

# HERODIAS JUGULARIS.

## Blue Reef Heron.

*Ardea jugularis*, Forst. Icon. Ined., t. 114.

— *cærulea*, var. Lath.

— *Matook*, Vieill.

*Herodias jugularis*, List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., part iii. p. 80.

*Blue Crane*, Colonists of Port Essington.

THE Blue Reef Heron is universally distributed over the whole of the coasts of the great continent of Australia, and is also found in New Zealand: the sea-coast is evidently the place destined by nature for this bird to inhabit; it especially loves to dwell on shores of a rocky nature; and when disturbed merely takes short flights to seaward, and returns again to some prominent point, whence it can survey all around and feel itself in security. Its food appears to consist of crabs and shelled mollusks; the stomachs of those dissected were very muscular, and contained the remains of both those kinds of animals; hence the necessity for the powerful bill and peculiar structure of feet with which this bird is provided.

"This species of *Herodias*," says Mr. McGillivray, "inhabits the islands of the north-east coast of Australia and Torres' Straits, and is abundantly distributed from the Capricorn group in lat. 23° 30' S., as far north as Darnley Island in lat. 9° 35' S. It procures its food at low water on the coral reefs surrounding the low wooded islands it loves to frequent; although generally a wary bird even when little disturbed by man, yet on one occasion on Heron Island I knocked down several with a stick. The nest is usually placed on a tree, but on those islands where there are none, such as Raine's Islet and elsewhere, it breeds among the recesses of the rocks; where the trees are tall, as on Oomāga or Keat's Island, the nests are placed near the summit; on Dugong Island they were placed on the root of a tree, on a low stump, or half-way up a low bushy tree; they are shallow in form, eighteen inches in diameter, and constructed of small sticks and lined with twigs; the eggs are two in number, and of a pale bluish white, one inch and seven-eighths long by one inch and a quarter broad." Mr. Strange says, "I procured specimens about ten miles north of Sydney Heads; it appears to be strictly confined to the rocky cliffs and ledges of rocks, where it takes great delight in allowing the spray to beat over it. It is very shy and wary, and never stops long in one place." In his notes from Port Essington, Mr. Gilbert states that "it is abundant on all the small islands and rocks immediately adjacent to the main-land. It is gregarious in its habits the whole year round, for I remarked that it was congregated in as large numbers before as after the breeding-season, which is the month of August. The nest is built of sticks on the ground, and is perfectly round and from twelve to eighteen inches in height, with a considerable depression for the reception of the eggs; they are always placed in thickets or underwood, and as near the outer edge of the rock as possible. On one small rock I found at least fifty of these nests, some of which were so close as nearly to touch each other. The eggs were sometimes two, and at others three in number."

The sexes are so similar that dissection must be resorted to to determine the one from the other.

It will be observed that these statements are contradictory in some particulars, which may perhaps be accounted for by the habits of the bird being modified by circumstances, or the peculiar nature of the situations in which they happened to be observed.

Down the centre of the chin a line of buff in some, white in others; the whole of the remainder of the plumage dark slaty black, with a wash of grey on the lengthened scapularies, and the lanceolate feathers pendent from the chest; bill pale dirty yellowish green; lores dull oil-green; tarsi and tibiae pale or apple-green; soles of the feet dirty yellow.

The figures represent a male and a female about three-fourths of the natural size.