

ATRICHIA RUFESCENS, Ramsay.

Rufescent Scrub-bird.

Atrichia rufescens, Ramsay in Proc. of Zool. Soc., 1866, pp. 438, 439.

In my account of *Atrichia clamosa* (vol. iii. pl. 34), I stated that few of the novelties received from Western Australia more highly interested me than the bird which Gilbert met with among the dense scrubs of that country, and to which his attention had been directed by its peculiar noisy notes long before his patient watching was rewarded by his obtaining examples. In my 'Handbook' I also remarked that the then only known species is "as singular in its structure as it is shy and retiring in its habits; the total absence of vibrissæ in a bird so closely allied to *Sphenura*, in which they are so much developed, renders it one of the anomalies of the Australian fauna." I have considered it desirable to make the foregoing brief remarks on the type species of the genus before entering upon the history and description of a second, which has lately been made known to us by Edward P. Ramsay, Esq., of Dobroyde in New South Wales, and whose account of it cannot fail to be interesting to all ornithologists, as it throws considerable light upon the economy of this singular genus of birds, the members of which appear to be especially adapted for frequenting the interior of forests, and for living on the insects which are abundant among decaying trees and fallen logs of timber: here the *Atrichie* creep mouse-like over the bark, or sit on a dripping stem and mock all surrounding notes.

In his remarks on this new species, communicated to the Zoological Society, Mr. Ramsay says:—

"The specimen from which my description was taken is one of two obtained by Mr. James F. Wilcox during an excursion made by himself and Mr. J. MacGillivray to the brushes of the Richmond River in June 1865; and he has favoured me with the following transcript from his notes made at the time. 'November 17, 1865, while in the Bowling Creek, Richmond River, in a dense scrub, my attention was drawn to the note of a bird I had never before heard, and which I at once knew would prove a prize, should I be fortunate enough to procure it. The scrub being too thick to admit of my standing upright, I followed the sound on my hands and knees until it appeared to be almost at the muzzle of my gun; here I remained fixed quite half an hour, and I can scarcely describe my feelings during that time. Although not superstitious, I was almost inclined to think some evil spirit was playing me a trick; for at one moment the bird would give out what seemed to be its own notes, apparently just in front of me, and the next minute mimic those of the Spine-tailed Orthonyx in another direction; then the Scrub-Robin's notes would be imitated in some other place; sometimes its voice seemed to come from the ground, and at others from the trees above me. This state of things lasted until I became painfully cramped from the position I had to lie in, and my eyes painful from staring about so long. I was just about to give up the search, when, to my delight, I saw my tormentor hop from one bush to another, not more than 7 or 8 feet from me; the scrub, however, was so dense that I could not bring the gun to bear upon it; but marking well the spot where the bird was sitting, I managed to back a little through a narrow open space, fired, and, to my intense satisfaction, succeeded in bringing it down. I am positive it kept in the same place during the whole time, and yet its mimicking voices were heard in different places.'"

In a note subsequently sent to me, Mr. Ramsay writes:—

"During a visit to Tarrango Creek, on the North Richmond River, I obtained more than a dozen, but, to my surprise and disappointment, did not find a female among them. Only on one occasion did I meet with more than a single bird in the same place. They are always among the logs and fallen trees overgrown with weeds, vines, nettles, &c., and are the most tiresome birds to procure imaginable. As to their ventriloquial powers, *they must be heard to be believed*. They will mock a Spine-tail's chirp so well, that more than once I have turned round in expectation of seeing that species on the log behind me; and upon one occasion the note of *Pachycephala gutturalis* sounded so close above me, that I went my way believing I had mistaken a "Thickhead" for an *Atrichia*, and immediately after heard the latter uttering its usual chirping note, which closely resembles that of *Climacteris picumnus*, and may be imitated by whistling the words *chip! chip! chip!* several times in succession; it also indulges in a kind of scolding hiss, like that of the *Cisticolæ*. It is impossible to say what its own note really is. I have frequently stood on a log waiting for it to show itself from among the tangled mass of vines and weeds at my feet, when all of a sudden it would begin to squeak and imitate first one bird and then another, now throwing its voice over my head, then on one side, and then again apparently from the log on which I was standing. This it will continue to do for hours together; and you may remain all day without catching sight of it."

It is evident that the female is even more shy than the male; whenever that sex may be detected I believe it will be very similar in colour, but probably somewhat less in size.

The figures in the accompanying plate are of the size of life.