PARRA GALLINACEA, *Temm.*

Gallinaceous Parra.

Parra gallinacea, Temm. Pl. Col. 464.—Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 539.
Mur-re-mă-rang-geit, Aborigines of Port Essington.

This bird may be regarded as one of the most interesting of the additions lately made to the Australian Fauna, since, independently of its beauty, the existence of a true Parra in Australia was hitherto unknown.

The *Parra gallinacea* is one of the most typical members of the genus, its hind toe and claw being more largely developed than those of any other species; hence it is beautifully and expressly adapted for traversing those floating leaves and herbage that merely rise to the level of the water.

The specimens in my collection were obtained at Port Essington, where this bird was tolerably numerous, but always affecting such localities as rendered it very difficult to procure. Having never seen this species in a state of nature, I cannot do better than transcribe Mr. Gilbert's notes respecting it; previous to which I may mention that this species is also a native of New Guinea, and that M. Temminck has lately published a figure of it in his "Planches Coloriées," as quoted above.

"I did not meet with this bird," says Mr. Gilbert, "until the latter part of my stay in the country, just before the wet season set in, when I observed it on the large lake near Point Smith, which at this time (the month of December) contained so little water that I could wade over every part of it; and it was fortunate that this was the case, for this bird confines itself so much to the muddy parts of the middle of the lake, that it might be looked for in vain from the shores. It would seem to be a very local species, for I did not meet with it in any other part of the Peninsula. In the following January, after a succession of heavy rains, the lake became so far filled as to be too deep for a person to attempt to cross any part of it, consequently no second opportunity of observing the Parra occurred before my departure. Those observed by me were distributed in four or five small families in different parts of the lake, and were usually occupied in feeding from the floating aquatic plants, over which the great length of their toes and nails enables them to run with great facility: at the slightest alarm they dive down at once or take to flight. Their powers of diving and of remaining under water are equal to those of any bird I have ever met with: on the other hand, their powers of flight are very weak; they will, however, often mount up fifteen or twenty yards, and fly from one end of the lake to the other, a distance of half or three-quarters of a mile, but generally they merely rise above the surface of the water and fly off for about a hundred yards; during flight their long legs are thrown out horizontally to their full length; while feeding they utter a slowly-repeated *cluck cluck*. The stomach is extremely muscular, and the food consists of aquatic insects and some kind of vegetable matter."

Although the nest and eggs were not found, it evidently breeds in the locality above-mentioned, for among the specimens procured were two young ones.

Back of the head, line down the back of the neck, tips of the shoulders, under surface of the wing, flanks, and a broad band crossing the chest and abdomen deep bluish black; chin and throat white; orbits, ear-coverts, sides of the neck and breast pale glossy orange, the white and the orange gradually blending into each other; back and scapularies bronzy olive-green, becoming nearly black at the base of the neck and on the rump; wing-coverts olive-brown; the remainder of the wing and tail greenish black; vent and under tail-coverts buffy white; irides light sulphur-yellow; eyelash light ash-grey; bill greenish grey at the extreme tip, then black to near the nostrils; the basal portion of the upper mandible and the helmet aurora-red; base of the lower mandible light primrose-yellow; forepart of the tibia red, with a mixture in patches of yellow and greenish grey; hinder part of the tibia, tarsi and toes dark greenish grey.

The young differs in having all the under surface white, crown of the head and occiput reddish chestnut, the line down the back of the neck brown, and the back reddish brown, each feather margined with a still redder hue; only an indication of the helmet; irides light brown, and the bill aurora-red, with the exception of the base of the lower mandible, which is light yellowish white.

The figures are those of a male, a female, and a young bird, of the natural size.