

SCOLOPAX AUSTRALIS, *Lath.*

New Holland Snipe.

Scolopax Australis, Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. lxiv.

New Holland Snipe, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 310.—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. ix. p. 242.

Scolopax Hardwickii, Gray, Zool. Misc., vol. i. p. 16.

Gallinago Australis, List of Birds in Brit. Mus., part iii. p. 111.

O-lāreg-a, Aborigines of Port Essington.

On comparing the Snipes killed at Port Essington with others obtained in Van Diemen's Land, some trivial differences are found to exist, and which it is necessary to point out, in order that future observers may be induced to ascertain if they be identical or if they constitute two distinct species: on a minute examination, the Port Essington bird is found to have a shorter tail, and the four lateral feathers narrower than in that from Van Diemen's Land; besides which, the tail of the former is composed of eighteen feathers in both sexes, while the specimens of the latter, contained in my collection, number but sixteen; it is true they were killed during a partial moult, which circumstance renders it somewhat doubtful whether sixteen be the right number or not. If the two birds should prove to be identical, then the range of the species will extend over the whole of Australia and Van Diemen's Land; still, like its prototype in Europe, its presence will depend much upon the occurrence of favourable localities; for in fact the same laws that regulate the movements of one species equally govern those of the other.

In Van Diemen's Land it is very abundant during the months of October, November, December and January, affords excellent sport to those fond of snipe-shooting, and is to be found in all low swampy grounds, lagoons, rivulets and similar situations. Its weight varies from five ounces to six ounces and a quarter; it is consequently a much larger species than the *Scolopax Gallinago* of Europe. It flies much heavier than that species, and thus affords a more easy mark for the sportsman; it is also more tame, sits closer, and when flushed flies but a short distance before it again alights. On rising it utters the same call of *scape-scape* as the *Scolopax Gallinago*. It is said to breed in Van Diemen's Land, but although many of the birds that I killed bore evident marks of youth, I could not satisfactorily ascertain that such was the case. Lieut. Breton, in his "Excursion to the Western Range, Tasmania," mentions that it always appears the last week in August or the first in September. I found it very abundant in many parts of New South Wales, in none more so than in the lagoons of the Upper Hunter, during the months of November and December; but it was only a transient visitor, the lagoons and swampy places then filled with water having attracted it.

Mr. Gilbert mentions that the Port Essington bird is only an occasional visitor to the Cobourg Peninsula, arriving about the middle of November, when the rainy season commences, and disappearing again in a few weeks; during its short stay it inhabits swampy but open grassy meadows: he adds, that he never saw more than six or eight at a time, and always found them very wild.

The stomachs of those examined were muscular, and contained small aquatic insects and sand.

The sexes are so similar in colour that a separate description is not requisite.

Crown of the head deep brownish black, divided down the centre by a line of buff; face and chin buffy white; sides of the neck, breast and flanks washed with pale reddish brown, and mottled with irregular spots of deep brown, which increase in size, until on the flanks they assume the form of irregular bars; back dark brownish black, the scapularies mottled with deep sandy buff, and broadly margined on their external webs with pale buff; wing-coverts dark brown, largely tipped with pale buff; wings dark brown, all the feathers slightly fringed with white at the extremity; lengthened flank-feathers regularly barred with brown and white; centre of the abdomen white; under tail-coverts buff, barred with dark brown; four central tail-feathers blackish brown, crossed near the tip by a broad band of rufous, beyond which is a narrow irregular line of brown, and the tip white; the lateral feathers alternately barred with dark and lighter brown, and tipped with white; irides dark brown; basal half of the bill yellowish olive, the remainder dark brown; legs yellowish white tinged with olive.

The figures represent a male and a female killed in Van Diemen's Land.