

ESTRELLA BICHENOVII.

Bicheno's Finch.

Fringilla Bichenovii, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 258.—Jard. and Selb. Ill. Orn., vol. i. pl. xii. fig. 3.

THIS beautiful little Finch inhabits the extensive plains of the interior, particularly such portions of them as are thinly intersected with low scrubby trees and bushes. The localities in which my specimens were obtained were the Liverpool and Brezi Plains, and I have not yet received it from any other parts of Australia, but this may be attributed rather to the paucity of information respecting the interior than to any other cause; and as I have had occasion to remark with respect to other species, it will be impossible to determine the precise extent of the range of this bird until the country has been more fully explored.

The Bicheno's Finch is very tame in its disposition, and is generally to be observed on the ground, occupied in procuring the seeds of the grasses and other small plants, which form its principal food. At the time of my visit to the interior, which was in the month of December, it was assembled in small flocks of from four to eight in number; these, when flushed from among the grasses, would perch on the neighbouring bushes rather than fly off to any distance, and indeed the form of its wings and tail indicate that it possesses lesser powers of flight than many of the other Finches.

I was not fortunate enough to obtain its nest or eggs, neither did I ever hear it utter any kind of song; consequently I am unable to give any information on these points.

The male has the face, ear-coverts and throat pure white, completely surrounded by a band of black, which is broadest on the forehead; crown of the head, nape of the neck, and back broccoli-brown, each feather crossed by numerous transverse lines of a lighter tint; upper part of the rump black; lower part of the rump and upper tail-coverts snow-white; wings black, all the feathers except the primaries beautifully spotted with white; chest greyish white tinged with buff, bounded below by a broadish band of jet-black; abdomen and flanks buffy white; under tail-coverts and tail black; irides black, surrounded by a narrow black lash; bill beautiful pale blue.

The sexes, although having a similar character of marking, may be distinguished from each other by the male having the black bands of the chest and throat broader, and its plumage more brilliant. The young also at an early age possess the characteristic markings of the adult.

The Plate represents a male and a female of the natural size.