STRIX CANDIDA, *Tickell.*

Grass-Owl.

Strix candida, Tick. in Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. ii. p. 572.—Jerd. Ill. Ind. Orn., pl. 30.—Id. Birds of India, vol. i. p. 118.—Gould, Supp. Birds of Australia, pl. 1.—Swinh. in Proc. Zool. Soc., 1871, p. 344.
—— *longimembris*, Jerd. in Madras Journ. of Lit. and Sci., vol. x. p. 86.
—— *Walleri*, Diggles, Orn. of Australia, part vii. pl. 1.
—— *pithecops*, Swinh. in Ibis, 1866, pp. 396, 397.
Scelostrix candida, Blyth, in Ibis, 1866, p. 251.
Glaux javanica, Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 42.
Strix javanica, Horsf. and Moore, Cat. of Birds in Mus. East-Ind. Comp., vol. i. p. 81.
—— (*Glaux*) *candida*, Gray, Hand-list of Birds, part i. p. 53.

That this fine Owl ranges over the greater part of the Old World, there can be no doubt, since I find little or no difference between specimens collected on the peninsula of India and those from the great grassy plains of Eastern Australia. It is supposed to inhabit the intermediate islands (Java included); and though I have not seen specimens from Java, it is probable that it inhabits both that island and the Philippines; for I observe that Mr. Swinhoe, in his 'Revised Catalogue of the Birds of China and its Islands,' mentions that it frequents South-west Formosa.

Structurally, this bird differs from the rest of the typical members of the restricted genus *Strix* in the much greater length of its tarsi, which was doubtless the occasion of Dr. Kaup's proposing for it a separate generic appellation—that of *Scelostrix*; but I do not think this difference a character of much importance, inasmuch as the tarsi of the Indian Screech-Owl (*Strix indica*) are directly intermediate in length between those of this species and those of the Common Barn-Owl of Europe (*S. flammea*); at the same time I may mention that the propriety of the separation would seem to be supported by the difference which is found to exist in the colouring of the young of the *Strix candida* and the young of our well known Barn-Owl,—that of the latter being snow-white, while that of the former is tawny, as shown on the opposite Plate. Those who may think proper to adopt Dr. Kaup's generic appellation of *Scelostrix* for it are, of course, at liberty so to do; for myself, I prefer to retain it in the genus *Strix*. The lengthened tarsi are admirably adapted for standing upon the great grassy plains in the midst of which this Owl principally dwells, and for rising therefrom with much greater ease than the shorter-legged members of the genus, which generally frequent trees, rocks, towers, and other buildings; this character, therefore, may be regarded as a special means to an end, and one which is as apparent as it well can be. The precise food of the *Strix candida* is not known; small quadrupeds, young birds, reptiles, and insects are doubtless what it lives upon in India, while the numerous little rodents which inhabit the grassy plains, sandy glades, and ridges of Australia afford it an abundance of food in that country.

I have not failed to observe that the plumage of the adult Indian birds is darker in colour, has the brown washes more uniform or spread about, and the white speckles smaller and less diffused than that of the Australian bird; still this does not induce me to believe they are other than one and the same species. The adult specimen from which my figure was taken formed, I believe, a part of the collection made by the Marquis of Blandford during his researches in India.

Respecting this species, Mr. Jerdon says:—"The Grass-Owl is found throughout the greater part of India, but thinly scattered and by no means plentiful. I first procured it on the grassy side of a hill on the Neilgherries, at about 6000 feet elevation. I afterwards obtained it in the Carnatic and in Central India; and it was procured by Tickell in the same district, and probably occurs also in the North-western Provinces; for Mr. Philipps, in the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London,' mentions its living in long grass, and being found in abundance some miles from Hodal; Tickell, too, mentions its being found throughout Bengal and the Upper Provinces.

"Our species does indeed live almost exclusively in long grass, not frequenting jungles or coming near the haunts of man. It is probably not rare in some localities; for, on the occasion of the long grass and reeds in the dry bed of a large tank near Nellore being fired to drive out some wild pigs, I saw at least twenty of these Owls. It in general rises heavily and flies only a short distance, when it drops down suddenly into the grass. Mr. Philipps mentions that it may sometimes be put up and chased by Hawks. I presume he means by trained Falcons; for I have heard that a favourite quarry for hawking in the Punjab is a Grass-Owl, which gives an excellent and long chase. It must be remembered, however, that *Otus brachyotus* frequents similar localities, and may be the Owl alluded to, rather than this one."