

CINCLORAMPHUS CRURALIS.

Brown Cincloramphus.

Megalurus cruralis, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 228.

Cincloramphus cruralis, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 150 ; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part IV.

As there are two, if not three, species of this very singular genus inhabiting the southern portion of Australia, which bear a great resemblance to each other, it becomes necessary to state that the bird represented in the accompanying Plate is the one commonly seen during the months of spring and summer in all the open districts of New South Wales, in which country it arrives in August, and after performing the task of incubation, departs again in January or February. Open downs, grassy flats and fields of corn are its favourite places of resort. It is certainly one of the most animated of the Australian birds. Had I not visited Australia and personally studied its habits, my credulity would have been severely taxed upon being informed that the two birds here figured represent the male and female of the same species, many genera having been instituted upon much slighter grounds of difference ; I had abundant proofs, however, that such is really the case, having seen many of the nests and eggs with the parent bird in the act of incubation, during the two seasons I spent in the country. In most of its habits and in its economy this bird closely assimilates to the Skylark of Europe. During the early months of spring it trips over the ground in the most sprightly manner with its tail nearly erect ; mounts on the dead limbs of trees and the fences of enclosures, and runs along them with the greatest dexterity ; at this season of the year also the male may be frequently seen running beside his diminutive partner, and so busily engaged in pouring forth his song for her amusement, as to be apparently unconscious of the presence of any other object. After the female has chosen the place for her nest, which is always on the ground, the male, like the Skylark, frequently mounts in the air with a tremulous motion of the wings, and after cheering her with his animated song, descends again to the ground or skims off to a neighbouring tree, and incessantly pours forth his voluble and not unpleasing notes.

I found it very abundant in all the Upper Hunter districts, as well as in all the surrounding country, both to the north and south : I killed numerous examples of both sexes, but not one male with the throat and under surface black, like specimens I have seen from Port Philip and South Australia, and which I consider to be specifically distinct.

The male has the entire plumage brown, each feather margined with brownish white ; a large patch of dark brown on the centre of the abdomen ; bill, inside of the mouth and tongue black ; irides hazel ; feet flesh-brown.

The female is similar in colour, but the feathers being more broadly margined with brownish white gives her a paler hue than her mate ; the under surface is also much lighter, and the patch in the centre of the abdomen is much smaller.

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