

HIMANTOPUS LEUCOCEPHALUS, *Gould.*

White-headed Stilt.

Himantopus leucocephalus, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. 1837, p. 26; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part II.

Djan-jar-uk, Aborigines of the lowland districts of Western Australia.

ALTHOUGH the extreme length of the legs of this bird, as compared with the small size of its body, would seem incompatible with easy carriage and graceful deportment, this is in reality not the case, for I never saw a bird which combined more grace of movement and elegance of appearance than the White-headed Stilt, which I for the first time observed in the month of December, near Mr. Edward Uhr's station on the banks of the river Mokai, where it was associated in small flocks of from six to twenty in number, and which, by their picturesque appearance as they ran along the margin and knee-deep in the shallows of the stream, added greatly to the beauty of the scene. This part of the Mokai was one of the most beautiful, and to me, one of the most interesting localities, I had visited in New South Wales, and I therefore encamped on its banks for some time, during which I experienced much hospitality from Mr. Uhr, and which I feel much pleasure in publicly acknowledging. I had no difficulty in obtaining as many specimens of this fine bird as I desired; for when shot at it would merely pass down the river and alight again at a short distance, or fly backwards and forwards in front of the camp. The flocks were composed of both sexes, in the finest state of plumage; and I ascertained by dissection of numerous specimens that the larger birds were the males, which circumstance indicates a greater alliance to the true Plovers than to the Sandpipers. In this locality the Stilts were feeding entirely on insects and small shelled snails, which food was procured on the margin of the stream, or by wading into the shallows: they ran about with great celerity, displaying many graceful, lively actions; their flight on the contrary was heavy and inelegant, and their long legs streaming out behind gave them a very grotesque appearance: while on the wing they continually uttered a plaintive piping cry, as if of distress, but which they seldom emitted when on the ground.

I was unable to obtain any information respecting the nidification of this bird, or to arrive at any conclusion as to its being a stationary or migratory species. It appears to possess an extensive range over the continent, as besides killing it myself in New South Wales, I have received specimens both from South and Western Australia. In the neighbourhood of Perth it is sometimes seen in company with the Avocet (*Recurvirostra rubicollis*), feeding upon freshwater shrimps and aquatic insects.

Back of the neck, back and wings glossy greenish black, the rest of the plumage pure white; irides pink, margined externally with a deep red ring; bill black; legs and feet deep pink flesh colour, becoming red after death.

The Plate represents a male and a female of the natural size.