

ELANUS AXILLARIS.

Black-shouldered Kite.

Falco axillaris, Lath. Ind. Orn., Supp., vol. ii. p. 42. — Shaw Gen. Zool., vol. vii. p. 173. — Vieill. 2nde Edit. du Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. iv. p. 453.

Circus axillaris, Vieill. Ency. Méth., Part. III. p. 1212.

Elanus notatus, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 141 ; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part IV.

A MORE careful comparison of the birds from various parts of the world, which have hitherto been classed under the old specific name of *Falco* (*Elanus*) *melanopterus*, has shown that, instead of their being all identical, each quarter of the globe is inhabited by its own peculiar species ; and that although they all bear a general resemblance to each other, they each possess well-defined characters, by which they may be readily distinguished : in their habits, as might be supposed, they are as closely allied as in general appearance.

The species here represented is a summer visitant to the southern portions of the Australian continent, over which it is very widely but thinly dispersed, being found at Swan River on the west coast, at Moreton Bay on the east, and over all the intervening country ; I have never seen it in collections from Java, although Sir William Jardine states that it is an inhabitant of that island, neither have I yet seen it from Van Diemen's Land.

In its disposition it is much less courageous than the other members of the Australian *Falconidæ*, and, as its feeble bill and legs would indicate, lives more on insects and reptiles than on birds or quadrupeds.

I very often observed it flying above the tops of the highest trees, and where it appeared to be hawking about for insects ; it was also sometimes to be seen perched upon the dead and leafless branches of the gums, particularly such as were isolated from the other trees of the forest, whence it could survey all around.

While under the Liverpool range I shot a young bird of this species that had not long left the nest ; which proves that it had been bred within the colony of New South Wales, but I could never obtain any information respecting the nest and eggs.

The sexes closely assimilate to each other in colouring. The young differ in having the feathers of the upper surface tipped with buffy-brown.

The adults have the eye encircled by a narrow ring of black ; forehead, sides of the face and under surface of the body pure white ; back of the neck, back, scapularies, and upper tail-coverts delicate grey ; a jet-black mark commences at the shoulders, and extends over the greater portion of the wing ; under surface of the shoulders pure white, below which an oval spot of jet black ; primaries dark grey above, brownish black beneath ; tail greyish white ; bill black ; cere and legs pale yellow ; irides reddish orange.

The figures are those of a male and a female of the natural size.