

BOTAURUS AUSTRALIS, Gould.

Australian Bittern.

Botaurus Australis, Cuv. Gal. de Paris ?—Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 572 ?
Bur-den-etch, Aborigines of the lowlands of Western Australia.

THE Australian Bittern, although nowhere very abundant, is so generally diffused over the surface of the country wherever marshes and the sedgy banks of rivers occur, that there are few localities of this description in which its presence may not be detected: owing to the frequent occurrence of such districts in Van Diemen's Land, it is perhaps more numerous in that island than elsewhere. A fine specimen, which had been captured on the Torrens, was sent to me during my stay in Adelaide by Mr. Dark, the Surveyor; I killed another myself on the 1st of July 1839, above Gleeson's Station, while journeying towards the Murray, and I subsequently procured others at Illawarra and in Van Diemen's Land: Captain Sturt mentions that he found it abundant in the marshes of the interior, in the neighbourhood of the river Macquarrie, and Mr. Gilbert procured it in Western Australia.

In its actions, habits, manners and mode of flight it so closely resembles the *Botaurus stellaris* of Europe, as to render a description of them entirely unnecessary; like that bird also it feeds on fish, frogs, newts, aquatic animals of all kinds, and insects, and has a capacious and membranous stomach.

The sexes are alike in plumage, but the female is smaller than the male.

Head and back of the neck purplish brown; back and scapularies dark purplish brown; wings buff, conspicuously and largely freckled with brown; ear-coverts tawny; throat and all the under surface deep tawny buff, with irregular markings of deep brown down the centre, giving the whole a mottled appearance; the brown colour however prevails on the lower part of the throat; bill yellowish olive in some, greenish horn-colour in others; space round the eyes and the legs beautiful pale green; irides in some yellow, lilac-red in others.

The figures are about two-thirds of the natural size.