

EPTHIANURA ALBIFRONS.

White-fronted Epthianura.

Acanthiza albifrons, Jard. and Selb. Ill. Orn., vol. ii. pl. 56. figs. 1 and 2.

I FIRST met with this species in a state of nature on the small islands in Bass's Straits, where it had evidently been breeding, as I observed several old nests in the Barilla and other stunted bushes which clothe those isolated spots, particularly Chalky and Green Islands, immediately contiguous to Flinders. I did not observe it in Van Diemen's Land or to the southward of the localities above mentioned. It would appear that it extends over the whole of the southern portion of the Australian continent, as I have specimens in my collection which were killed at Swan River, in South Australia, and in New South Wales: the extent of its range northwards is not known; I have never yet seen examples from the north coast.

It is a most sprightly and active little bird, particularly the male, whose white throat and banded chest render him much more conspicuous than the sombre-coloured female. As the structure of its toes and lengthened tertiaries would lead us to expect, its natural province is the ground, to which it habitually resorts, and decidedly evinces a preference to spots of a sterile and barren character. The male, like many of the Saxicoline birds, frequently perches either on the summit of a stone, or on the extremity of a dead and leafless branch. It is rather shy in its disposition, and when disturbed flies off with considerable rapidity to the distance of two or three hundred yards before it alights again. I observed it in small companies on the plains near Adelaide, over the hard clayey surface of which it tripped with amazing quickness, with a motion that can neither be described as a hop or a run, but something between the two, accompanied by a bobbing action of the tail.

Of its nidification, I regret to say, nothing is at present known.

The male has the forehead, face, throat and all the under surface pure white; occiput black; chest crossed by a broad crescent of deep black, the points of which run up the sides of the neck and join the black of the occiput; upper surface dark grey, with a patch of dark brown in the centre of each feather; wings dark brown; upper tail-coverts black; two centre tail-feathers dark brown; the remainder dark brown, with a large oblong patch of white on the inner web at the tip; irides, in some, beautiful reddish buff, in others yellow with a slight tinge of red on the outer edge of the pupil; bill and feet black.

The female has the crown of the head, all the upper surface, wings and tail greyish brown, with a slight indication of the oblong white spot on the inner webs of the latter; throat and under surface buffy white; and a slight crescent of black on the chest.

The figures are of the natural size.