

RHYNCHÆA AUSTRALIS, *Gould.*

Australian Rhynchæa.

Rhynchæa Australis, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 155; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part IV.

THE Australian Rhynchæa is a summer visitant to New South Wales, where it arrives in August and September; but whether its visits are regular, or only occur in such wet seasons as fill the lagoons and cause a redundancy of rushes and other herbage to spring forth, I know not; in all probability they are entirely influenced by the character of the season, as none but the most humid situations appear to suit its habits. During the fine season of 1839, when much rain had fallen and the whole face of the country was covered with the most luxuriant and varied verdure, and every hollow formed a shallow lagoon, this bird was tolerably plentiful in the district of the Upper Hunter, particularly in the flats of Segenho, Aberdeen, Scone, &c. Although I did not succeed in finding its nest, no doubt exists in my mind of its breeding in the immediate locality, as on dissecting a female an egg was found in the ovarium, nearly of the full size, and ready to receive its calcareous covering or shell. In its habits and disposition this bird partakes both of the true Snipe and Sandpiper; it neither lies so close nor has it the crouching manner of the true Snipes, but exposes itself to view like the Sandpipers, running about either among the rushes or on the bare ground at the edge of the water: on being disturbed, those I saw generally flew off toward the brush, seeking shelter among the low bushes, from which they were not easily driven or forced to take wing. It flies straighter, slower, more laboured and nearer to the ground than the true Snipes. Considerable confusion has always existed respecting the members of the group to which this bird belongs, the opposite sexes of the same species having been described as distinct; from actual dissection, however, of numerous examples, and from seeing these birds mated in a state of nature, I am enabled to affirm that the figures in the accompanying Plate are accurate representations of an adult male and female. This species will be found on comparison to possess among other characters much shorter toes than the Indian and Chinese species, to which it is most nearly allied. On dissection I also observed an anatomical peculiarity of a very extraordinary nature, the more so as it exists in the female alone; I allude to the great elongation of the trachea, which passes down between the skin and the muscles forming the breast for the whole length of the body, making four distinct convolutions before entering the lungs. On discovering this extraordinary formation I immediately placed the body in spirits, for the examination of my friend Mr. Yarrell, who, as is well known, has paid great attention to this part of the organization of birds, and who informs me that the position and form of the trachea in the *Rhynchæa Australis* is similar to that of the Semipalmated Goose, figured in the 15th volume of the Trans. Linn. Soc. Tab. 14. The Cranes, Swans, Guans, &c., present us with species having the trachea most singularly developed, several of them with extensive convolutions before entering the lungs; some with a receptacle for its folds within the cavity of the keel of the breast-bone; while in others it is situated outside the pectoral muscles, immediately beneath the outer skin of the breast; but in no instance is it more extensively or more curiously developed than in the present bird.

The use of this conformation so exclusively confined to one, and that the female sex, I could not in any way discover or surmise. No note whatever was heard to proceed from either sex, while on the wing or when flushed.

The female has a stripe from the bill down the centre of the head to the nape pale buff; circle surrounding and a short stripe behind each eye white; back of the neck chestnut, crossed with indistinct narrow bars of greenish brown; crown dark brown; sides of the face, and the sides and forepart of the neck chocolate; chin white; back olive-green tinged with grey, and marbled with dark brown; scapularies blotched on their external webs with deep buff; wing-coverts olive-green, crossed by numerous fine irregular bars of black; tertiaries olive-green tinged with grey, crossed by irregular bars and numerous sprinkled with black; three outer primaries dark brown, crossed on their outer webs with broad irregular patches of deep buff, and sprinkled with grey on the inner; the remainder of the primaries and the secondaries grey, crossed by numerous narrow irregular lines of black, and spotted with white surrounded with black; rump and tail grey like the secondaries, but spotted with both white and buff, each of which colours are bounded with black; breast and all the under surface white, with a large irregular patch of olive-green, narrowly barred with black, on each side of the chest; bill pale green at the base, passing into brownish horn-colour at the tip; irides rather dark hazel; legs pale green.

The male is much smaller than the female, and has the sides, back and front of the neck much lighter and mingled with patches of white; wings more olive, the coverts ornamented with numerous large irregular patches of buff, encircled with a narrow line of black; the buff bands on the primaries richer and more distinct; the scapularies speckled with white; the patch on each side of the chest dark olive, with large patches of white surrounded by a line of black.

The figures represent both sexes of the natural size.