

ESACUS MAGNIROSTRIS.

Large-billed Plover.

- Ædicnemus magnirostris*, Geoff.—Temm. Pl. Col. 387.—Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxiii. p. 251.—Ib. Ency. Méth. Orn., part i. p. 339. pl. 234. fig. 1.
Charadrius magnirostris, Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. lxvi.—Wagl. Syst. Avium, Charadrius, sp. 3.
Burhinus magnirostris, Less. Man. d'Orn., tom. ii. p. 335.—Ib. Traité d'Orn., p. 547.
Great-billed Plover, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 319.—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. ix. p. 341.
Ædicnemus recurvirostris, Swains.
Carvanaca grisea, Hodgs.
Esacus magnirostris, G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 2nd Edit. p. 83.
Weë-lo, Aborigines of Port Essington.
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THIS fine species of Plover is tolerably abundant along the northern and north-western parts of Australia, where it gives a preference to the low flat shores of the sea, on which every receding tide leaves crabs, marine insects, worms and various kinds of mollusks, which form its natural food; hence we see a marked difference in the habits of this bird from those of the true *Ædicnemi*, with which it was formerly placed; the latter being entirely confined to inland districts, such as open plains and grassy hills, while the *Esacus magnirostris* is exclusively confined to the sea-beach, and only retires inland at the breeding-season to deposit its eggs and rear its young on some grassy hill or plain, where its feeble offspring may obtain shelter until they are able to traverse the mud flats and shingly beach. At night it is said to utter a loud scream or cry, resembling the word *Weë-lo*, whence its aboriginal name: it is somewhat singular that the same name is applied to the *Ædicnemus grallarius* by the natives of Western Australia, where the present bird has not as yet been seen; the cry of the two birds being similar is doubtless the cause of their both being known to the natives of those distant parts of the country by the same appellation, as it is not unusual for them to name birds after the sound they utter.

The sexes bear a general resemblance to each other, and the young of the first autumn is only distinguished by its feathers being margined with grey.

I have been favoured with an egg of this fine bird by Lieut. J. M. R. Ince, R.N., who obtained it at Port Essington, and as it was not procured by Mr. Gilbert or myself, it forms a valuable acquisition to my cabinet. Its ground-colour is cream-white, streaked and marked all over with dark olive-brown, some of the markings being large and bold without assuming any regular form, and others mere blotches about an eighth of an inch in diameter; while many of the streaks are as fine as a hair, and are of a crooked or zig-zag form: it is two inches and a half long by one inch and three quarters broad; judging from analogy, I may venture to assert that two are laid at a time.

Above and below the eye a broad mark of white, which is continued down the side of the head, the eye and the white marks being surrounded by a large patch of dark blackish brown; at the angle of the lower mandible is a small patch of blackish brown; throat and sides of the face dull white; head and all the upper surface light brown, the feathers of the head and neck with a narrow line of dark brown down the centre; lesser wing-coverts dark brown, the last row crossed with white near the tip, forming a line along the wing; remainder of the coverts grey, deepening into brown on the tertiaries; first three primaries dark brown at the base and tip, and white in the centre, the remainder white stained with brown near the tip; tail grey, crossed with white near the tip, which is dark brown; fore-part of the neck like the head, but paler; breast brownish grey; abdomen and under tail-coverts buffy white; irides pale yellow; eyelids primrose-yellow; base of the bill sulphur-yellow, which colour is continued along the sides of the upper mandible above the nostrils; remainder of the bill black; tibiae lemon-yellow; tarsi and feet wine-yellow; the upper ridge of the scales of the toes lead-colour.

The young bird is similar, but has the markings of the body less defined, the whole of the upper surface being mottled brown and grey.

The Plate represents an adult male and a young bird of the year of the natural size.