

ACANTHOGENYS RUFOGULARIS, *Gould.*

Spiny-cheeked Honey-eater.

Acanthogenys rufogularis, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 153; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part IV.

NUMEROUS and diversified as are the forms of the great family of the *Meliphagidæ*, the present species has always appeared to me more than usually interesting, because in the first place few are more elegantly formed, and in the second it differs widely from all others in plumage, and in the singular spiny processes which adorn its cheeks and ear-coverts. In its habits and general economy it bears a close alliance to the Wattle-birds (*Anthochaera*), but still presents in these respects sufficient differences to warrant its separation into a distinct genus or subgenus, as naturalists may think fit to designate the division.

The Spiny-cheeked Honey-eater ranges very widely over the interior of Australia. I observed it to be very numerous on the Lower Namoi to the northward of the Liverpool Plains in New South Wales. It was the commonest species of Honey-eater I encountered in the interior of South Australia; and I have also received a pair of this or a closely allied species from the interior of Western Australia; as, however, some difference exists between these latter and the birds from New South Wales, I refrain, until I have seen other examples, from stating that it goes so far to the westward as the Swan River Settlement. It is not at all improbable that there may be two or more species of this singular form. Like the Brush Wattle-bird it is rather a shy species, but its presence may at all times be detected by the loud hollow whistling note which it frequently utters while on the wing, or while passing with a darting diving flight from tree to tree. It appears to give a decided preference to the Banksia and other trees growing upon sandy soil; its presence therefore is a certain indication of the poverty of the land in the immediate neighbourhood. It is very active among the trees, clinging and creeping about with the greatest ease and elegance of position, passing its brush-like tongue over the flowers of the Banksias as well as inserting it into the interstices for lurking insects, upon which, like all the other Honey-eaters, it partially subsists.

The nest, which is a round, rather deep, cup-shaped structure, is suspended from a fine branch of a low tree, and is composed of long wiry grasses, and now that the sheep is a denizen of the country, matted together both internally and externally with wool. The eggs are three in number, of a dull olive-buff, strongly dotted with deep chestnut-brown and bluish grey, the markings being most numerous at the larger end. Their average length is one inch, and breadth nine lines.

The sexes are so much alike, that, with the exception of the female being slightly inferior to her mate in size, no difference is perceptible.

Crown of the head, back and wings dusky brown, each feather margined with pale brown; upper tail-coverts with each feather dusky brown in the centre; stripe behind the eye and on the sides of the neck black, above which on the side of the neck another line of whitish mingled with dusky; hairs on the cheeks white; below the lower mandible a line of feathers, which are white crossed by black lines; throat and fore-part of the chest pale rufous; under surface dirty white, each feather striated with dusky brown; tail blackish brown, tipped with white; bare part of the face and base of the bill soft, pulpy, and of a pinky flesh-colour; irides bluish lead-colour; feet olive.

The Plate represents a male and female on a branch of one of the Banksias, all of the natural size.