

SPHENŒACUS GRAMINEUS, *Gould.*

Grass-loving Sphenœacus.

Sphenœacus gramineus, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part XIII. p. 19.

ALTHOUGH the present species is very generally dispersed over the whole of the southern portions of Australia and Van Diemen's Land in all situations suitable to its habits, it is as little known to the colonists as if it were not in existence, which is readily accounted for by its recluse nature and the localities it frequents, the thick beds of grasses, rushes and other kinds of herbage growing in low, damp and wet places on the mainland, and on such islands as those of Green and Actæon in D'Entrecasteaux' Channel, being its favourite places of resort. As may be supposed, it is a very shy species, and will almost allow itself to be trodden upon before it will quit the place of its concealment; in the open grassy beds of the flats it is more easily driven from its retreat, but even then it merely flies a few yards and then pitches again among the herbage. It would be very interesting to know whether the habits above described accord with those of the other members of the genus *Sphenœacus*, in which, with the concurrence of Mr. Strickland, who instituted it, I have placed the present bird.

Its song consists of four or five plaintively uttered notes, repeated five or six times in succession.

The nest is generally a very compact structure, and in Western Australia is formed of the soft tops of the flowering part of the reeds, and the thin skin-like coating of the reed-stalks, but occasionally of fine swamp-grasses, always lined with feathers; in some instances two large feathers are made to meet over the opening, which is near the top of the nest, and thus protects the inside from cold or rain: it is attached to two or three upright reeds about two feet from the surface of the water. The eggs, which are laid during the months of August and September, are four in number, nearly eight lines long and six lines broad; they are of a fleshy white, freckled and streaked all over, particularly at the larger end, with purplish red; in some instances large obscure blotches of reddish grey appear as beneath the surface of the shell.

The sexes present no difference in size or colour, and there is scarcely any variation in specimens from Van Diemen's Land, Swan River and New South Wales.

Stripe over the eye white; all the upper surface brown, the centre of the feathers being dark brown; secondaries brownish black, margined with buff; tail pale reddish brown, with dark brown shafts; under surface grey, passing into black on the flanks and vent; each feather of the breast with a very minute line of dark brown down the centre; bill and tarsi fleshy brown.

The figures are of the natural size.