

CARPOPHAGA LUCTUOSA.

Torres Strait Fruit Pigeon.

Columba luctuosa, Temm. Pl. Col., 247. — Wagl. Syst. Av. Columba, sp. 23.
Mō-koit, Aborigines of Port Essington.

THIS bird is commonly known by the name of the Torres Strait Pigeon, from its being so abundant there that few voyagers pass the straits during its breeding-season without encountering it. It arrives in the Cobourg Peninsula at the beginning of November and departs again in April or May. Like every other true *Carpophaga* it is strictly arboreal, living among the branches of the highest trees and feeding upon various fruits and berries. Mr. Gilbert's notes respecting it are as follows :—"This bird may generally be seen in great numbers wherever the wild nutmeg is to be found, and so exclusively does it confine itself to the trees in search of food, that during the whole time I was in the country I never saw one rise from the ground, nor did I meet with any person in the settlement who had. It flies very rapidly, and generally mounts up to so great a height as to be beyond the range of a gun. The only time at which I could succeed in procuring specimens was the evening, when it resorts to the mangroves on the small islands lying off the shore, or to the dense thickets a short distance inland; at this time it may be seen arriving in small flocks of from ten to fifteen to roost for the night. Its note, like that of the other pigeons, is a *coo*, but at times, particularly when it has paired, it is much louder and deeper than that of any other species I ever heard.

"It pairs and commences breeding immediately after its arrival in November, and I have obtained eggs as late as the middle of January. The nest is formed of a few sticks laid across one another in opposite directions, and is so slight a structure that the eggs may usually be seen through the interstices from beneath, and it is so flat that it appears wonderful how the eggs are retained upon it when the branch is waving about in the wind; it is usually built on the horizontal branch of a mangrove, and it would seem that it prefers for this purpose a branch overhanging water. That it never lays more than one egg appears to me without a doubt, for upon visiting Table Head River on the eastern side of the harbour of Port Essington I found no less than twenty nests, all of which contained either a single egg or a single young bird."

The whole of the plumage buffy white, with the exception of the primaries, secondaries and greater wing-coverts, which are greyish black, and the tips of the tail-feathers, which are black, the black becoming of less extent as the feathers recede from the centre of the tail, until the outer feather is only slightly tipped; this feather is also broadly margined with black on the outer web for three-fourths of its length from the base; the under tail-coverts also have an irregular band of black near the tip of each feather; irides dark brown; bill dark greenish grey, except the tip, which is light yellow.

The figure is of the natural size.