

SULA AUSTRALIS, Gould.

Australian Gannet.

Sula Australis, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part VIII. p. 177.

It will be clear to every ornithologist that the present species and the *Sula Bassana* of Europe are representatives of each other, and that they are destined by nature to perform similar offices, and to inhabit corresponding zones of latitude in opposite hemispheres. Their habits, actions and economy are, in fact, so precisely alike, that an account of one species is equally applicable to the other.

I found the *Sula Australis* generally dispersed over the seas washing the shores of Van Diemen's Land, but most numerous on the south side of the island. The Mewstone, the South Cape, the rock at the mouth of D'Entrecasteaux' Channel, and the low Actæon Islands were tenanted by hundreds during the period of my visit in 1839, and it was also seen, but in less numbers, along the entire coast of South Australia. Much as has been said respecting the natural stupidity of other species of the genus *Sula*,—Boobies as they are called,—the present appeared to be the Booby "*par excellence*," as evidenced by the manner in which I captured the specimens in my collection. Observing about fifty fine adult birds reposing on the flat top of a low rock on one of the Actæons, I directed my boatmen to row cautiously that I might endeavour to get a shot at them; I was soon not only within range, but too near to use my large duck gun, loaded as it was with cartridge and large shot; I determined therefore to take them on the wing as they flew from their resting-place; judge of my surprise when I found that neither the near approach of the boat nor our speaking to each other startled them in the least. Taking one of the men with me I stepped on shore and approached the motley assembly, which was still sitting in close array on the rock, and which did at length exhibit some degree of surprise and uneasiness at the intrusion, but even then was so little disturbed that we succeeded in capturing five fine birds with the hand before the remainder had shuffled off to the ledge of the rock and taken wing. Had this occurred at a breeding-place it would not have excited my astonishment, for I was aware that the *Sula Bassana* would allow itself to be so taken at that period; but I did not expect that the present species would admit of being so captured while merely at rest: much of this apparent stupidity may doubtless be attributed to the nature of the bird, but much was in all probability attributable to the fact that their haunts on these islands had rarely been intruded upon: boats the natives do not possess, and the visits of civilized man must have been few and far between.

Its food consists of fish of various kinds, which it procures by plunging vertically upon them as they swim near the surface of the water.

The sexes when adult are precisely alike in plumage; the young on the contrary, as is the case with the European bird, differ greatly from their parents; at first they are entirely dark grey, which gives place to a beautifully mottled appearance, the head, neck and under surface having put on a white colouring with blotches or traces of the dark grey still remaining, and the feathers of the upper surface having a triangular spot of white at the tip of each; this style of plumage is gradually exchanged for the following, which is characteristic of the adult.

Crown of the head and back of the neck beautiful buff; the remainder of the plumage white, with the exception of the primaries, secondaries and four centre tail-feathers, which are fuliginous brown with white shafts; irides olive-white; bill brownish horn-colour, slightly tinged with blue; space round the eye leaden blue; bare skin at the base of the beak and down the centre of the throat nearly black; front of the tarsi and toes sickly greenish yellow; webs brown.

The figures represent an adult and a young bird about two-thirds of the natural size.

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