

# PERISTERA HISTRIONICA, *Gould.*

## Harlequin Bronzewing.

*Peristera histrionica*, Gould, in Proc. of Zool. Soc., September 8, 1840.

I FIRST met with this new and beautiful pigeon on the 2nd of December, 1839, while encamped on the banks of the Mokai, a river which rises in the Liverpool range, and falls into the Namoi.

I was strolling beside the stream at sunrise, when one of these birds rose from the water's edge, flew to the distance of forty yards, and again alighted on the ground, where it assumed much of the air and actions of a Sand Grouse (*Pterocles*). A fortnight after this I descended the Namoi, about one hundred and fifty miles, and while traversing the extensive plains, studded here and there with patches of trees that skirt the Nundawar range, I was suddenly, but agreeably startled by an immense flock of these birds rising before me, and again alighting on the ground at a short distance; finding they would not admit of near approach, I secreted myself, and desired my aboriginal companion Natty to go round and turn the flock towards me: the whole simultaneously rose as before with a loud burring noise, so closely packed, that had they not passed me at a considerable angle, many must have fallen to my shot; as it was I succeeded in obtaining four, two of which were males. Alarmed at so unusual a sound in these solitudes as the discharge of a gun, the remainder winged their way rapidly out of sight. About a week afterwards, while returning from hunting the kangaroo on a distant part of the same plain, we approached a small group of Myalls (*Acacia pendula*), and Natty suddenly called out, "Look massa;" in an instant the air before us seemed literally filled with a dense mass of these birds, which had suddenly rose from under the trees at his exclamation; we had scarcely time to raise our guns before they were seventy or eighty yards off; our united discharge, however, brought down eight additional specimens, all of which being merely winged and fluttering about, attracted the attention of our kangaroo dogs, and it was with the greatest difficulty they could be prevented from tearing them to pieces; in the midst of the scramble, a kite, with the utmost audacity, came to the attack, and would doubtless, in spite of our presence, have carried off his share, had not the contents of my second barrel stopped his career. This was the last time I met with the Harlequin Bronzewing. I took every opportunity of making inquiries respecting it of the natives of the interior, and of the stockmen at the out stations, both of whom assured me they had never observed it before the present season. If this assertion be correct, and there seems to be no reason for doubting it, whence has this fine bird made its appearance? Had it always been common in those parts of the country, its size and its beauty must have attracted the attention of the various travellers who have, from time to time, traversed the interior. May we not reasonably suppose that it had migrated from the central regions of this vast continent, which has yet much in store for future discovery? The great length of wing which this bird possesses, admirably adapts it for inhabiting such a country as the far interior is generally imagined to be, since by this means it may readily pass with great ease, and in a short time, over a vast extent of country; this great power of flight is also a highly necessary qualification to enable it to traverse the great distances it is probably often necessitated to do in search of water.

On dissecting the specimens obtained, I found their crops half filled with small hard seeds, which they procured from the open plains, but of what kinds I was unable to determine.

Forehead, stripe from behind the eye, forming a circle round the ear-coverts, and a crescent-shaped mark across the throat snow-white; the remainder of the head, throat and ear-coverts jet-black; all the upper surface, wing-coverts, flanks and two centre tail-feathers deep cinnamon-brown; edge of the shoulder dull white; spurious wing bluish gray, slightly margined with white; primaries brownish gray, margined on their outer web with rufous at the base, largely marked with the same on the inner web, forming a conspicuous patch on the under surface of the wing, and with an oval spot of white at the tip of each feather; secondaries crossed by a beautiful deep crimson bronze on the outer webs near the tip; lateral tail-feathers bluish gray at the base, passing into black toward the extremity, which is white; breast and centre of the abdomen bluish gray; under tail-coverts light buff; nostrils and bill black; bare skin surrounding the eye purplish black; irides dark brown; frontal scales of the legs and feet lilac-red; hind part flesh-red.

The female has only a faint indication of the markings which adorn the male, and is altogether much less brilliant in her appearance.

The figures are those of a male and female of the natural size.