

HEMIPODIUS VARIUS.

Varied Hemipode.

Perdix varia, Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. lxiii.

New Holland Partridge, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 283.

Varied Quail, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. viii. p. 344. no. 88.

Hemipodius varius, Temm. Pl. Col., 454. f. 1.—Gould in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part II.

Turnix varius, Vieill. 2nd Edit. du Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxxiv.—Ib. Ency. Méth., part i. p. 331.—List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., part iii. p. 41.

Moó-ro-lum, Aborigines of the lowland districts of Western Australia.

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

AMONG the game birds of Australia the Varied Hemipode plays a rather prominent part, for although its flesh is not so good for the table as that of the little partridge and quail, *Synoicus Australis* and *Coturnix pectoralis*, it is a bird which is not to be despised when the game-bag is emptied at the end of a day's sport, as it forms a not unacceptable variety to its contents. Although it does not actually associate with either of the birds mentioned above, it is often found in the same districts, and all three species may be procured in the course of a morning's walk in any part of the colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. The natural habits of the *Hemipodius varius* lead it to frequent sterile stony ridges, interspersed with scrubby trees and moderately thick grass; the quail, on the other hand, tenants the open plains and fields of corn; the little partridge loves to dwell in swampy lands, where the herbage is rank and green; and these particulars relative to the habits of the three birds in question being known to the colonists who have paid any attention to sporting, it is easy for them, by varying their ground, to procure either of the species they desire to obtain.

The Varied Hemipode is very common in all parts of Van Diemen's Land suitable to its habits, hills of moderate elevation and of a dry stony character being the localities preferred; it is also numerous on the sandy and sterile islands in Bass's Straits; on the continent of Australia, it is abundant in New South Wales and South Australia: specimens from Western Australia, which at first sight appear to be identical with the bird here figured, are found to be smaller in size and to differ in their markings, and they will probably prove to be a distinct species. Van Diemen's Land specimens, having an average weight of five ounces each, are rather larger than those of New South Wales; no difference however occurs in their markings; I therefore consider them to be mere local varieties and not distinct species: no specimen has yet come under my notice from the north coast, and the range of the species doubtless does not extend to within several degrees of that latitude.

It runs remarkably quick, and when flushed flies low, its pointed wings giving it much the appearance of a snipe or sandpiper. When running or walking over the ground the neck is stretched out and the head carried very high, which together with the rounded contour of the back give it a very grotesque appearance. The breeding-season commences in August or September and terminates in January, during which period at least two broods are reared. The eggs are invariably four in number, and are either deposited on the bare ground or in a slightly constructed nest of grasses, placed in some slight hollow, not unfrequently under the lee of a stone or at the foot of a tuft of grass; they are very similar in form to those of the Sandpipers, being more pointed than those of other gallinaceous birds; they are of a very pale buff, very minutely and thickly spotted and freckled with reddish brown, chestnut and purplish grey, one inch and a quarter long by one inch broad.

It has rather a loud plaintive note, which is often repeated.

One very remarkable feature connected with this bird, and indeed with all the species of the genus, is the large size of the female when compared with that of her mate; so great, in fact, is the difference, that the figures in the accompanying Plate scarcely make it sufficiently apparent; no difference however exists in their colour and markings.

The young run as soon as they are hatched, and their appearance then assimilates so closely to that of the young partridges and quails that they can scarcely be distinguished. The pretty downy coat with which they are then covered soon gives place to feathers, whose markings and colours resemble, but are less brilliant than those of the adult.

The food of this species consists of insects, grain and berries; of the former many kinds are eaten, but