

HÆMATOPUS LONGIROSTRIS, Vieill.

White-breasted Oyster-catcher.

Hæmatopus longirostris, Vieill., 2nd Edit. du Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xv. p. 410.—Ib. Ency. Méth., Part I. p. 341.

——— *picatus*, Vig. App. to King's Voy. to Australia.

——— *Australasianus*, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 155.

THIS species is so generally dispersed over the southern coast of Australia, that to particularize localities where it may be found would be superfluous, but I may state that it is more abundant in Van Diemen's Land and the islands in Bass's Straits than elsewhere. As is the case with the European species, low muddy flats under the influence of the tide, sandy bays on the sea-shore, estuaries, the mouths of rivers and marshes, are its natural places of resort. During the greater part of the year it may be observed in small companies of from three to ten or more in number, together with the *Hæmatopus fuliginosus* and other shore birds, such as Curlews, Whimbrels, Stints, Sandpipers, &c., that seek their food on beaches and sand-banks, whereon each receding tide leaves numerous mollusks and other marine animals, which afford a plentiful repast to myriads of birds of the order of which the present species forms a part. In its appearance it is very handsome and attractive, the white feathers of the wings and breast showing very conspicuously as it nimbly trips over the sands. During the breeding-season, which lasts from September to January, it leaves the shores and resorts to small islands and rocky promontories for the purpose of rearing its young. The eggs, which are two or three in number, are usually deposited on the bare ground near the water's edge; they are of a buffy stone-colour, marked all over with large irregular blotches of dark chestnut-brown, approaching to black; two inches and a quarter long by one inch five-eighths broad. The young are soon capable of running, and in case of danger secrete themselves behind a stone or in a crevice of the rocks, while the adults keep flying backwards and forwards, uttering their loud and clamorous cries with the view of decoying away the intruder,—a stratagem often resorted to by other birds.

The sexes present no external difference whatever. The young, from the time they are half-grown to maturity, have the same kind of plumage, but differ from the adults in having each black feather of the back and wings strongly edged with brown, forming circular marks and bars on nearly the whole of the upper surface.

Head, neck, breast, back, wings, and tail-feathers for three parts of their length from the tip, deep greenish black; the tips of the wing-coverts, abdomen, rump, upper and under tail-coverts, and the bases of the tail-feathers pure white; irides crimson; bill and eyelash deep orange-scarlet; feet light brick-red.

The Plate represents the two sexes of the natural size.