

ARDETTA STAGNATILIS, *Gould.*

Little Grey Bittern.

Ardetta stagnatilis, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., November 1847.

Wor-gorl, Aborigines of Port Essington.

Little Grey Bittern, of the Colonists.

THIS bird is tolerably abundant at Port Essington and other parts of the north coast of Australia, where its favourite haunts are small islets covered with mangroves and low swampy points of land running out into the sea ; its chief place of resort, however, is the dense beds of mangroves, beneath the shade of which it runs about in search of food, of which there is a great variety, such as fish, crustaceans, and numerous marine worms and insects : when the tide rises and the muddy beds and roots of the mangroves are covered with water, the bird betakes itself to the higher branches, where it sits motionless until the tide retires and leaves behind a fresh supply of food.

Although generally speaking it is a solitary species, yet at times it congregates in considerable numbers. Mr. Gilbert found a colony breeding on two small islets in Coral Bay, near the entrance of the harbour of Port Essington. Their nests, about thirty in number, were built both on the mangroves and on the branches of the yellow-blossomed *Hibiscus* ; they were very frail structures, consisting of a few small twigs placed across each other on the horizontal branches, and none of them were more than six feet from the ground ; each contained either two young birds, or two eggs of a uniform very pale green, one inch and five-eighths long by one inch and a quarter broad.

Crown of the head, occipital crest and a small tuft beneath each eye black ; neck and all the under surface grey, with a vinous tinge, which becomes much deeper on the abdomen and under tail-coverts ; lengthened feathers of the back bluish grey with lighter shafts ; wing-coverts dark slate-grey, narrowly margined with buff and white ; remainder of the wings and tail dark grey ; irides light yellow ; orbits and eyelash gamboge-yellow ; upper mandible and cutting edge of the lower mandible very dark reddish brown ; remainder of the lower mandible oil-green ; tibiæ and hinder part of the tarsi bright yellow ; remainder of the legs and feet yellowish brown.

The young differ in having all the upper surface brown, with a triangular spot of white at the tip of all the wing-feathers, and the throat broadly and conspicuously striated with brown on a white ground.

The figures represent a male and a female of the natural size.