
Order Accipitriformes, Family Falconidæ, Genus
Ieracidia—Ieracidea Berigora (Brown Hawk).

—By S. A. White, C.M.B.O.U., C.F.A.O.U.—

Description—All upper surface reddish brown, with feather shafts dark; upper tail coverts deep rufous brown, with ashy white bars and tipped with white; wing coverts rusty brown; primaries and secondaries light brown on outer web, inner web white, barred with buff; throat and side of head white, divided by a brown line; lower throat light, with dark streaks; flanks deep rufous; under surface almost white in places.

Distribution—Over the interior of Australia, but seldom seen on the coastline.

Habitat—Frequents open plains, ranges, timbered and scrub country alike.

Habits—During the summer months these birds are mostly distributed over the country in pairs, but in the winter it is not an uncommon sight to see eight or ten together.

Flight—Rapid and powerful.

Call—Loud, harsh screech, very often uttered upon the wing.

Food—Consists of small animals, such as mice and rats; also beetles, grass-hoppers, caterpillars, lizards, snakes, and at times, small birds.

Nesting season—Varies very much, according to the season, especially in the droughty districts. The season being good, August, September and October are the months during which most of these birds nest.

Nest—More often than not the deserted nests of magpies are used, but they will build a stick nest, and invariably line both the old and the newly constructed nests with green eucalyptus leaves. The position of the nests varies very much, sometimes being only a few feet above the ground, at others 50 or 60 feet.

Eggs—Two to four in number, more often three; colouration and shape varies very much. Dr. A. M. Morgan gives the average sized egg as—5.30 c.m. x 4.00 c.m.; largest egg, 5.70 c.m. x 4.10 c.m.; smallest, 5.00 c.m. x 3.90 c.m.

It is forced upon me to attach my name to these notes, because there is a very wide and diversified opinion in relation to these birds; some holding that there is but one species. The writer does not agree with this, and is of the opinion that *I. berigora* is the interior form, while *I. occidentalis* keeps to the coastal belt and islands. These deductions have been arrived at after years of observation. Never once had the writer taken the dark form in mature state in the interior, and never once has the rufous bird been observed near the coast; nestlings in both cases are very dark, but this would prove little more than that both forms may have had a common ancestry. *Ieracidea berigora* is one of the most plentiful birds in the interior, and its shrill, harsh cry is a familiar sound in that country. The darker form (*Ieracidea occidentalis*) is not an uncommon bird upon the coastline, and is to be found on most of the larger islands. Mr. G. M. Mathews has made the bird a subspecies of *I. berigora*; they are so easily separated that it would not be out of the way to give them specific difference.

J. W. Mellor writes—

“These hawks were once common at the Reedbeds, but they are now only occasionally seen, I secured one some years ago,

and kept it in captivity for about five or six years. It was remarkably tame, and would take food out of my hand, mice and large grubs, etc., being preferred to larger prey. I have not known these hawks to attack fowls and large game, and always look upon them as beneficial to the fields, because they eat up some of the pests. I have seen them flying with a small snake in their talons, apparently taking it to their young. They have a curious habit of flying and soaring in the air, circling round and round at a great height, chasing one another, at times making a "nose-dive" and righting themselves after going a short distance, all the while uttering their well-known harsh, screeching notes, as if talking to one another. When alighting on a tree they generally select the topmost dry bough, from which point of vantage they scan the surrounding country, but on the approach of an intruder they are quickly on the wing again. These birds at times take possession of some old stick nest, built by another species of bird. They lay rufous washed and reddish spotted eggs, two or three forming a clutch. I have known them to lay in a hollow tree, just placing their eggs on the decayed wood, without any pretence at making a nest, and, but for the color and more elongated shape, the eggs could be mistaken for those of the owl or laughing jackass.

J. Neil McGilp—Records from Observations in Lake Frome District, Far Northern South Australia—

The light-colored form of Brown Hawk is very numerous; some very dark forms are occasionally seen.

Its call is a harsh screech rapidly repeated, and can be heard any time during the day, and often during the night, especially just before daylight.

When procurable, large insects, such as grass-hoppers and caterpillars, form its chief food. It secures these in its beak, half flying and half running to capture them. At other times it lives on mice, lizards, birds, small rabbits and carrion, but usually prefers to kill its own food. I have never seen it catch rabbits, although remains of very young ones are to be found under and near its nest.

It rarely constructs its own nest, preferring to use the deserted nest of a crow or hawk, which may be placed at all heights from the ground. A few green leaves are added as a lining to old nests, and the eggs, usually three, but sometimes four, are to be found between 1st July and first week in October.

The female sits closely on the eggs or young. The male bird carries most of the food to the young, and the female, hear-

ing the call of her home-coming mate, meets him while in the air, and takes the food in her claws from his, and then tears off pieces to feed the young. With the exception of Black Falcons, *Ieracidea* is the noisiest feeder of the inland hawks.

When a few days old the nestlings are clothed in rusty colored down, but they closely resemble the adults when they leave the nest, perhaps a little more rufous and with wider rufous tips to feathers.

Though the Brown Hawk has not been known to molest chickens, I have seen it catch a bird. Several *Stictopelia cuneata* (Diamond Doves) were noted feeding on the ground when a Brown Hawk suddenly swooped, caught one before it could rise, and commenced to eat it on the ground. When disturbed, it carried the remains to a neighbouring tree.

Mr. A. M. Lea, Entomologist, S.A. Museum, reports on stomach contents of Brown Hawk.

Taken Ooldea, 1917, by Capt. S. A. White.

Stomach contents—Head of nocturnal moth; jaw of a large cricket; legs of cock-shafer beetles; lizard (*Amphibolurus pictus*); wings of ants; an antlion, and other fragments of insects.

Mr. Edwin Ashby reports—Although one of our commonest hawks, I have only collected two or three in my life. It has always seemed more numerous in the open country such as the Lower North, than is the case in hills in the neighbourhood of Blackwood. Although we not infrequently see them flying overhead, our attention is usually called to them by the notes of warning uttered by the smaller birds, especially by our commoner honey-eaters. This habit of the small birds is not peculiar to the occasion when the Brown Hawk is near, for the same cries are heard when any of the hawk family appear.

At Ellensbrook, in South-Western Australia, during October last, I noted several pairs of this hawk searching for prey on the coastal hills, especially where the honeysuckles (*Banksias*) were in full bloom. I think they were attracted to that particular scrub because it was alive with small birds, in addition to the parrots and cockatoos that come after the honey in the *Banksia* flowers. I succeeded in securing the male of one pair of Brown Hawks in that scrub, and find that they differ from any I have handled in the Eastern States.

It is unusually small, much paler in color, and showing far less of the rich rufous coloration. The deep buff of the throat

and the rich rufous coloration of the crown of the head are quite absent. I judged it to be a mature bird, evidently breeding, so the differences of coloration are interesting; I do not think the Brown Hawk is much trouble to those who keep fowls, for in my more than 30 years' experience I have never had a specimen of this hawk sent in as a "chicken stealer," whereas I have had numbers of the Australian Goshawk sent to me, that have been killed for this reason.
