

HEMIPODIUS VELOX, Gould.

Swift-flying Hemipode.

Hemipodius velox, Gould, in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Nov. 10, 1840.

Kar-a-dong, Aborigines of the mountain districts of Western Australia.

Little Quail, of the Colonists.

I FOUND this new and interesting species of *Hemipodius* abundant in various parts of New South Wales, but whether it has always visited those localities, or has only recently made its appearance there, I cannot say. Mr. Stephen Coxen, on whose estate it was plentiful, and who, it is well known, has for some years paid considerable attention to the Ornithology of Australia, could give me no information respecting it, and it would appear to have escaped the notice of collectors generally, for I have never seen a specimen in any collection either public or private. I clearly ascertained that it is strictly migratory, by finding it abundant in those places in summer which I had previously visited in winter, when no appearance of one was to be seen.

The season of more than usual luxuriance that followed the long and distressing drought of 1838—39, bringing in its train a number of rare and interesting species, was highly advantageous to the objects of my expedition. It was to this season of plenty, when the whole face of the country was covered with the richest vegetation, that I am inclined to attribute the appearance of vast numbers of this species over the district of the whole Upper Hunter, particularly in the flats of Segenho, Invermein, and Yarrundi. It appeared to give preference to the low stony ridges which border and intersect these flats, and which are thinly covered with grasses of various kinds, for it was in such situations I generally found it, though on some occasions I started it from among the rank herbage clothing the alluvial soil of the bottoms. It lies so close as to be nearly trodden upon before it will rise, and when flushed it flies off with such extreme rapidity, as, combined with its small size and the intervention of trees, to render it a most difficult shot to the sportsman. On rising it flies to the distance of one or two hundred yards within two or three feet of the surface, and then suddenly pitches to the ground. As might be expected, it lies well to a pointer, and it was by this means that I found many which I could not otherwise have started.

One of the most singular circumstances connected with the history of this and the following species, is the great difference in the size of the sexes, the males being but little more than half the size of their mates. Pleased as I was at making acquaintance with this little bird, I was still more gratified at finding its nest and eggs. Natty and Jemmy, two intelligent and faithful natives, of the Yarrundi tribe, and who always accompanied me, also caught several of the young which had not left the nest many days.

In addition to the districts above named, I observed it, although rarely, in the interior of the country north of the Liverpool Plains. Before I left Sydney a single specimen was sent me from South Australia, and in my recently arrived collection from Swan River I found both the bird and its eggs; these circumstances proving that it possesses a range of longitude extending from one side of the continent to the other, and in all probability it inhabits a great portion of the northern interior. In Western Australia it is stated to inhabit clear open spots of grass, and may occasionally be met with in the thick scrub, but its most favourite retreat is the grassy valleys of the interior adjacent to water.

It breeds in September and October. The nest is slightly constructed of grasses placed in a shallow depression of the ground under the shelter of a small tuft of grass: the eggs are four in number, of a dirty white, very thickly blotched all over with markings of chestnut, eleven lines and a half long by nine lines broad: the eggs from Western Australia are much lighter in colour, and have the chestnut blotchings much more minute.

The stomach is extremely muscular, and the food consists of grasshoppers and other insects, seeds, etc.

Head, ear-coverts, and all the upper surface chestnut-red; the crown of the head in some specimens has a longitudinal mark of buff down the centre; the feathers of the back, rump, scapularies, and sides of the chest margined with buff, within which is a narrow line of black running in the same direction; the feathers of the lower part of the back are also crossed by several narrow irregular bands of black; primaries light brown, margined with buff on their internal edges; throat, chest, and flanks sandy buff, passing into white on the abdomen; bill horn-colour; irides straw-white; legs and feet yellowish white.

The above is the description of a female: the male has the feathers on the sides of the chest conspicuously margined with buff.

The Plate represents a male and female of the natural size.