

ATTAGEN ARIEL, *Gould.*

Small Frigate Bird.

Attagen Ariel, Gould in Gray and Mitchell's Genera of Birds.

THIS species of *Attagen*, which may be distinguished from all the other members of the genus by its smaller size, is rather abundantly dispersed over the seas washing the shores of the tropical parts of the Australian continent, particularly those of Torres' Straits. Commander Ince, R.N., who during the late surveying voyage of H.M.S. Fly, was for some time stationed on Raine's Islet, superintending the erection of a Beacon, informs me that on his landing on this small island, which is situate in lat. 12° S., at about seventy miles from the north-eastern coast of the Australian continent, and surrounded by a part of the great barrier reef, he "found this bird breeding in colonies at its S.W. corner; the nest being composed of a few small sticks collected from the shrubs and herbaceous plants which alone clothe the island, and placed either on the ground or on the plants, a few inches above it. The eggs, which are generally one, but occasionally two in number, are larger than those of the Booby and Gannet, are of a purer white, not so chalky in appearance, and nearly of the same shape at either end. Upon one occasion I killed the old birds from a nest that contained a young one; on visiting the spot I found the young bird removed to another nest, the proprietors of which were feeding it as if it had been their own: I am sure of this fact, because there was no other nest near it containing two young birds. Some of the eggs were quite fresh, while others had been so far sat upon that we could not blow them; and many of the young birds must have been hatched some two or three weeks. We regarded these birds as the Falcons of the sea, for we repeatedly saw them compel the Terns, Boobys and Gannets to disgorge their prey, and then adroitly catch it before it fell to the ground or water. We never saw them settle on the water, but constantly soaring round and round, apparently on the watch for what the smaller birds were bringing home. I have found in their pouch young turtles, fish, cuttle-fish and small crabs."

The male has the entire plumage brownish black, the feathers of the head glossed with green, and the lengthened plumes of the back with purple and green reflexions; orbits and gular pouch deep red; bill bluish horn-colour; irides black; feet dark reddish brown.

The female is similar to the male, but browner; is destitute of the coloured plumes on the back; has some of the wing-coverts and tertiaries edged with light brown, forming a mark along the wing; a collar at the back of the neck, the breast and upper part of the flanks white, washed with rufous.

A nestling bird in my collection is clothed in white down, except on the back and scapularies, where the dark brown coloured and perfect feathers have just been assumed.

The Plate represents the two sexes about two-thirds of their natural size.