

PTILORIS MAGNIFICA.

Magnificent Rifle Bird.

Le Promefil, Levaill. Ois. de Parad. p. 36. pl. 16.

Falcinellus magnificus, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat. tom. xxviii. p. 167. pl. G. 30. No. 3.—Ib. Ency. Méth. Orn. pt. 11. p. 579.

Epimachus magnificus, Cuv. Règn. Anim. pl. 4. fig. 2.—Wagl. Syst. Av. *Epimachus*, sp. 10.—Less. Cent. Zool. p. 22. pl. 4. fem., p. 27. pl. 5. young.—Gray and Mitchell, Gen. of Birds, vol. i. p. 94.—Less. Traité d'Orn. p. 321, Atlas, pl. 74. fig. 1.—Hist. Nat. des Ois. de Parad. pls. 32, 33, 34.

Epimachus paradiseus, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. i. pl. xxxii.

Promerops à parures chevelues, Dum. Dict. des Sci. Nat. tom. xliii. p. 367. avec fig.

Craspedophora magnifica, G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 2nd Edit. p. 15.

HERE then we have a third species of *Ptiloris*, rendering the ornithology of Australia still more interesting: unlike the *P. Victorice*, however, this has no claims to novelty, inasmuch as it has been known to us for nearly fifty years. "It is New Guinea," says Vieillot, "that country in which are found the most beautiful birds in the world, and the most remarkable for the singularity of their plumage, that is the habitat of this species, one of the richest of its family." "It is still," says M. Lesson, writing in 1830, "very rarely met with in collections; the individual in the gallery of the Museum (at Paris) was procured in London, at the sale of Bullock's collection. During our sojourn at New Guinea with the corvette 'La Coquille,' we only obtained two mutilated skins; and M. Dumont-Durville, commander of the expedition of the 'Astrolabe,' secured only a single skin deprived of its wings and feet, the manner in which they are usually prepared by the natives. It is in the dense and vast forests which surround the harbour of Dorehy in New Guinea, that this fine species resides." The researches of Mr. MacGillivray and others enable me to state that it also inhabits the north-eastern portion of Australia, a circumstance of no ordinary interest, since besides adding another fine species to the already exceedingly rich fauna of that country, we now know that our museums will ere long be graced with fine and perfect specimens in lieu of the mutilated skins hitherto procurable. We have abundant evidence of its being frequently met with at Cape York, since not only Mr. MacGillivray, but nearly every officer of the "Rattlesnake" procured and brought home specimens.

The following are Mr. MacGillivray's notes respecting it:—

"This fine Rifle Bird inhabits the densest of the brushes in the neighbourhood of Cape York. The natives are familiar with it under the name of 'Yagoonya'; the Darnley Islanders also recognized a skin shown them, and described it to be a native of *Dowde* or the south coast of New Guinea, near Bristow Island. Its cry is very striking: upon being imitated by man, which may be easily done, the male bird will answer; it consists of a loud whistle resembling *wheoo* repeated three times and ending abruptly in a note like *who-o-o*. Both sexes utter the same note, but that of the male is much the loudest. The old males were generally seen about the tops of the highest trees, where, if undisturbed, they would remain long enough to utter their loud cry two or three times at intervals of from two to five minutes. If a female be near, the male frequently perches on a conspicuous dead twig in a crouching attitude, rapidly opening and closing his wings, the feathers of which by their peculiar form and texture produce a loud rustling noise, which in the comparative stillness of these solitudes may be heard at the distance of a hundred yards, and may be faintly imitated by moving the feathers of a dried skin. The full-plumaged males are much more shy than the females or immature birds. According to the testimony of several of the Cape York natives whom I questioned upon the subject, the *P. magnifica* breeds in a hollow tree and lays several white eggs. The ovary of a female shot in November, the commencement of the rainy season, contained a very large and nearly completely formed egg.

"From the shyness of this Rifle Bird, it is difficult to catch more than a passing glimpse of it in the dense brushes which it inhabits; I once, however, saw a female running up the trunk of a tree like a Creeper, and its stomach was afterwards found to be filled with insects only, chiefly ants; while the stomach of a male, shot about the same time, contained merely a few small round berries, the fruit of a tall tree, the botanical name of which is unknown to me."

I would here add a note pertaining to the history of the *P. paradisea*, sent to me by Mr. Strange, which cannot fail to be regarded with interest, as increasing our knowledge of that species and confirming Mr. MacGillivray's account of the rustling noise produced by the wings of the *P. magnifica*.