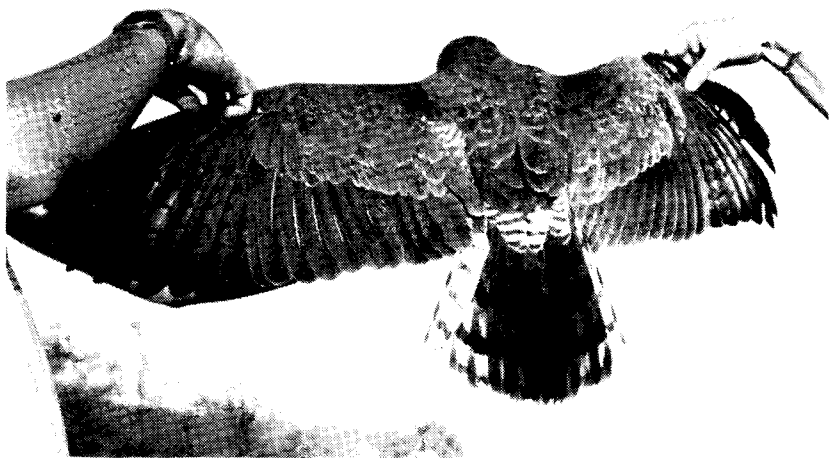


ABBERANT PLUMAGE

Aberrantly coloured or patterned feathers in birds are not a rare phenomenon. The commonest form is partial albinism, plain white feathers where they should be coloured or patterned. This may occur in perhaps 1% of all birds but is much commoner in some groups than others, e.g. starlings vs swifts. It usually affects one or two feathers at random and does not usually occur in the homologous (same) feathers on the other side of the body. Much less common is partial symmetrical albinism and total albinism is even rarer. Albinism, the lack of pigment where it ought to occur, is due basically to a failure to produce melanin in the feather concerned. This may be due to a minor injury to the feather follicle(s) concerned or be due to genetic reasons, usually possession of a homozygous

ABBERANT PLUMAGE



Sub-adult Chanting Goshawk photographed by E.F. von Maltitz near Messina, Transvaal in November 1980

recessive condition for the character concerned. Total recessive albinism is usually associated with general systemic weakness of the bird concerned and such birds seldom live long.

Aberrant colouring or patterning which is not due to a lack of the normal melanin deposition in the feather(s) concerned is truly rare and its causes are poorly understood. An example of this is seen in the immature Dark Chanting Goshawk *Melierax metabates* photograph where apparently the two innermost upper minor secondary wing coverts on the left side do not look like the other coverts of that series, including the homologous ones on the right side but resemble the upper tail coverts.

It is desirable to record such aberrations, both photographically and in writing, even though their causation is not understood. A minority of such aberrations give a clue to the relationships of the species concerned and such a clue would be useful in the case of *Melierax* on which there is no agreement on what is its closest relative within the Accipitridae.

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CHANGE OF RINGING ADDRESS

At its 1981 meeting the Steering Committee of SAFRING gave its approval to a proposal that the return address on South African rings be changed. The old legend 'Inform Zoo Pretoria' has served for the 30 years that the South African Ringing Scheme has been in existence but there have been repeated proposals to change it for various reasons. The main motivation for the change stems from the inevitable delays which a two-stage recovery route entails. Finders frequently fail to report all the details needed for a well-documented recovery, and if too much time elapses before they receive a request from SAFRING for further information, they are likely to have forgotten the essential details. To a ringer this may sound like a tall story, but regrettably we have adequate correspondence on file to prove it.