

SCHŒNICLUS AUSTRALIS.

Australian Tringa.

Tringa Australis, Jard. and Selb. Ill. Orn., vol. ii. pl. 91.

Schœniclus Australis, List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., part iii. p. 105.

THIS pretty species of Sandpiper is distributed over all parts of Australia, including Van Diemen's Land. The sandy beaches of the sea-coast and the banks of the rivers in the interior of the country are equally visited by it; and in all such situations it is to be seen either in pairs or in small parties of from six to fifteen in number. It is very fearless, and will allow of the nearest approach before it will take wing. In its economy it appeared to me to hold an intermediate station between the Sandpipers and true Snipes. It is a bird especially fond of the grassy sides of lagoons and open wet marshy places, where it trips over the herbage which rests on the surface of the water, and sometimes wades up to its body in search of insects. Its flight resembles that of the true Snipes. Of the specimens killed, by far the greater number were birds of the year, at which period of their existence a rufous tint pervades the breast and flanks; the feathers of the back are also margined with the same hue, except where they are varied with greyish white, some of the feathers of the scapularies and back being edged with this colour; when fully adult, an almost uniform grey pervades the upper surface, the centre of the abdomen alone being white.

I dissected a number of specimens and found the larger ones to be males, a somewhat unusual circumstance in this group of birds; the Ruff however may be quoted as an instance of the contrary to the usual law; several of the males were weighed, and averaged two ounces and three-quarters.

The food consists of aquatic insects and their larvæ.

All the feathers of the upper surface very dark brown in the centre, gradually fading into grey on the margins; crown slightly washed with rufous; primaries brown, with white shafts; under surface white, washed on the breast with greyish brown, and where this tint appears, each feather has a small streak of brown down the centre; under tail-coverts with a conspicuous streak of dark brown down the centre; bill olive at the base, becoming dark brown at the tip; legs yellowish olive; irides black.

The above is the description of an adult in winter plumage; the young of the year are similarly marked, but have the greater portion of the feathers, and particularly those of the crown and the tertiaries, distinctly margined with sandy red and white, the breast washed with buff, and free from spots except on the sides.

The Plate represents an adult and a young bird of the size of life.