

PTILORIS VICTORIÆ, Gould.

Victoria Rifle Bird.

Ptiloris Victorix, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., 1849, p. 111, Aves, pl. xii.

THE discovery of a new and beautiful Rifle bird has enabled me to fulfil a wish I had long entertained, of dedicating to our most gracious Queen one of the loveliest of the ornithological productions of her antipodal dominions; and I had therefore no ordinary pleasure in naming the present species *Victoriæ*, as a just tribute of respect for the many virtues which have endeared Her Majesty to all classes of her subjects, and as some slight acknowledgment on my part of her kindness and liberality in permitting me to dedicate to her my great work on the 'Birds of Australia.'

The *Ptiloris Victorix* is one of the many novelties which have rewarded the researches of Mr. MacGillivray, the able Naturalist of the late expedition of H.M.S. Rattlesnake. The value of its acquisition is greatly enhanced by the notes he has recorded of its habits; which are particularly interesting to myself, inasmuch as they tend to confirm the opinion I have expressed in the Introduction as to the alliance of the members of this genus to the *Climacteres*. The present species is smaller in all its admeasurements than the *Ptiloris paradisea*, but is still more resplendent in colour; it may be distinguished by the purple of the breast presenting the appearance of a broad pectoral band, bounded above by the scale-like feathers of the throat, and below by the abdominal band of deep oil-green, and also by the broad and much-lengthened flank feathers which show very conspicuously.

It appears to be strictly an inhabitant of the north-eastern portion of Australia, and the chain of islands lying between the Barrier Reef and the mainland. The following notes respecting it have been transmitted to me by Mr. MacGillivray:—

"This bird was seen by us during the survey of the N.E. coast of Australia on the Barnard Isles, and on the adjacent shores of the mainland at Rockingham Bay, in the immediate vicinity of Kennedy's first camp. On one of the Barnard Isles (No. III. in lat. 17° 43' S.) which is covered with dense brush I found the Victoria Rifle Bird (supposed at the time to be the *P. paradisea*), in considerable abundance. Females and young males were common, but rather shy; however, by sitting down and quietly watching in some favourite locality, one or more would soon alight on a limb or branch, run along it with great celerity, stop abruptly every now and then to thrust its beak under the loose bark in search of insects, and then fly off as suddenly as it had arrived. Occasionally I have seen one anxiously watching me from behind a branch, its head and neck only being visible. At this time (June) the young males were very pugnacious, and upon one occasion three of them were so intent upon their quarrel that they allowed me to approach sufficiently near to kill them all with a single charge of dust shot. The adult males were comparatively rare, always solitary and very shy. I never saw them upon the trees, but only in the thick bushes and masses of climbing plants beneath them; on detecting the vicinity of man they immediately shuffled off among the branches towards the opposite side of the thicket and flew off for a short distance. I did not observe them to utter any call or cry; this, however, may have arisen from my attention not having been so much directed to them as to the females and young males, which I was more anxious to procure, the very different style of their colouring having led me to believe they were a new species of *Pomatorhinus*."

The male has the general plumage rich deep velvety black, glossed on the upper surface, sides of the neck, chin and breast with plum-colour; feathers of the head and throat small, scale-like, and of a shining, metallic bronzy green; feathers of the abdomen very much developed, of the same hue as the upper surface, but each feather so broadly margined with rich deep olive-green, that the colouring of the basal portion of the feather is hidden, and the olive-green forms a broad abdominal band, which is sharply defined above, but irregular below; two centre tail-feathers rich shining metallic green, the remainder deep black; bill and feet black.

The female has all the upper surface greyish brown, tinged with olive; head and sides of the neck dark brown, striated with greyish brown; over each eye a superciliary stripe of buff; wing-feathers edged with ferruginous; chin and throat pale buff; remainder of the under surface, under wing-coverts, and the base of the inner webs of the quills rich deep reddish buff, each feather with an irregular spot of brown near the tip, dilated on the flanks into the form of irregular bars; bill and feet black.

The Plate represents two males and a female of the natural size.