

MILVUS ISURUS, *Gould.*

Square-tailed Kite.

Milvus isurus, Gould, in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. 1837, p. 140.—Ib. Syn. Birds of Australia, Part III.
Ge-durn-mul-uk and *Mar-arl*, Aborigines of the mountain districts of Western Australia.
Kite, of the Colonists.

THIS new species, although possessing the short feet, long wings, and other characters of the true Kites, may at once be distinguished from all the other members of that group by the square form of its tail. I met with it in various parts of New South Wales, and on the plains of the interior, still it is by no means abundant, and persons who had been long resident in the colony knew but little about it. I had, however, the good fortune not only to kill the bird myself, but, in one instance, to find its nest, from which I shot the female. I have also received two specimens from Swan River, which shows that, although the species may be thinly scattered over the country, it nevertheless enjoys an extensive range of habitat. It is a true Kite in all its manners, at one time soaring high above the trees of the forest, and at others hunting over the open wastes in search of food.

The nest which I found near Scone, in the month of November, was of a large size, built exteriorly of sticks, and lined with leaves and the inner bark of the gum-trees: it contained two eggs, the ground colour of which was buffy white; one was faintly freckled with rufous, becoming much deeper at the smaller end, while the other was very largely blotched with reddish brown; they were somewhat round in form, one inch and eleven lines long by one inch and seven lines broad.

In his notes from Western Australia, Mr. John Gilbert remarks, that it is there “always found in thickly-wooded places. Its flight at times is rapid, and it soars high for a great length of time. I found a nest on the 10th of November, 1839; it contained two young ones scarcely feathered, and was formed of sticks on a lofty horizontal branch of a white gum-tree, in a dense forest about four miles to the eastward of the Avon. I have not observed it in the lowlands, but it appears to be tolerably abundant in the interior. The stomach is membranous and very capacious: the food mostly birds.”

Forehead and space over the eye buffy white, each feather tipped and marked down the shaft with black; crown of the head, back and sides of the neck, throat, shoulders, both above and beneath, and the under surface generally reddish orange; the feathers on the crown and the back of the head, like those of the forehead, marked longitudinally and tipped with black, but in no part are these markings so widely spread as on the chest, whence they suddenly diminish, and are altogether lost on the abdomen, the uniformity of which, particularly on the flanks, is broken by obscure transverse bands of a lighter colour; upper part of the back and scapularies deep blackish brown; tips of the primaries on the upper surface dark brown, obscurely banded with black; internal web of the basal portion of the primaries, together with the stem and under surface generally, greyish white; secondaries dark brown banded with black, the remainder of the wing light brown, the edges of the feathers being still lighter; rump and upper tail-coverts white, with transverse bands of brown and buff; tail brownish grey, and nearly square in form, all the feathers, except the two outer on each side, marked with about four obscure narrow bands of black, the whole tipped with black; irides very pale yellow, freckled with light rufous; cere, base of the bill and feet greyish white; culmen and tip of the bill and claws black.

The female has the same character of markings as the male, but is readily distinguished by her great superiority in size.

The figure is that of a male two-thirds of the natural size.