

THALASSEUS PELECANOÏDES.

Torres' Straits' Tern.

Sterna Pelecanoïdes, King's Survey of Intertropical Australia, vol. ii. p. 422.

Pelecanopus Pelecanoïdes, Wagl.—G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 2nd Edit. p. 100.—List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., part iii. p. 180.

Caspian Tern, Lath. in Phil. Voy., p. 160. pl. in p. 77?—Lath. Gen. Syn., vol. vi. p. 351. var. B.

Crested Tern, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. x. p. 101.

Gerra-gerra, Aborigines of New South Wales.

Kal-jêr-gang, Aborigines of the lowlands of Western Australia.

Yellow-billed Tern, of the Colonists.

THE Tern forming the subject of the present Plate I believe to be the bird described by Capt. King as *Sterna Pelecanoïdes*, as it is the only large species of the family inhabiting Torres' Straits. Captain King's description was doubtless taken either from an immature bird or one in the winter plumage. It differs from *Thalasseus poliocercus* in its much larger bill and in being a much stouter bird; it is however most nearly allied. I have received specimens and eggs from Port Essington, and also from Rottnest Island off the western coast of Australia, where Mr. Gilbert found the bird breeding in great numbers on an isolated rock about two hundred yards from the main-land; it also attracted the notice of Mr. John McGillivray while cruising in Torres' Straits, and it is to him that I am indebted for the following information as to its range, &c.:—"This handsome Tern, which supplies the place of the *Thalasseus poliocercus* upon the north-east coast, is generally distributed from Lizard Island to the southward as far northward as Bramble Quay, and is also to be found in Endeavour Straits. It was breeding on Lizard Island in the beginning of May, and on Raine's Island in June, when both eggs and young birds were procured; in the latter locality I found it in three small parties upon a low ridge on one side of the island, depositing its single egg in a slight hollow scooped out of the ground in a bare smooth spot surrounded with herbage. This bird was so much more shy than the Sooty Tern and Noddy, that I was obliged to resort to the gun to procure specimens, as it would not allow me to approach sufficiently near to throw a short stick with effect. The eggs vary considerably in their markings; the ground-colour is generally stone-grey, in some instances thickly speckled and blotched with black; others are marked with irregular waved streaks and minute spots of dark brown; others again with scattered irregular streaks and spots of black; some are thickly blotched, especially at the larger end, with reddish, and others are finely blotched and streaked with dark red on a light pinkish grey ground; they also vary somewhat in size, but they usually average two inches and three-eighths in length by one inch and a half in breadth." I possess one which differs both in size and colouring, being considerably larger and of a rich reddish buff, blotched all over, but particularly at the larger end, with brownish black, and others in which the streaks assume the appearance of Chinese characters.

Mr. Gilbert states that on the rock near Rottnest Island they breed in December, and that the eggs are merely deposited in a slight hollow made by the parents in the soft part of the rock, but were so numerous that it was with difficulty he could move among them without crushing many at every step.

Crown of the head and occipital crest jet-black; forehead, sides, and back of the neck and all the under surface silky white; back, wings and tail dark grey, deepening into black on the edges and tips of the primaries, the shafts of which as well as those of the tail are white; bill pale greenish yellow; irides very dark brown; legs and feet black; soles dirty brownish yellow.

Young birds have the grey of the upper surface much paler, and the black of the head mottled with white.

The Plate represents two birds, one in the winter and the other in the breeding plumage, rather under the natural size.