

SYNOICUS AUSTRALIS.

Australian Partridge.

Perdix Australis, Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. lxii.

Coturnix Australis, Temm. Fig. et Gall. 8vo, tom. iii. pp. 474 and 740.—Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. xi. p. 373.—Vieill. Gal. des Ois., pl. 215.—Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 508.

New Holland Quail, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 283.—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. viii. p. 306.

Moo-réete, Aborigines of the lowland districts of Western Australia.

Brown Quail, Colonists of Swan River and Van Diemen's Land.

THE present species will at all times claim more than ordinary attention from the colonists of Australia, from the circumstance of its being the representative in that country of the Common Partridge of the British Islands, so renowned for the goodness of its flesh, and for the healthy pastime it annually affords during the shooting season to all who are attached to and follow the sports of the field. Although much more diminutive in size, the present species offers in many points of its economy a great similarity to its antipodean ally. I believe that several species of this intermediate form exist in Australia; if, however, my surmise should prove to be incorrect, and it should be found that the Partridges over all parts of the country are merely varieties of each other, then it may be stated that the present species is an inhabitant of every known part of Australia, the north coast even not being without its presence; but if, on the other hand, it should be discovered that they are several distinct species, then the habitat of the present bird will be restricted to New South Wales, South Australia and Van Diemen's Land, over the whole of which countries it is plentifully dispersed; the localities most suited to its habits being thick grassy flats and humid spots overgrown with herbage, by the sides of rivers and water-holes. Its call is very similar to that of the Common Partridge, and like that bird it is found in coveys of from ten to eighteen in number, which simultaneously rise from the ground and pitch again within a hundred yards of the spot whence they rose. It sits so close, that it will often admit of being nearly trodden upon before it will rise. Pointers stand readily to it, and it offers perhaps better sport to the sportsman than any other bird inhabiting Australia. Its weight is about four ounces and three quarters, and its flesh is delicious.

The Australian Partridge breeds on the ground, where it constructs a slight nest of grass and leaves; the eggs, which are of large size, and from ten to eighteen in number, are sometimes uniform bluish white, at others minutely freckled all over with buff.

The sexes differ but little in their colouring, neither do the young birds from the adult, except that the markings are somewhat broader and more distinct.

Forehead, space between the bill and the eye, and the throat greyish white, with a tinge of buff; all the upper surface irregularly marked with beautiful transverse bars of grey, black and chestnut, each feather on the back having a fine stripe down the centre; shoulders greyish brown, the remainder of the wing marked with obscure transverse lines of grey, brown and black; primaries brown, mottled on the external edges with greyish brown; all the under surface buffy grey, each feather having numerous zigzag markings of black, and many of them having a very fine line of white down the centre; bill blue, deepening into black at the tip; irides orange; feet dull yellow.

The figures are of the natural size.