

SCELOGLAUX ALBIFACIES.

Wekau.

Athene albifacies, G. R. Gray, Voy. of Ereb. and Terr. Birds, p. 2.—Ib. List of Birds in Coll. Brit. Mus., part i. 2nd edit. p. 90.

Sceloglaux albifacies, Kaup.—G. R. Gray, Cat. of Gen. and Subgen. of Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 8. No. 110.

THE bird here figured is another of the strange inhabitants of our antipodal country New Zealand. An owl it unquestionably is, but how widely does it differ from every other member of its family! Its prominent bill, swollen nostrils, and small head are characters as much accipitrine as strigine; its short and feeble wings indicate that its powers of flight are but limited, while its lengthened legs and abbreviated toes would appear to have been given to afford it a compensating increase of progression over the ground. On what does this bird live? There are no indigenous small quadrupeds in the country upon which we might infer, from its structure and what we know of the economy of other terrestrial Owls (such as the Burrowing Owl of North America, *Surnia cunicularia*), it would feed. Does it partially feed on the larvæ of such Lepidoptera as *Hepialus virescens*, so subject to the attack of that singular fungus the *Sphaeria Robertsi*? It would indeed be interesting to ascertain how it maintains existence.

Of this very rare and singular bird only two examples are known to me: of these, one is in the British Museum, the other in the collection of J. H. Gurney, Esq., of Norwich, a gentleman much attached to Ornithology, as his liberal donations to the Norwich Museum abundantly testify. Both these specimens were collected on the middle and south islands of New Zealand: that in the British Museum is the original of Mr. G. R. Gray's *Athene albifacies* and the type of Dr. Kaup's genus *Sceloglaux*.

The present is the first time the bird has been figured, and as its appearance in this work may be the means of making it more generally known, I trust that the attention of travellers will be directed to the species, and that ere long we may be furnished with some account of its habits and economy, of which, at present, nothing is known.

Mr. Percy Earl, who obtained the specimen in the British Museum at Waikonaiti, in the south island of New Zealand, states that it is known to the natives by the name of *Wekau*.

Plumage of the upper surface chocolate-brown, each feather margined with fulvous; some of the scapularies with a lengthened mark of dull white within the margin and others on the edge; primaries spotted along the outer margin with buffy white; secondaries and tertiaries crossed by indistinct or interrupted bars of buffy white, assuming on those near the body the form of spots; spurious wing very dark brown; tail brown, crossed by five narrow irregular bars of buffy white and tipped with fulvous; fascial disk pale sandy-brown, except on the forehead, throat and ear-coverts, which are whitish, each feather with a streak of brownish-black down the centre; feathers of the under surface deep fulvous, with a broad mark of dark brown down the centre of each, the former tint increasing on the lower part of the abdomen and thighs, when it again gradually fades into dull white on the lower part of the tarsi; toes sickly-green, thinly beset with hair-like feathers; cere much developed and of a lead colour; bill bluish horn-colour at the base, passing into yellowish horn-colour at the tip, the under mandible yellow.

The figure is of the natural size.