

ARTAMUS LEUCOPYGIALIS, *Gould.*

White-rumped Wood Swallow.

Artamus leucopygialis, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., February 8, 1842.

ON a careful comparison of specimens of the White-rumped *Artami* from India and the Indian Archipelago with those killed in Australia, I cannot but consider that at least two, if not three, species have been confounded under one name, and that the Australian bird had remained undescribed until characterized by me at the Meeting of the Zoological Society above quoted. The present species is most nearly allied to the *Artamus leucorhynchus*, but is readily distinguished from it by the blue colour of the bill; and I may here remark, that all the Australian birds have the bill fine pale blue, and are also considerably smaller in all their admeasurements than those of the islands to the northwards.

Van Diemen's Land and Western Australia are the only colonies in which this bird has not been observed; its range, therefore, over the continent may be considered as very general: in South Australia and New South Wales it would appear to be migratory, visiting those parts in summer for the purpose of breeding. Among other places where I observed it in considerable abundance was Mosquito, and the other small islands near the mouth of the Hunter, and on the borders of the rivers Mokai and Namoi, situated to the northward of Liverpool Plains; in these last-mentioned localities it was breeding among the large flooded gum-trees bordering the rivers.

The breeding-season commences in September and continues until January, during which period at least two broods are reared. In the Christmas week of 1839, at which time I was on the plains of the interior, in the direction of the Namoi, the young progeny of the second brood were perched in pairs or threes together, on a dead twig near their nest, as represented in the Plate. They were constantly visited and fed by the adults, who were hawking about for insects in great numbers, some performing their evolutions above the tops and among the branches of the trees, while others were sweeping over the open plain with great rapidity of flight, making in their progress through the air the most rapid and abrupt turns; at one moment rising to a considerable altitude and the next descending to within a few feet of the ground, as the insects of which they were in pursuit arrested their attention. In the brushes, on the contrary, the flight of this bird is more soaring and of a much shorter duration, particularly when hawking in the open glades, which frequently teem with insect life. When flying near the ground the white mark on the rump shows very conspicuously, and strikingly reminds one of the House Marten of our own country.

Two nests, taken in November on a small island in Coral Bay, near the entrance of the harbour at Port Essington, were compactly formed of dried wiry grass and the fine plants growing on the beach; they were placed in a fork of a slender mangrove-tree within fifteen feet of the water, in which they were growing; but like several other Australian birds, the *Artamus leucopygialis* often avails itself of the deserted nests of other species instead of building one of its own. Most of those I found breeding on the Mokai had possessed themselves of the forsaken nest of the *Grallina Melanoleuca*, which they had rendered warm and of the proper size by slightly lining it with grasses, fibrous roots, and the narrow leaves of the *Eucalypti*. The eggs are generally three in number, are much lighter in colour, and more minutely spotted than those of any other species of the genus I have seen; their ground-colour is flesh-white, finely freckled and spotted with faint markings of reddish brown and grey, in some instances forming a zone at the larger end: their medium length is ten lines, and breadth seven lines and a half.

The sexes are only to be distinguished by dissection, and may be described thus: head, throat and back sooty grey; primaries and tail brownish black washed with grey; chest, all the under surface and rump pure white; irides brown; bill light bluish grey at the base, black at the tip; legs and feet mealy greenish grey.

The Plate represents a male, a female, two young ones and a nest of the natural size.