

GEOPHAPS SCRIPTA.

Partridge Bronze-wing.

Columba scripta, Temm. Pl. Col. 187; and in Linn. Trans., vol. xiii. p. 127.—Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiv. p. 284.

Geophaps scripta, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., February 8, 1842.—G. R. Gray, Appendix to Gen. of Birds, p. 12.

THIS Pigeon has more than ordinary claims to the attention both of the ornithologist and the epicure, since to the first it is of interest as being a typical example of a minor group of the *Columbidae*, whose habits and economy are very peculiar, and to the second as a most delicate viand for the table. It is, unquestionably, the best bird I ate while in Australia; and, in my opinion, it is second to none in any other part of the world: the quality of its flesh is so superior to that of the Common Bronze-wing, that the latter cannot for a moment be put in comparison with it; for, as in the Wonga-wonga Pigeon, another most excellent bird for the table, both the upper and under pectoral muscles are white, juicy and delicately flavoured, while in the Common Bronze-wing the upper muscle is brown. It is to be regretted that a bird possessing such high qualifications as an article of food should be so exclusively a denizen of the plains of the interior that it is available to few except inland travellers. It is equally interesting to the sportsman, no other bird not strictly gallinaceous offering so close a resemblance to the members of the genus *Perdix* (Partridges) in many of its habits and manners as does the Partridge Bronze-wing; and I conceive that in no instance is the theory of the analogical relationship of one group to another more strikingly borne out than in the close resemblance of the members of this group to those of the genus *Perdix*.

When on the ground it has so much the carriage and actions of a Partridge that it might readily be mistaken for one. I sometimes observed it in pairs, but more frequently in small coveys of from four to six in number, which, when approached, instead of seeking safety by flight, ran off with exceeding rapidity in an opposite direction, and crouched down either on the bare plain or among any scanty herbage that appeared to offer the least shelter. It is withal so excessively tame, that it is not unfrequently killed by the bullock-drivers with their whips, while passing along the roads with their teams. The colouring of the bird assimilates so closely to that of the ground or the herbage, that when crouched down for shelter it is not easily to be seen, and they will often lie until it is all but trodden upon. It rises with extreme rapidity, making a loud burring noise with the wings and generally spinning off, not, as might be supposed, to another part of the plain, but to the horizontal branch of a large tree, on which it immediately squats down quite flat, in the same line with the branch, from which it is not easily distinguished or driven off. The shortness of its wings gives it much the appearance of a Partridge during flight, and it also assimilates in the arrow-like direction of its course to the nearest tree, terminating with a skimming motion of the wings before alighting.

The nearest point to the colony of New South Wales in which I met with this bird was the Liverpool Plains, from whence to as far as I proceeded on the Lower Namoi its numbers appeared to increase. I have also heard from other travellers that it is equally abundant on all the plains and banks of the rivers between New South Wales and the Murray in South Australia; but I have never yet observed it in collections either from the northern or western portions of the continent.

The eggs are two in number, and are deposited on the bare ground without any nest. The young both run and fly strongly when they are only as large as a quail, as I satisfactorily ascertained by killing one which rose before me; but at what bird I had fired I had not the slightest conception until I picked it up.

In speaking of this bird as an inhabitant of the plains, I must not fail to mention that it was far more abundant on such as were intersected by rivers and water-holes; in fact, a good supply of water seemed to be essential to its existence. Its chief food is the seeds of various grasses and other small plants, to which are added at some seasons insects and berries.

Head, all the upper surface and chest light brown, the extremities of the wing-coverts and the edges of the primaries being much paler; the outer webs of several of the greater coverts with a speculum of greenish purple obscured, barred with a darker tint; chin and throat, a broad stripe from the lower mandible to beneath the eye, another stripe from the posterior angle of the eye down the side of the neck, and a spot on the side of the neck snow-white, the interspaces being jet-black, the latter colour surrounding the eye, and also forming a crescent across the lower part of the throat; abdomen grey; flanks black; all but the two centre tail-feathers greyish brown at the base and largely tipped with black; bill white; irides black; naked skin surrounding the eye bluish lead-colour; the corners immediately before and behind the eye mealy vinous red; feet and frontal scales dark purplish vinous red.

The figures are of the natural size.