

# SCOPS PENNATUS.

## Indian Scops Owl.

- Scops pennatus*, Hodgs. Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. vi. p. 69; Asiat. Res., vol. xix. p. 175.—Blyth, *ibid.*, vol. xiv. p. 183.—Kaup, Mon. Strig. in Jard. Cont. to Orn., 1852, p. 110.
- *Aldrovandi*, Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 36.
- *zorca*, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., tom. i. p. 47.
- *sunia*, Hodgs. Asiat. Res., vol. xix. p. 175.—Jerd. Ill. Ind. Orn., pl. 41.—Gray, Hand-list of Birds, vol. i. p. 45.
- *Malayanus*, Hay.
- Ephialtes spilocephalus*, Blyth, Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. xv. p. 8.
- *scops*, Horsf. & Moore, Cat. of Birds in Mus. East-Ind. Comp., vol. i. p. 69.
- *pennatus*, Jerd. Birds of Ind., vol. i. p. 136.
- Choghad kusial* and *Sunya kusial*, in Nepaul.
- Chetta guba* and *Yerra chitta guba*, Telugu.

I SHOULD suppose that there is no species of Owl respecting the specific name of which there has been more confusion than the one here represented, a confusion which has been mainly occasioned by the same author at one time considering it identical with the *Scops zorca* of Europe, and at another, under a different impression, reapplying either the one or the other of the two names *pennatus* and *sunia* given to it by Mr. Hodgson; its generic appellation, also, has been equally variable, being at one time *Strix*, at another *Scops*, and at a third *Ephialtes*.

That the Indian *Scops pennatus* and the European *Scops zorca* are two distinct species, there never has been any doubt in my mind. As Mr. Jerdon justly remarks, the former, besides differing very considerably in its markings, is much smaller than the latter. The red phase of plumage, too, whether due to sex or age, is much stronger in the Indian than in the European species. I trust that a glance at the accompanying Plate will be sufficient to convince those ornithologists who have a knowledge of our bird that the opinion of their being distinct is the correct one; in confirmation of this view, I may add that I have not yet seen the *Scops zorca* from India, but I have a specimen in the grey plumage from Asia Minor, the most eastern locality in which I have known it to be found. From the time when Mr. Jerdon's plate of the Indian bird first came under my observation in his 'Illustrations of Indian Ornithology,' this species has been of great interest to me; and it doubtless has and will be held in equal estimation by other ornithologists. With its habits and economy I have had no opportunity of making myself acquainted; I must therefore take the liberty of transcribing the notes made by those who have been more fortunately situated.

"This little Owl," remarks Mr. Jerdon, "was first considered distinct from its European representative, *S. zorca*, and named *pennatus* by Hodgson. It has been considered identical by some, and is so put in Blyth's and Horsfield's Catalogues. Kaup, however, keeps it distinct from the European one; and all ornithologists agree in distinguishing *sunia*, which is only found in the same localities with the grey one, and must be considered a phase of plumage of that bird. Indian specimens, even in the grey plumage, can generally be distinguished from European ones, though it is difficult to describe in words in what the difference consists. Two European specimens of *S. zorca* in the Museum of the Asiatic Society at Calcutta differ from Indian specimens of *pennatus* in the upper plumage being more conspicuously streaked, in the bands on the quills being lighter, and in the pale ground-colour being wider and more mottled. They are also decidedly larger, the wing being above six inches in length."

After stating that "the Indian Scops is found occasionally throughout all India and Ceylon, in forests and well-wooded districts," Mr. Jerdon adds:—"The first specimen I procured was found dead outside my house at Madras, and had probably been killed by the Crows, as it was in good case and very little injured. I have obtained it both from the Eastern and Western Ghâts, but not from Central India. It is also found in the Himalayas, and extends into Burmah, Malayana, and China. It utters a low, mild hoot which is often repeated, soon after dark. All I have examined had eaten insects."

"This Owl," says Capt. Hutton, "occurs on the Himalaya in the neighbourhood of Mussoorie, at an elevation of five thousand feet, and nidificates in hollow trees, laying three pure white eggs of a rounded form, on the rotten wood, without any preparation of a nest. A nest was found on the 19th of March; the diameter of the egg  $1\frac{3}{8}$  by 1 inch.

In the red phase the whole of the upper surface is of a deep cinnamon or bright chestnut hue, with a mark of black down the shaft of each feather, showing inconspicuously on the back and wings, but very