

SCHŒNICLUS ALBESCENS.

Little Sandpiper.

Tringa albescens, Temm. Pl. Col., 41. fig. 2.

Calidris Australis, Cuv. Gal. de Paris.—Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 558.

Land Snipe and *Least Sandpiper*, of the Colonists of Western Australia.

I HAVE received specimens of this little Sandpiper from every one of the Australian colonies, the islands in Bass's Straits, the Houtmann's Abrolhos off the western coast, and Raine's Islet in Torres' Straits; no one, therefore, of the Australian species of the genus is more generally dispersed. To those who are acquainted with the Little Dunlin (*Schœniclus minutus*) of Europe, I may say that the habits of the two species so closely assimilate as to render a separate description unnecessary; low flat shingly beaches fringing deep bays and inlets of the sea, salt estuaries and spits of land at the extremities of small islands, are its usual places of resort. In Van Diemen's Land I observed it in hundreds at Ralph Bay Neck and the adjoining estuary near the mouth of the Derwent; and it was equally plentiful at Nepean Bay and other parts of the shores of Kangaroo Island, at the entrance of Spencer's Gulf in South Australia. Agile and elegant in its movements, it trips over the ground with astonishing celerity, following each receding tide in search of such small marine insects as form part of its diet. All the examples procured by myself were in the winter or light-coloured dress, and had I not recently received specimens from South Australia, which exhibit traces of red on the breast and dark feathers on the upper surface, I should have been led to suppose that it did not undergo the usual changes of the other members of the genus.

Mr. Gilbert found it breeding on the Houtmann's Abrolhos in December, its two eggs being deposited in a hollow, which it had formed in the ridge of black deposit and salt thrown up by the ripple of the water, and which, when the water receded, was left high and dry at about four or five yards from the water's edge. Mr. Gilbert also states that it assembles in large flocks on all the lakes around Perth and on Rottnest Island, that it utters a weak piping note when on the wing, that its stomach is muscular, and that its food consists of small land and aquatic insects and small mollusca. He further observes, that at Port Essington it congregates in flocks of several hundreds, and like the Greenshank and other members of the group, perches on the mangroves during the height of the flood-tide.

In summer the crown of the head and upper surface is greyish brown, with a patch of blackish brown in the centre of each feather, deepening into rusty red on the margins of the scapularies, with a slight wash of rufous; wing-coverts tipped with white; primaries blackish brown with white shafts; rump, upper tail-coverts and two centre tail-feathers blackish brown; tail pale brownish white with white shafts; forehead and under surface white; sides of the breast spotted with dark brown, and stained with rusty red in the centre; irides brownish black; bill blackish brown; tarsi and feet olive-brown.

The winter plumage is similar, but much paler, and entirely destitute of the red markings; the spottings of the sides of the breast are also much less extensive.

The figures are of the natural size; the lighter-coloured bird representing the plumage of winter, and the others changing from winter to summer.