

COTURNIX PECTORALIS, Gould.

Pectoral Quail.

Coturnix pectoralis, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 8; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part II.—List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., Part III. p. 40.
Stubble Quail of the Colonists of Van Diemen's Land.

In Van Diemen's Land, South Australia and New South Wales, the present species is very abundant; I have also received specimens from Western Australia and a single example from the north coast, from both of which localities the specimens are smaller, and have a more buffy tint pervading the under surface; I am not, however, prepared to affirm that they are specifically distinct from the bird here figured, although I am disposed to regard them as such. Open grassy plains, extensive grass flats, and those parts of the country under cultivation, are situations favourable to the habits of the bird; in its economy and mode of life, in fact, it so closely resembles the Quail of Europe (*Coturnix communis*), that a description of one is equally descriptive of the other. In South Australia it may be found on all the extensive plains to the north of Adelaide; I sometimes flushed a single bird without finding another in the neighbourhood, while at others I met with it in pairs or in small parties of from four to six in number. Although occasionally found in the immediate neighbourhood, it affects totally different situations from those frequented by the *Synoicus Australis*, which goes in coveys, and which differs but little in its habits from the Common Partridge (*Perdix cinerea*). Its powers of flight are considerable, and when flushed, it wings its way with arrow-like swiftness to a distant part of the plain; it lies well to a pointer, and has from the first settlement of the colony always afforded considerable amusement to the sportsman. I need scarcely say that it is an excellent bird for the table, equalling as it does in this respect its European representative. During my rambles in the districts frequented by this Quail, I frequently found its nest and eggs, which bear a strong resemblance to those of our own Quail; much variation, however, exists in their colouring, some being largely blotched all over with brown on a straw-white ground, while from this to a finely peppered marking every variety occurred; the number of eggs in each nest varied from eleven to fourteen. The situations chosen for the nest are also very various; I sometimes found it placed among the thick grass of the luxuriant flats, while at others it was artfully concealed by a tuft of overhanging grass on the open plains, where the temperature was of a much warmer character, and where, from the exposed situation, the sun's rays caused a degree of heat never felt in the humid situations just alluded to. The chief food of this species is grain, seeds and insects, the grain as a matter of course being only procured in cultivated districts; and hence the name of Stubble Quail has been given to it by the colonists of Van Diemen's Land, from the great numbers that visit the fields after the harvest is over.

September and the three following months constitute the breeding-season; but it is somewhat later in Van Diemen's Land than in South Australia and New South Wales.

The average weight of the male is four ounces and a half; the female, which rarely equals her mate in size, may at all times be distinguished by the total absence of the black markings on the chest, and by the throat being white instead of buff.

The male has the lores, ear-coverts and throat buff; crown of the head and back of the neck deep brown; over each eye two parallel lines of yellowish white; a similar line down the centre of the head from the forehead to the nape; back of the neck brown, each feather marked down its centre with a lanceolate mark of yellowish white, blotched on each side with black; mantle, back and upper tail-coverts brown, transversely rayed with zigzag markings of black, and striped down the centre with lanceolate markings of yellowish white; wings brown, transversely rayed with zigzag lines of grey and black; primaries and centre of the chest black; sides of the chest brown; abdomen white, each feather marked down its centre with black; flanks rich brown, the centre of each feather white, bounded on either side by a fine line of black; bill black; irides hazel; feet pearly vinous white.

The female differs in being destitute of the black marks on the chest, in the throat being white instead of buff, and in the bill being olive instead of black.

The Plate represents both sexes of the natural size.