

CARPOPHAGA LEUCOMELA.

White-headed Fruit Pigeon.

Columba leucomela, Temm. in Trans. Linn. Soc., vol. xiii. p. 126.—Ib. Pl. Col., 186.

Columba leucomelana, Wagl. Syst. Av., pars i. Columba, sp. 56.

Columba Norfolkensis, Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. lx.?

Norfolk Pigeon, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. Add. p. 374?—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. viii. p. 30?

THIS fine species of Pigeon is an inhabitant of those vast primæval forests of New South Wales to which the colonists have applied the name of Brushes. I found it very numerous on Mosquito and the other low islands near the mouth of the river Hunter, as well as in the cedar brushes of the Liverpool range; I believe that it breeds in both those districts; and that it never quits these luxuriant forests is the more probable, as a plentiful supply of fruits and berries is furnished by the various species of trees at every season of the year; the wild fig, the palm-nut and the grape, constitute a considerable portion of its food. I have frequently observed it sweeping over the forests in flocks of from ten to fifty in number, and often seen it also in pairs. It feeds on the wild fig, whose slender branches are borne down by its weight, particularly when it clings to the extreme end of the spray to obtain the best and ripest fruit; in this mode of clinging and in many of its actions it far more resembles the larger Honey-eaters and Parrots than the Pigeons; an examination moreover of the structure of the foot of a typical *Carpophaga* will show that it deviates from that of the true Pigeons, and that it is beautifully adapted for the duties it is intended to perform. I have never seen this bird on the ground, not even to procure water, and the form of its foot is as little adapted for terrestrial progression, as it is admirably constructed for use among the smaller branches of the trees.

The powers of flight of this species are very great, its voluminous wing enabling it to pass from one part of the forest to another, or to a new district in a comparatively short space of time; hence flocks may frequently be observed passing over the tops of the trees, forsaking a locality they have exhausted of its supplies and in search of another where food is more abundant.

The nest of this species, like that of the other Columbidae, is a slight flat structure formed of small sticks and twigs; the eggs are frequently only one, and never more than two in number, of a pure white.

The sexes may be distinguished by the smaller size of the female, and by her colours being less strongly contrasted than those of her mate, the yellowish white of the head and breast blending into the darker colouring of the other parts.

The male has the head, neck and breast white, washed with buff, particularly on the crown; all the upper surface, wings and tail greyish black; all the feathers of the back, rump and lesser wing-coverts bordered with bronzy-purple in some, and greenish purple in others; flanks slate-colour; abdomen dingy-buff; bill for two-thirds from the base beautiful pink-red, covered with a mealy substance; tip of the bill yellowish white tinged with lilac; irides large and of a rich yellowish hazel in some specimens, reddish orange in others; naked skin of the orbits mealy pink-red; feet buff, with the scales pink-red and the nails white.

The figures are of the natural size, and represent the bird feeding on one of the fruits of the brushes called wild cherry by the colonists.