

## APLONIS METALLICA.

### Shining Aplonis.

*Lamprotornis metallicus*, Temm. Pl. Col. 266.

*Calornis metallica*, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 327, *Calornis*, sp. 2.

*Mooter*, Goodang tribe of Aborigines at Cape York.

MANY years have now elapsed since I established the genus *Aplonis* for the reception of a bird, which at the time I considered to be Australian, but which I have since ascertained was from Norfolk Island; the form is common, and many species have been described from the islands of the Louisiade Archipelago, the Navigator Islands, New Guinea and Java, but the present is the first and only species of the genus yet discovered on the Australian continent. It is apparently very common at Cape York, where it was found breeding in great numbers: it also inhabits New Guinea, Timor, the Celebes, Amboyna, and New Ireland.

As is the case with other members of the genus, a very striking difference exists between the plumage of the immature and adult birds—so great in fact is the difference, that were we not aware of it, we could scarcely regard them otherwise than as distinct species: when fully adult, the sexes of the present bird are so precisely alike, that dissection must be resorted to, to distinguish the one from the other,—a circumstance ascertained by Mr. MacGillivray, who has obligingly furnished me with the following interesting account of its habits and nidification:—

“During the early part of our last sojourn at Cape York, this bird was often seen passing rapidly over the tops of the trees in small flocks of a dozen or more. In their flight they reminded me of the Starlings, and like them made a chattering noise while on the wing. One day a native took me to a breeding place in the centre of a dense scrub, where I found a gigantic cotton-tree standing alone, with its branches literally hung with the pensile nests of the bird: the nests, averaging two feet in length and one in breadth, are of a somewhat oval form, slightly compressed, rounded below and above, tapering to a neck by the end of which they are suspended; the opening is situated in the centre of the widest part; they are almost entirely composed of portions of the stem and the long tendrils of a climbing plant (*Cissus*) matted and woven together and lined with finer pieces of the same, a few leaves (generally strips of *Pandanus* leaf), the hair-like fibres of a palm (*Caryota cereus*), and similar materials: the eggs, usually two, but often three in number, are an inch long by eight-tenths of an inch broad, and of a bluish grey speckled with reddish pink, chiefly at the larger end; some have scarcely any markings, others a few minute dots only. The note of the bird is short, sharp and shrill, and resembles ‘*twee-twee*,’ repeated, as if angrily, several times in quick succession.

“On the tree above mentioned the nests were about fifty in number, often solitary, but usually three or four together in a cluster—sometimes so closely placed as to touch each other. Tempted by the promise of a knife, the lad who accompanied me offered to climb the tree, though how he was to do so I was at a loss to know, on account of the smoothness of the bark and the size of the trunk, which measured four feet and a half in diameter at the base, and rose to the height of sixty feet before a branch was given off; after much exertion, however, he succeeded in reaching the nests,—a feat which he accomplished with the aid of a piece of tough pliant vine (*Cissus*), sufficiently long to pass nearly round the tree; holding one end of this in each hand and pressing his legs and feet against the trunk, he ascended by a series of jerks, and threw me down as many nests as I desired, one of which is now in the British Museum.

“The bird appears to enjoy a wide range. During the progress of the expedition two were shot at the Duchateau Isles in the Louisiade Archipelago, and I saw a specimen on board H.M.S. Meander which had been procured at Carteret Harbour in New Ireland.

“The stomachs of those examined contained triturated seeds and other vegetable matter.”

The general plumage is a mixture of dark rich bronzy green and purple, the green hue predominating on the lower part of the throat and the upper part of the back; wings and tail bluish black, washed on the margins with bronzy green; bill and feet black; irides vermilion.

The young of both sexes have the upper surface similarly coloured, but not so bright as in the adult; wings brown, narrowly margined with brownish white; all the under surface buffy white, streaked on the breast, flanks and under tail-coverts with brownish black.

The Plate represents an adult male and a young bird of the year of the natural size.