

TINNUNCULUS CENCROÏDES.

Nankeen Kestrel.

Falco Cencroïdes, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 183.
Nankeen Hawk, of the Colonists.

ORNITHOLOGISTS will not fail to observe how beautifully the present bird represents in Australia the well-known Kestrel of the British Islands, to which it closely assimilates in many of its actions and in much of its economy.

So far as is yet known, this elegant Kestrel is not only confined to Australia, but its habitat is even restricted to the south-eastern portion of that continent. I observed it to be tolerably abundant in every part of New South Wales, and also on the plains of the interior in the neighbourhood of the river Namoi. A large collection of birds from South Australia, kindly forwarded to me by T. C. Eyton, Esq., also contained examples.

Mr. Caley states that it is a migratory species, but I am inclined to differ from this opinion; his specimens were procured in New South Wales in May and June, while mine were obtained at the opposite season of December, when it was breeding in many of the large gum-trees on the rivers Mokai and Namoi; probably some districts are deserted for a short time, and such others resorted to as may furnish it with a more abundant supply of its natural food, and this circumstance may have led him to consider it to be migratory.

The flight of the Nankeen Kestrel differs from that of its European ally in being more buoyant and easy, the bird frequently suspending itself in the air without the slightest motion of the wings: it also flies much higher; and having arrived at a great height flies round in a series of circles, these flights being often performed during the hottest part of the day; a circumstance which leads me to suppose that some kind of insect food was the object of the search, it being well known that in mid-day insects ascend to a much greater altitude than at any other time.

The sexes present the usual differences in their markings, the female having all the upper surface alternately barred with buff and brown, while the male is furnished with a more uniform tint. I once took four fully-fledged young from the hole of a tree by the side of a lagoon at Brezi, in the interior of New South Wales; I also observed nests which I believe were constructed by this bird, but which were placed on the branches in the ordinary way of the members of this group.

The male has the forehead white; head and back of the neck reddish grey, with the shaft of each feather black; back, scapularies and wing-coverts cinnamon-red, with a small oblong patch of black near the extremity of each feather; primaries, secondaries and greater coverts dark brown, slightly fringed with white; the base of the inner webs of these feathers white, into which the dark colouring proceeds in a series of points, resembling the teeth of a large saw; face white, with a slight moustache of dark brown from each angle of the mouth; chest and flanks buffy white, with the shaft of each feather dark brown; abdomen and under tail-coverts white; upper tail-coverts and tail-feathers for two-thirds of their length from the base grey; remaining portion of all but the two centre feathers white, crossed near the tip by a broad distinct band of deep black, the band being narrow, and only on the inner web of the external feather; bill horn-colour near the base, black towards the tip; base of the under mandible yellowish; cere and orbits yellowish orange; legs orange.

The female has all the upper surface, wings and tail cinnamon-red; each feather of the former with a dark patch of brown in the centre, assuming the shape of arrow-heads on the wing-coverts; the scapularies irregularly barred with the same, and the tail with an irregular band near the extremity; throat, vent and under tail-coverts white; remainder of the under surface reddish buff, with a stripe of brown down the centre of each feather.

The figures represent the two sexes of the natural size.