

# OTIS AUSTRALASIANUS, Gould.

## Australian Bustard.

*Otis Australasianus*, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part VIII. p. 176.

*Be-bil-ya*, Aborigines of Western Australia.

*Turkey*, Colonists of New South Wales.

*Native Turkey*, Colonists of Swan River.

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It is a remarkable circumstance, that the vast collections of birds that have been transmitted from Australia to Europe during the last fifty years should not have comprised examples of so noble and interesting a bird as the present, and that no account should have reached us respecting the existence of so fine a Bustard. A single specimen has, it is true, for a long time formed part of the collection of the Linnean Society, but nothing whatever was known of its history, and it was not until I personally visited the *terra Australis* that I ascertained that the present species was one of the most abundant, and one of the most widely and generally dispersed of the larger birds inhabiting that country. Extensive grassy plains and open wastes in all countries of the Old World afford a suitable asylum for Bustards; hence it might have been naturally concluded that members of this genus were not wanting in Australia; and it is I think somewhat surprising that other species of this family have not been discovered. Most probably, however, the interior, whenever it may be investigated, will afford additional examples.

In size this species exceeds the European Bustard (*Otis Tarda*), standing higher upon its legs and having a longer neck; and when seen at freedom slowly stalking over its native plains, no Australian bird, except the Emu, is so majestic, or assumes in its carriage so great an air of independence. The male, whose weight is from thirteen to sixteen pounds, considerably exceeds the female in size, and, from the greater length of the plumes of the neck and occiput, is much more stately in appearance.

I am of opinion that it is merely a summer visitant to all the southern parts of Australia, but to determine this point requires a longer residence in the colony than the nature of my visit permitted. I frequently encountered and killed it both on the plains of the Lower Namoi and also in South Australia, and Mr. Gilbert met with it in Western Australia. Specimens from Swan River present no material differences from those from the east coast. Within the precincts of the colony of New South Wales, as might be expected, a bird of so large a size is much persecuted, and has consequently become very shy, but it is still abundant there: the two specimens from which my figures were taken were shot in a paddock adjoining Mr. Coxen's House at Yarrundi on the Upper Hunter; I also met with it upon several occasions on the downs near Scone, the flats in the neighbourhood of Aberdeen, and other similar situations. On the plains of the interior, on the contrary, where it is much more abundant, and, being free from the assaults of civilized man, much less wary, I have killed it with small shot from my double-barrelled gun. To succeed in getting sufficiently near, however, it is necessary to bring in the aid of a horse, and to approach in circles, gradually closing in upon it, before it takes wing, which it readily does by running quickly a few yards, thereby gaining an impetus which enables it to rise. It flies heavily, with its long neck stretched out to the utmost; but it is capable of sustaining flight for a considerable distance. As an article of food its flesh is delicate and well-flavoured, and in every respect equals that of its well-known prototype of Europe.

Its food consists of seeds, vegetables, grasses, insects, &c.

It breeds in the latter part of September; the situation chosen for the purpose being a clear spot in a valley, or on the side of a grassy hill: the eggs are usually deposited on the bare ground; occasionally, however, a few sticks are spread for them to lie upon. They are two in number, three inches long by two inches and two lines broad, and are of an olive colour, stained with longitudinal dashes of brown.

Crown of the head and occiput black; sides of the head, the neck and breast greyish white, each feather crossed by numerous fine zigzag bands of brown, giving those parts a freckled appearance; wing-coverts black, largely tipped with white; all the upper surface, wings and upper tail-coverts brown, very minutely freckled with reddish brown; some of the feathers towards the hinder parts of the body tinged with grey; tail grey, crossed near the centre by an interrupted band of white, minutely freckled with white, margined with brown, and slightly tipped with white; chest crossed by an irregular band of black, beyond which the under surface is white; under tail-coverts greyish black tipped with white; irides greenish white; eyelash pale olive-yellow; bill straw-white, with olive and black culmen; legs and feet straw-yellow.

The figures are about half the natural size.