

## PTILORHIS PARADISEA, Swains.

### Australian Rifle-bird.

*Ptilorhis paradisea*, Swains. Zool. Journ. i. p. 481 (1825).—Less. Hist. Nat. Ois. Parad. pp. 25, 213, pls. 29, 30 (1835).—Gould, B. Austr. iv. pl. 100 (1847).—Reichenb. Vög. Neuholl. p. 93 (1849).—Bp. Consp. i. p. 412 (1850).—Cab. Mus. Hein. Th. i. p. 214 (1851).—Reichenb. Handb. Scans. p. 328, Taf. dcix. figs. 3083-85 (1851).—Gould, Handb. B. Austr. i. p. 591 (1865).—Elliot, P. Z. S. 1871, p. 582.—Id. Mon. Parad. pl. xxv. (1873).—Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. iii. p. 154 (1877).—Ramsay, Proc. Linn. Soc. N. S. W. ii. p. 191 (1878).—Eudes-Deslongch. Ann. Mus. d'Hist. Nat. Caen, i. p. 8 (1880).—Ramsay, Tab. List Austr. B. p. 15 (1888).

*Epimachus regius*, Less. Voy. 'Coquille,' Zool. i. p. 667, pl. 28 (1828).—Id. Cent. Zool. pl. 3 (1830).

*Epimachus brisbanii*, Less. Man. d'Orn. ii. p. 6 (1828).—Wilson, Ill. Zool. pl. 9 (1831).

*Epimachus paradiseus*, Gray, Gen. B. i. p. 94, pl. xxxii. (1848).—Schl. J. f. O. 1861, p. 386.—Id. Mus. P.-B., Coraces, p. 97 (1867).

*Ptilornis paradisea*, Gray, Hand-l. B. i. p. 105, no. 1271 (1869).

THE Australian Rifle-bird is one of the most interesting birds of that continent, as well as one of the most beautiful. Although the skins are sent to London in large numbers for the purposes of decoration of ladies' hats, and the bird is now to be found in every museum, very little has been recorded of its habits since the days of Gould, and its egg seems to be undescribed up to the present moment.

The area of country inhabited by the Rifle-bird cannot be considered very extensive, and, if the present mode of destruction continues to be carried on, there is no doubt that the bird will soon become extinct.

Dr. Pierson Ramsay, in his 'Tabular List of Australian Birds,' gives the range of the *Ptilorhis* as the Wide Bay and the Richmond and Clarence River districts. Mr. Gould's note on the species is as follows:—

"Hitherto this magnificent bird has only been discovered in the brushes of the south-eastern portion of Australia; so limited in fact does its range of habitat seem to be, that the river Hunter to the southward, and Moreton Bay to the eastward, may be considered its natural boundaries in either direction." Mr. Gould never saw the bird himself alive, but Mr. F. Strange, who was an excellent field naturalist, forwarded him the following note:—"The principal resort of the Rifle-bird is among the large cedar-brushes that skirt the mountains and creeks of the Manning, Hastings, MacLeay, Bellenger, Clarence, and Richmond Rivers, and there, during the pairing-months of November and December, the male bird is easily found. At that time of the year, as soon as the sun's rays gild the tops of the trees, up goes the Rifle-bird from the thickets below to the higher branches of the pines (*Araucaria macleayana*) which there abound. It always affects a situation where three or four of these trees occur about two hundred yards apart, and there the morning is spent in short flights from tree to tree, in sunning and preening its feathers, and in uttering its song each time it leaves one tree for another. The sound emitted resembles a prolonged utterance of the word 'Yass,' by which the bird is known to the natives of the Richmond River. In passing from tree to tree, it also makes an extraordinary noise resembling the shaking of a piece of new stiff silk. After 10 A.M. it descends lower down, and then mostly resorts to the thick limb of a cedar-tree (*Cedrela australis*), and there continues its cry of *Yass* at intervals of two minutes' duration; at this time, owing to the thickness of the limb and the closeness with which the bird keeps to it, it is very difficult of detection: wait with patience, however, and you will soon see him, with wings extended, and his head thrown on his back, whirling round and round first one way and then another."

Mr. A. P. Goodwin, who has probably seen more Rifle-birds than any other man, has kindly given me his experiences of the species, which are as follows:—

"The Rifle-bird is now mostly found on the head-waters of the Clarence, Richmond, and Tweed Rivers in New South Wales, where it inhabits the large cedar-scrubs.

"In the months of July and August the male bird roves about, but during the pairing-months of September, October, and November it is to be found in one place. It is never seen in numbers, but it often happens during the months of incubation that when a male is shot another will take its place. It is generally found near water, where, after having its bath in the morning, it will seek the highest tree-top and there preen its feathers and send forth its shrill note of 'skragha,' which may be heard for a long distance.

"Its food consists of insects and fruit. When seeking for the former, it may be seen in the position of a