

BIZIURA LOBATA.

Musk-Duck.

Anas lobata, Shaw, Nat. Misc., pl. 255.

Lobated Duck, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 349.—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. x. p. 273.

Biziura Novæ-Hollandiæ, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 222.

Hydrobates lobatus, Temm. Pl. Col., 406.—Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 630.

Biziura lobata, Eyton, Mon. of Anat., p. 168.

Anas carunculata, Vieill. 2^{nde} Edit. du Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. v. p. 109.—Ib. Ency. Méth. Orn., Part I. p. 356.

Go-dä-ra, Aborigines of Western Australia.

THIS singular species of Duck is widely and very generally distributed over the whole of the southern countries of Australia, including Tasmania and the smaller islands in Bass's Straits. I have specimens in my collection from the extreme western, southern and eastern portions of the continent, which present no differences sufficiently marked to establish a second species. It frequents deep bays and inlets of the sea, the upper part of rivers, lakes and secluded pools. More than a pair are rarely seen at one time ; often a solitary individual takes up its abode in some favourite pool, where it lives a life of complete seclusion, depending for its food and for its preservation from danger upon its powers of diving rather than upon those of flying. Although I have many times come suddenly upon this bird I could never force it to take wing, even when I surprised it at one of those small water-holes that are frequently met with in the beds of rivers during droughts, instead of attempting to escape by flight it would immediately dive and remain submerged for a great length of time, merely rising to the surface at long intervals for the purpose of breathing. The chief food of the Musk-Duck is mussels, leeches, and aquatic worms. In Western Australia it is said to leave the rivers in August, and to take up its abode for the purpose of breeding in the numerous lakes which stretch along parallel to the coast ; a precaution probably taken for the better protection of the eggs, which would become an easy prey to the natives and colonists, were the task of incubation performed on the banks of the narrow rivers and pools ; besides which, the lakes not being subject to the sudden rising of the water which always occurs in the rivers after rain, the birds are thus secured from this among other dangers : the nest, which is placed either on the stump of a low tree, or on the bank about two feet above the level of the water, is formed of dried reeds, and lined with feathers and down plucked by the bird from its own breast ; the eggs are of a large size, usually two in number and of a uniform pale olive, three inches long by two broad.

The young birds if pursued while on the water mount on the back of their parent, who dives with them to a place of safety.

During the pairing and breeding-season, which is the months of September and October, it emits a strong musky odour, which is often perceptible long before the bird can be seen, and this odour is retained for years afterwards in the skins of specimens killed during that particular season.

Its note is extremely singular, resembling the sound caused by a large drop of water falling into a deep well ; or it may be imitated by the sudden opening of the lips.

A most remarkable difference exists in the relative size of the sexes, the bulk and admeasurements of the female being not more than half of those of her mate ; the male only possesses the wattle under the throat, the use of which I could not detect.

The male has the crown of the head and the back of the neck brownish black ; the remainder of the upper surface, chest and flanks blackish brown, crossed by numerous narrow freckled bars of buffy white ; wings and tail blackish brown ; throat and under surface dark brown, each feather tipped with pale buffy white ; irides dark brown ; bill and lobe beneath the chin greenish black ; legs and feet dark leaden grey ; inside of the tarsi greenish grey.

The female is similar in colour, but has all the markings lighter and less distinct, and is destitute of the lobe beneath the chin.

The Plate represents the male and female, about three-fourths of the natural size.