

# MELOPSITTACUS UNDULATUS.

## Warbling Grass-Parrakeet.

*Psittacus undulatus*, Shaw, Nat. Misc., pl. 673.—Kuhl, Consp. Psitt. in Nova Acta, &c., vol. x. p. 49.

*Undulated Parrot*, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. ii. p. 179, pl. xxvi.

*Undulated Parrakeet*, *Psittacus undulatus*, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. viii. p. 469.

*Nanodes undulatus*, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 277.—Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiv. p. 119.—Lear's Ill. Psitt., pl. 13.—Selby, Nat. Lib., Parrots, p. 181, pl. 19.

*Euphema undulata*, Wagl. Mon. Psitt. in Abhand., &c., pp. 493, 545, and 707.

*Canary Parrot*, Colonists.

*Betcherrygah*, Natives of Liverpool Plains.

AMONG the numerous members of the family of Parrots inhabiting Australia, this lovely little bird is pre eminent both for beauty of plumage and elegance of form, which, together with its extreme cheerfulness of disposition and sprightliness of manner, render it an especial favourite with all who have had an opportunity of seeing it alive. This animated disposition is as conspicuous in confinement as in its native wilds; a pair now before me are in exuberant health after having braved the severities of a passage to this country by way of Cape Horn in the midst of winter.

The first notice of this species was published by Dr. Shaw in his "Naturalist's Miscellany," and until lately, a single specimen, forming part of the collection of the Linnean Society, was the only one known; more recently, however, numbers have been added to our museums, and the bird is now far from being scarce. In all probability it is generally dispersed over the central parts of Australia; but is so exclusively an inhabitant of the vast inland plains, or, if I may so call it, basin of the interior, that it is rarely seen between the mountain-ranges and the coast. In the whole southern portion of the continent it is strictly migratory, appearing in large flocks in spring, when the grass-seeds are plentiful, and retiring again after the breeding-season is over to more northern latitudes. My friend Captain Sturt, in one of his letters, dated at Adelaide, South Australia, informs me, that "The Scolloped Parrakeets," the name given to these birds in that part of the country, "are found in vast flocks in the interior, and make their appearance here about October, following each other in flights like Starlings, in company with the little Crested Parrot (*Nymphicus Novæ-Hollandiæ*), holding a due north and south course. The flight of both is very rapid, and although an interval of half an hour may elapse, they all wend their way in the same direction. Whence come they?"

On arriving at Brezi, to the north of Liverpool Plains, in the beginning of December, I found myself surrounded by numbers, breeding in all the hollow spouts of the large *Eucalypti* bordering the Mokai; and on crossing the plains between that river and the Peel, in the direction of the Turi Mountain, I saw them in flocks of many hundreds feeding upon the grass-seeds that were there abundant. So numerous were they, that I determined to encamp on the spot, in order to observe their habits and procure specimens. The nature of their food and the excessive heat of these plains compels them frequently to seek the water; hence my camp, which was pitched near some small pools, was constantly surrounded by large numbers, arriving in flocks varying from twenty to a hundred or more. The hours at which they were most numerous were early in the morning, and some time before dusk in the evening. Before going down to drink, they alight on the neighbouring trees, settling together in clusters, sometimes on the dead branches, and at others on the drooping boughs of the *Eucalypti*. Their flight is remarkably straight and rapid, and is generally accompanied by a screeching noise. During the heat of the day, when sitting motionless among the leaves of the gum-trees, they so closely assimilate in colour, particularly on the breast, that they are with difficulty detected.

It is known that migratory birds after a time forsake the districts they have been accustomed to frequent, and resort to others where they had scarcely ever before been seen: in confirmation of this view, I may state, that the natives had never before observed this species in the districts where I found it so abundant; while on the lower Namoi, where formerly they had been very numerous, there was this year scarcely one to be found.

The breeding-season is at its height in December, and by the end of the month the young are generally capable of providing for themselves; they then assemble in vast flights, preparatory to their great migratory movement. The eggs are three or four in number, pure white, nine lines long by seven lines in diameter, and are deposited in the holes and spouts of the gum-trees without any nest.

The beauty and interesting nature of this little bird naturally made me anxious to bring home living examples; I accordingly captured about twenty fully fledged birds, and kept them alive for some time; but the difficulties necessarily attendant upon travelling in a new country rendering it impracticable to afford them the attention they required, I regret to say the whole were lost. My brother-in-law, Mr. Charles Coxen, who resides on the Peel, having succeeded in rearing several, kindly presented me with four, two of which,