

GEOPELIA CUNEATA.

Graceful Ground-Dove.

Columba cuneata, Lath. Ind. Orn., Supp., p. 61.—Wagl. Syst. Av., sp. 107.

——— *Macquarie*, Quoy et Gaim. Voy. de l'Uranie, Ois., t. 31.—Ib. Knip et Prevost, Hist. Nat. des Pig., t. 41.

——— *spiloptera*, Vig. in Zool. Journ., vol. v. p. 275.

Geopelia cuneata, List of Brit. Mus. Coll., Part III. p. 11.

Men-na-brun-ka, Aborigines of the mountain districts of Western Australia.

Turtle Dove, Colonists of Swan River.

THE beautiful little Dove here represented is at once remarkable for the elegance of its contour, the chaste and quiet colouring of its plumage, and for its tame and gentle disposition, all of which combine to render it a general favourite with the Australians; and it is a matter of surprise to me that it has not long ere this been a denizen of their aviaries and sent alive to England, few birds being likely to bear confinement more contentedly.

I have specimens collected in every one of the Australian colonies, even that of Port Essington; I encountered it myself on the flat and fertile districts of the Upper Hunter in New South Wales, and James Macarthur, Esq., informed me that it is sometimes seen on his estate at Camden; at the same time, as it is rarely met with on the seaside of the mountain ranges, but occurs in considerable numbers on the plains of the interior, so far as they have yet been explored, it must be regarded as an inhabitant of the central portion of the country, over the whole of which vast space it is doubtless numerously dispersed.

Its natural food being the seeds of grasses and leguminous plants, it is observed more frequently on the ground than among the trees; I sometimes met with it in small flocks, but more often in pairs or singly. It runs over the ground with a short bobbing motion of the tail, and while feeding is so remarkably tame as almost to admit of its being taken by the hand, and if forced to take wing it merely flies to the nearest trees, and there remains motionless among the branches until it again descends to the ground. I not unfrequently observed it close to the open doors of the huts of the stock-keepers of the interior, who, from its being so constantly before them, regard it with little interest.

The nest is a frail but beautiful structure, formed of the stalks of a few flowering grasses, crossed and interwoven after the manner of the other pigeons. One sent me from Western Australia is "composed," says Mr. Gilbert, "of a small species of knotted everlasting-like plant (*Composita*), and was placed on the overhanging grasses of the *Xanthorrhæa*; but the bird usually constructs a very loosely formed nest in the fork of a tree. During my first visit to this part of the country only two situations were known as places of resort for this species, and I did not meet with more than five or six examples; since that period it has become extremely abundant, and now a pair or two may occasionally be seen about most of the settlers' houses on the Avon, becoming apparently very tame and familiarized to man. It utters a rather singular note, which at times very much resembles the distant crowing of a cock. The term *Men-na-brun-ka* is applied to it by the natives from a traditionary idea that the bird originally introduced the *Men-na*, a kind of gum which exudes from a species of *Acacia*, and which is one of the favourite articles of food of the natives."

The eggs are white and two in number, eleven-sixteenths of an inch long by seven-sixteenths broad.

The sexes, although bearing a general resemblance to each other, may be readily distinguished by the smaller size of the female, by the browner hue of her wing-feathers, and by the spotting of her upper surface not being so numerous or so regular as in the male.

The male has the head, neck and breast delicate grey, passing into white on the abdomen and under tail-coverts; back and scapularies cinnamon-brown; wing-coverts dark grey; each feather of the wing-coverts and scapularies with two spots, one on the edge of either web near the tip, of white encircled with black; spurious wing and primaries brown, the latter rufous on their inner webs for two-thirds of their length; four centre tail-feathers grey, deepening into black at the extremity and with black shafts; the remainder greyish black at the base, and pure white for the remainder of their length; irides in some instances bright red, and the naked skin round the eyes light scarlet; in others the irides and naked skin round the eyes are pale greenish yellow; bill dark olive-brown; feet reddish flesh-colour in some instances, in others yellowish.

The female differs in having the back of the head, neck and upper surface browner, and the spots on the wings larger than the male.

The Plate represents the two sexes of the natural size.