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 142; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part III.

With the exception of the Eagles, *Aquila fucosa* and *Ichthyiaëtus leucogaster*, this is the most powerful of the Raptorial birds yet discovered in Australia. Its strength is prodigious, and woe to him who ventures to approach its clutch when wounded. So far as I have been able to ascertain, the habitat of the *Athene strenua* is confined to New South Wales; at all events no examples occur in collections made in any other part of Australia. It is strictly an inhabitant of the brushes, particularly of those which stretch along the coast from Port Philip to Moreton Bay. I have also obtained it in the interior on the precipitous sides of the Liverpool range, which are known to the colonists by the name of the cedar brushes, where the silence of night is frequently broken by its hoarse loud mournful note, which more resembles the bleating of an ox than any other sound I can compare it to. During the day it reposes under the canopy of the thickest trees, from which however it is readily roused, when it glides down the gulleys with remarkable swiftness; the manner in which so large a bird threads the trees while flying with such velocity is indeed truly astonishing.

Its food consists of birds and quadrupeds, of which the brushes furnish a plentiful supply. In the stomach of one I dissected in the Liverpool range were the remains of a bird and numerous green seed-like berries, resembling small peas; but whether they had formed the contents of the stomach of a bird or quadruped the Owl had devoured, or whether the large Owls of Australia, which certainly offer some difference in their structure from every other group of the family, live partly on berries and fruits, it would be interesting to know; a fact which can only be ascertained by residents in the country.

The bill of this species stands out from the face very prominently; it has also a smaller head and more diminutive eyes than the *Athene connivens*, although it is a much larger bird.

The sexes differ but little in the colouring of the plumage or in size.

Crown of the head, all the upper surface, wings and tail dark clove-brown, crossed by numerous bars of broccoli-brown, which become much larger, lighter, and more conspicuous on the lower part of the back, the inner edges of the secondaries and of the tail; face, throat, and upper part of the chest buff, with a large patch of dark brown down the centre of each feather; the remainder of the under surface white, slightly tinged with buff, and crossed with irregular bars of brown; bill light blue at the base, passing into black at the tip; feet pale gamboge-yellow; toes covered with whitish hairs; irides yellow; cere greenish olive.

The Plate represents the bird about two-thirds of the natural size, with a young Koala (*Phascolarctos fuscus*, Desm.) in its claws, an animal very common in the brushes.