

HERODIAS SYRMATOPHORUS, *Gould.*

Australian Egret.

Herodias syrmatophorus, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part XIV.

THIS noble species of Egret, the largest of the group inhabiting Australia, is very generally dispersed over all parts of that continent, and is equally to be met with along the rivers and lagoons of the interior as well as in the neighbourhood of the coast. I have often seen it near the mouth of the Hunter, but it is more frequently met with on the banks of the Clarence and other rivers little frequented by civilized man. I observed it also in Van Diemen's Land in the vicinity of George's River, and the other unfrequented streams to the northward of the island. The specimen from which my drawing is taken, the acquisition of which enabled me to figure the soft parts correctly, was killed on the 2nd of January 1840, on the banks of the Mokai near Mr. Uhr's station. It is of an extremely shy and distrustful disposition, and can only be approached within range by the exercise of the utmost care and caution. Its powers of wing are considerable, and like other Herons it occasionally performs long-continued flights at a great height in the air; its food is also of a similar character, consisting of fish, frogs, aquatic insects, &c. When on the ground its snowy plumage presents a strong and pleasing contrast to the green sedgy and other herbage clothing the banks of the rivers.

That it undergoes seasonal changes of plumage is evident, since I possess specimens, some of which are adorned with long ornamental plumes on the back, as represented in the Plate, while in others they are entirely wanting, from which I infer, that as they all appear to be old birds, they have been killed at different periods of the year, and that these ornamental plumes are only carried during the months of spring and the breeding-season.

The sexes are precisely alike in external appearance, and both possess the lengthened plumes during the vernal season.

The whole of the plumage pure white; irides rich straw-yellow; naked space before and behind the eye fine greenish yellow; bill beautiful orange; legs above the knee pale dull yellow, which colour is continued down the centre of the inner part of the tarsi; remainder of the tarsi and feet black.

The Plate represents a male about two-thirds of the natural size.