

DENDROCYGNA ARCUATA.

Whistling Duck.

Anas arcuata, Cuv., Horsf. Zool. Research. in Java.

Dendrocygna arcuata, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 365.—List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., part iii. p. 131.

—Eyton, Mon. of Anat., p. 108.

En-jëp-ere, Aborigines of Port Essington.

Whistling Duck, of the Colonists.

I POSSESS specimens of this fine Duck from Moreton Bay and from various parts of the north coast, on comparing which with others procured in Java I find that they are somewhat larger, and that they have the throat and fore-part of the neck of a less deeply tinted buff; in other respects they are precisely similar.

During the months of September, October, November and December it assembles in vast flocks on the lakes around the settlement at Port Essington: the lagoons and waters at that season of the year are so shallow, that this and many other species of the Duck tribe are enabled to wade among the herbage and procure an abundant supply of food. Mr. Gilbert states, that on the approach of man or the report of a gun, this and the other species in company with it rise altogether, but that each species separates itself into a distinct flock during the act of rising. While on the water it is quite silent, emitting no kind of noise, but all the time it is on the wing it gives utterance to its peculiar whistle.

The stomach is extremely muscular, and the food consists of small fish and aquatic plants.

Some eggs brought to the settlement by the natives and said to belong to this bird were taken early in March, from nests built in long grass on the small islands adjacent to the harbour at Port Essington; they are of a creamy white, one inch and seven-eighths long by one inch and a half in breadth.

Crown of the head, line down the back of the neck, all the upper surface, wings and tail brownish black, each feather of the back broadly margined with deep buff; wing-coverts deep chestnut; chin white; sides of the head buffy white; breast deep buff, each feather crossed by a short bar of black; abdomen chestnut; line down the centre of the abdomen and vent buff, mottled with black; under tail-coverts white; flank-feathers buffy white, margined on either side with two stripes, the inner one of which is brownish black and the outer chestnut; irides dark brown; bill black; tarsi greenish grey; feet blackish grey.

The figures represent the two sexes, which are nearly alike in plumage, of the natural size.