

PHAËTON PHŒNICURUS, *Gmel.*

Red-tailed Tropic Bird.

- Phaëton phœnicurus*, Gmel. Edit. of Linn. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 583.—Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 894.—Leach, Nat. Misc., pl. 177.—List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., part iii. p. 182.—Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 372.—Vieill. Gal. des Ois., pl. 279.—Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 625.—Atlas, pl. 114. fig. 1.
- Paille-en-queue à brins rouges*, Buff. Hist. des Ois., tom. viii. p. 357.
- *de l'Isle de France*, Buff. Pl. Enl., 979.
- Red-tailed Tropic Bird*, Lath. Gen. Syn., vol. vi. p. 619. pl. 105.—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. x. p. 447. pl. clxxxiii.
- Phaëton erubescens*, Banks's Drawings, No. 31.
- New Holland Tropic Bird*, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. x. p. 448.

THIS bird is very generally dispersed over the temperate and warmer latitudes of the Indian Ocean and the South Seas, where it often hovers round the ship and occasionally alights on the rigging. During the months of August and September it retires to various islands for the purpose of breeding; among other places selected for the performance of this duty are Norfolk Island off the east coast of Australia, and Raine's Islet in Torres' Straits, from both of which localities I possess specimens of the bird and its eggs. As I had no opportunity of observing it myself, I am induced to avail myself of the information communicated to me respecting it by Mr. John McGillivray.

"This Tropic bird," says Mr. McGillivray, "was found by us on Raine's Islet, where, during the month of June, about a dozen were procured. Upon one occasion three were observed performing sweeping flights over and about the island, and soon afterwards one of them alighted; keeping my eye upon the spot, I ran up and found a male bird in a hole under the low shelving margin of the island bordering the beach, and succeeded in capturing it after a short scuffle, during which it snapped at me with its beak and uttered a loud, harsh, and oft-repeated croak. It makes no nest, but deposits its two eggs on the bare floor of the hole, and both sexes assist in the task of incubation. It usually returns from sea about noon, soaring high in the air and wheeling round in circles before alighting. The eggs are blotched and speckled with brownish red on a pale reddish grey ground, and are two inches and three-eighths long by one inch four-eighths and a half broad.

"The contents of the stomach consisted of the beaks of cuttle-fish.

"The only outward sexual difference that I could detect consists in the more decided roseate blush upon the plumage of the male, especially on the back; but this varies slightly in intensity in different individuals of the same sex, and fades considerably in a preserved skin."

Latham states that it is found in great numbers on the island of Mauritius, that it is very common at Palmerston, Turtle and Harvey's Islands in the South Seas, and that in all these places its eggs are deposited on the ground under the trees.

The adults have a broad crescent of black before each eye, the upper part of which extends over and behind that organ; centre of the tertiaries and flank feathers deep black; the whole of the remainder of the plumage silky white, with a rich roseate tinge especially on the back; shafts of the primaries black from the base to within an inch of their apex; shafts of the lateral tail-feathers black to within half an inch of the tip; two centre tail-feathers white at the base and rich deep red for the remainder of their length, which extends to eighteen inches, their shafts black; irides black; bill vermilion, with a black streak running through the nostrils, and a narrow line of faint blue at the base of both mandibles; tarsi and the base of the toes and webs faint blue, remainder of the toes and webs black.

The young birds for the first year are very different from the adults, being of a silky white without the roseate blush, with the whole of the upper surface broadly barred with black, and with the black of the shafts of the primaries expanded into a spatulate form at the tips of the feathers.

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