

RHIPIDURA MOTACILLOIDES, *Vig. and Horsf.*

Black Fantailed Flycatcher.

Rhipidura Motacilloides, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 248.

Wil-la-ring, Aborigines of the lowland, and

Jit-te-jit-te, Aborigines of the mountain districts of Western Australia.

Wagtail Flycatcher, of the Colonists of Swan River.

WITH the exception of Van Diemen's Land, this bird has been found in every part of Australia yet visited by Europeans. A slight difference is observable in the size of the specimens from different localities, those from New South Wales being the largest and those from Port Essington the least: the latter may hereafter prove to be specifically distinct.

At the same time that it is one of the most widely diffused, it is also one of the most tame and familiar of the Australian birds, and consequently a general favourite; it is constantly about the houses, gardens and stock yards of the settlers, often running along the backs and close to the noses of the cattle in order to secure the insects which are roused and attracted by the heat from their nostrils, along the roofs of the buildings, the tops of palings, gates, &c.; constructing its pretty nest beneath the verandah, and even entering the rooms to capture its insect prey; it passes much of its time on the ground, over which it runs and darts with the utmost celerity, and when skirting the stream with tail erect and shaking from side to side, it presents an appearance very similar to that of the English Black and White Wagtail (*Motacilla Yarellii*); the movements of the tails of the two birds are, however, very different, that of the European being perpendicular, while that of the Australian is lateral.

Its song, which consists of a few rather loud and shrill notes, is continually poured forth throughout the entire night, especially if it be moonlight.

Its flight is at times gracefully undulating, at others it consists of a series of sudden zigzag starts, but is always of a very short duration; it never poises itself in the air, like the *Seisura volitans*, and never mounts higher than the tops of the trees, appearing to prefer hopping from tree to tree to flying.

It commences breeding in September and generally rears two or three broods. Its beautiful deep cup-shaped and compact nest is very often built on a branch overhanging water, or on the dead limb of a tree overshadowed by a living branch above it, but the usual and favourite site is the upper side of a fallen branch without the slightest shelter from the sun and rain, at about three or four feet from the ground; the nest itself is constructed of dried grasses, strips of bark, small clumps of grass, roots, &c., all bound and firmly matted together and covered over with cobwebs, the latter material being at times so similar in appearance to the bark of the branch, that the entire nest looks like an excrescence of the wood, consequently it is almost impossible to detect it; it is lined with a finer description of grass, small wiry fibrous roots or feathers. The eggs are generally three in number, of a dull greenish white, banded round the centre or towards the larger end with blotches and spots of blackish and chestnut-brown, which in some instances are very minute; the medium length of the egg is nine lines and a half by seven lines in breadth. On an intruder approaching the nest, the birds fly about and hover over his head, and will even sit on the same branch on which the nest is placed while the intruder is in the act of robbing it of the eggs; all the time uttering a peculiar cry, which may be compared to the sound of a child's rattle, or the noise produced by the small cog-wheels of a steam-mill.

The stomach is muscular, and the food consists of insects of various kinds.

The sexes are alike in plumage, and may be thus described:—

Head, neck, throat, sides of the chest, upper surface and tail, glossy greenish black; over each eye a narrow line of white; wings brown; wing-coverts with a small triangular spot of white at the tip; under surface pale buffy white; irides, bill and feet black.

The figures are of the natural size.