

## MALACORHYNCHUS MEMBRANACEUS, *Swains.*

### Membranaceous Duck.

*Anas membranacea*, Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. Ixix.—Vieill. 2nde Edit. du Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. v. p. 108.

—Ib. Ency. Méth., Part I. p. 358.

— *fasciata*, Shaw, Nat. Misc., pl. 697.

*New Holland Duck*, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 359.

*Membranaceous Duck*, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. x. p. 331.

*Rhynchaspis fasciata*, Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 632.

— *membranacea*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 124.

*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*, Swains.—Ib. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 366.—Eyton's Anat., p. 136.—G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 2nd Edit., p. 94.—List of Brit. Mus. Coll., Part III. p. 139.

— *fasciatus*, Wagl.

*Wrongi*, Aborigines of New South Wales.

*Wym-bin*, Aborigines of Perth, Western Australia.

*Pink-eyed Duck*, Colonists of Swan River.

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ALTHOUGH this is by no means a common bird in any part of Australia that I have visited, it is very generally distributed over the southern latitudes of that country, and it also occasionally visits Van Diemen's Land ; its occurrence however is very irregular, the shortness or duration of the intervals being evidently influenced by some peculiarity of the season. Shallow freshwater lagoons seem to be its favourite places of resort ; hence in New South Wales during the rainy season, when the flats and hollows are temporarily filled with water, giving life to myriads of the lower animals upon which this Duck feeds, its presence may almost at all times be looked for, while on the other hand it is seldom to be met with during the opposite periods, or the seasons of drought. As this bird has never yet been seen out of Australia, or even on the northern shores of that country, we may reasonably suppose that toward the interior it finds situations suited to its existence, and where it doubtless breeds ; but respecting this portion of its economy no particulars whatever have yet been ascertained. No one of the tribe that I have observed in a state of nature presents a more elegant or graceful appearance than this little Duck, which is generally seen in small companies of from six to twenty in number, swimming over the placid lagoons, and betraying so little fear and shyness on the approach of man, as to present a singular contrast in this respect to the other members of the family. Its peculiarly light plumage renders it very buoyant on the water ; its flight is very powerful, and it passes through the air with great quickness, like the Green-necked Duck and Shoveller, with both of which species it is frequently found in company.

The sexes are so perfectly similar in plumage that they are not to be distinguished with certainty ; the male, however, is generally the larger of the two.

Sides of the face and chin white ; crown greyish brown, becoming paler on the forehead ; space round the eye, and a line from either eye uniting at the occiput and passing down the back of the neck brownish black ; immediately beneath this line and behind the dark patch surrounding the eye an oblong mark of rose-pink ; back and wings brown, very minutely freckled with black ; rump dark brown ; upper tail-coverts buffy white, with a broad stripe of dark brown across the tip of each ; tail dark brown, slightly tipped with white ; sides of the head and neck, back of the neck and all the under surface brownish white, crossed by numerous dark brown fasciæ, which are narrow on the sides of the head and neck, broad and distinct on the back of the neck, the breast and flanks, and nearly obliterated on the centre of the abdomen ; under tail-coverts deep buff ; irides dark reddish brown ; bill varies from greenish grey to bluish olive ; tip of the lower mandible white ; tarsi and toes emerald-green in some specimens and yellow-brown in others ; webs dark brown.

The Plate represents the two sexes of the natural size.