

AMADINA GOULDIÆ.

Gouldian Finch.

Amadina Gouldiæ, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., January 23, 1844.

NOVELTY in itself has attractions, but when with novelty, beauty and elegance are combined, the attractions are augmented beyond measure. With this trite observation I here introduce to the notice of the ornithologist a species not only the most beautiful of the family to which it belongs, but which has its plumage adorned with colours and markings that render it conspicuously different from every other bird known; it is in fact beyond the power of my pen to describe or my pencil to portray anything like the splendour of the changeable hues of the lilac band which crosses the breast of this little gem, or the scarcely less beautiful green of the neck and golden-yellow of the breast, the latter colour being only equalled, certainly not surpassed, by the crest-feathers of the Golden Pheasant. Whenever this bird becomes so far common as to form a part of our preserved collections, or to add a living lustre to our aviaries, it cannot fail to become a general favourite. It is therefore with feelings of no ordinary nature that I have ventured to dedicate this new and lovely little bird to the memory of her, who in addition to being a most affectionate wife, for a number of years laboured so hard and so zealously assisted me with her pencil in my various works, but who, after having made a circuit of the globe with me, and braved many dangers with a courage only equalled by her virtues, and while cheerfully engaged in illustrating the present work, was by the Divine will of her Maker suddenly called from this to a brighter and better world; and I feel assured that in dedicating this bird to the memory of Mrs. Gould, I shall have the full sanction of all who were personally acquainted with her, as well as of those who only knew her by her delicate works as an artist.

A single specimen of apparently an adult male and two immature birds are all that ever came under my notice; for the former my especial thanks are due to my esteemed friend Benjamin Bynoe, Esq., Surgeon R.N., late of H.M.S. the Beagle, who obtained it in the Victoria River, on the north-west coast of Australia. The young birds were procured by Mr. Gilbert at Port Essington. These three examples are probably all that have been collected, and from the remote situation of the country of which it is a native, a long period is likely to elapse before the species becomes common.

“This would seem to be a very local species,” says Mr. Gilbert, “for I only met with it on Greenbill Island at the head of Van Diemen’s Gulf, where it inhabited the edges of the mangroves and thickets: when disturbed it invariably flew to the topmost branches of the loftiest gums, a habit I have not before observed in any other member of the genus. Its note is a very mournful sound, added to a double twit. Those I observed were feeding among the high grass in small families of from four to seven in number, and were very shy. The stomach is tolerably muscular, and the food consists of grass and other seeds.”

The adult has the forehead, lores, ear-coverts and throat, deep velvety-black; from behind the eye, round the occiput, and down the sides of the neck, a mark of verdigris-green, gradually blending into the yellowish green of the upper surface and wings; across the breast a broad band of shining lilac-purple, below which all the under surface is shining wax-yellow; bill flesh-white at the base, tipped with blood-red; feet flesh-colour.

The young bird has the head grey; upper surface light olive; under surface pale buff; chin white; primaries and tail brown; irides dark brown.

The figures are of the natural size.