

the Java Sparrow, the real *Munia*? Has *Aidemosyne* a spotted mouth, or is it like *Munia*? Then *Tæniopygia*, from external characters alone, is regarded as possibly peculiar, and thus merits consideration. My own conclusion, from Chapin's account, is that all the Australian birds will be found to resemble more or less *Poephila*, though it is possible that unexpected results will be seen, especially as it is suggested that these Weaver-Finches have arrived in Australia at different periods. It is certain that they are immigrants from the north, and, moreover, comparatively recent. Thus, they are practically absent from south-west Australia and Tasmania, only one species occurring in each of these localities, and these are representative species, belonging to the same genus, *Zonæginthus*. This at once suggests that this was the earliest immigrant into Australia, and that later arrivals have exterminated it in the northern districts. *Stagonopleura* and *Tæniopygia* occur in Victoria and South Australia, and these may have come with *Zonæginthus*, but in less numbers, and, not being such wanderers, have failed to penetrate into Tasmania or get round to Western Australia. It is possible that some of the northern species came at the same time, but did not push south, but it is certain that the northern forms are extending their range, as the case of *Erythrura* emphasizes this. However, the Australian species are all well differentiated, so that every item that can be of use is necessary. Consequently, I hope this note will bring forth descriptions of nestlings' mouths, and if this be undertaken it is feasible to anticipate other items being recognized that may be of even more value.

A New Raptor (*Gypoictinia melanosterna*) for Tasmania.

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ON or about the 23rd November, 1916, while in my poultry yard in the early morning, my attention was arrested by an unfamiliar cry of a bird of prey, accompanied by the well-known notes of the Brown Hawk and the Harrier. The birds were high in the air, directly above me. Soaring in wide and perfectly uniform circles was a large, Eagle-like bird, with long, narrow wings and even tail, seemingly quite indifferent to the swoops of the two Brown Hawks and the Harrier. The wings and tail showed at once that he was not a Wedge-tailed Eagle, and a momentary glance revealed to me the two conspicuous white under-wing patches identifying the stranger as the splendid Black-breasted Buzzard (*Gypoictinia melanosterna*), beautifully depicted in Gould's fine plate. As Campbell remarks in his "Nests and Eggs," these white patches, very noticeable from beneath, when the bird is soaring above the spectator, are an easy clue to its identity. It was a fascinating sight to gaze at its majestic circlings, with perfectly immovable wing, all the while indifferent to the attacks

of its adversaries. Gradually widening them without a beat of the wing, the Buzzard moved out in a north-easterly direction towards the forest-clad ranges of the East Coast, until he was lost to view.

The question arose at once—from whence and by what migratory path had this new visitant come to Tasmania? The true Buzzards and our aberrant Australian form are denizens of forests, both on mountain and plain. It is therefore probable that the newcomer, under the influence of the frequent north-easterly winds of last spring, took flight from the Gippsland forests across Bass Strait to the Flinders Island ranges. Once in that locality, it is an easy advance for a bird of powerful wing to the forest-clad region of Cape Portland, and thence southward to the “wilderness” of hills and gorges which unite with the East Coast ranges, thickly clad with forest. An alternative route would have been from the Otway Forest to King Island and across to the North Coast. There the country rises rapidly to the Great Central Plateau of Tasmania, which would tend to preclude a further wandering to the south or east.

To ornithologists who are given to studying the Accipitres, the Black-breasted Buzzard is an interesting species. The wide range that it is now known to possess since the publication of Messrs. Campbell and Barnard’s exhaustive paper on “The Birds of North Queensland” has been but slowly added to during the long years from Gould’s day until now. This is doubtless due to its being, like the true Buzzards, a forest-loving species, and consequently difficult of observation. Its great eastern habitat, the mountain forests of Eastern Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland, is extended by the above-quoted paper to the Northern Territory. From the coast brushes, where Gould procured it, the Buzzard probably, in the breeding season, sallies westward into the great timber land beyond the Dividing Ranges on its bird-egging depredations. There it would breed in isolated forests, coming as it did under A. J. Campbell’s far-reaching observations. Its powerful flight will carry it thence westward to the Macdonell Ranges, where it is also probably resident, as these ranges would help as a connecting link to the Western Australian woodlands, where Gilbert found it. From there north the intervening forest land in the Kimberley province will form another link in its range to the Northern Territory.

The most noteworthy feature in the interesting life-history of this species is that, added to its ordinary reptilian diet, it has a daring habit, combined with much “sagacity and cunning,” of robbing birds of their eggs, as an addition to its larder. As this fact may not be known to readers of *The Emu* who have not had an opportunity of reference to our standard works, it may be well to recapitulate some of the evidence relating to the exploits of the robber. It was first heard of from the aborigines, and disbelieved. Why that should be so is not plain to the writer, for no one who has studied the ethnology of the Australian aborigine

can deny that among the child-races of the world he stands pre-eminent for his marvellous powers of vision and observation in his native wilds. He is a human companion of the fauna among which he lives. Gould's valued collector and assistant, Gilbert, was the first, as we note in the great author's "Handbook," to give information on the subject on the testimony of the blacks, as related by a pastoralist, Mr. Drummond, together with his son. In essence, the natives' story is that the Buzzard, having discovered an Emu on its nest, advances on the ground to the attack, with a stone in its talons, with outstretched wings, and assaults the Emu with great ferocity. Having driven the Emu off the eggs, the Buzzard hovers over the nest and drops the stone on the eggs. It then devours their contents, and, in addition, probably carries some to its nest. If no stone is procurable the bird picks up a lump of hard, calcined earth and uses it! A. J. Campbell, in his comprehensive work, "Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds," alludes to this evidence, and adds to it considerably by giving an extract from an article by Mr. H. K. Bennett in the *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales*. This substantiates the evidence of the blacks. Mention is made here of a friend of his who found an Emu's nest with five broken eggs and a lump of calcined earth "as big as a man's fist" lying by them. Further proof is given by A. J. Campbell, who found a nest with the shell of a Bustard's egg in it. Finally, in Messrs. Campbell and Barnard's paper on "The Birds of North Queensland," we have the latter's testimony that he has proof of this robber "dropping stones on eggs in the Northern Territory." There they also noticed its great soarings, and were struck by "its peculiar floating flight while hawking over the tree-tops." Lastly, in its nesting habits it competes with the Eagles in building its eyrie, which is nearly as large as that of the Eagles. It no doubt has the habit of adding to the structure from season to season, as the Sea-Eagle (*Haliastur*) does, which, by the way, is not the custom of our Wedge-tailed Eagle, so far as I have ascertained.

Kaup, the well-known Continental ornithologist, removed this species from the genus *Buteo*—the true Buzzards—and created for its reception the new genus, *Gypoictinia*, on account of its very differently scaled tarsus, the anterior portion of which is protected by broad, diamond-shaped scales, which are supplemented on the sides and posterior part by small reticulated ones. This amply justifies its separation from *Buteo*, in which the anterior tarsal scales are rectangular and transverse.

Finally, we may note that, to the systematic ornithologist, there remains the interesting fact that the one and only Australian member of this noteworthy group of birds of prey stands almost at the head of the group in size. It is only exceeded in dimensions by one or two species of the true Buzzards, notwithstanding that they range over the new world and the old, Malaysia and Oceania excepted, the big South American Buzzard (*Buteo melanosterna*) of the western republics of that continent being the only species that passes our bird materially in size and length of wing.