

ARTAMUS CINEREUS, Vieill.

Grey-breasted Wood Swallow.

Artamus cinereus, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xvii. p. 297.—Ib. Ency. Méth., Part II. p. 758.—Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 211.
Ocypterus cinereus, Valanc. Mém. du Mus. d'Hist. Nat., tom. vi. p. 22. t. 9. fig. 1.
Be-wô-wen, Aborigines of the lowland and mountain districts of Western Australia.
Wood Swallow of the colonists of ditto.

THIS bird exceeds in size all other of the Australian Wood Swallows, and as far as I am aware (not having seen the species from Madagascar, figured in the “Planches Enluminées,”) is the largest of the genus. Its large tail, most of the feathers of which are broadly tipped with white, as well as the colouring of its plumage, at once point out its close affinity to the *Artamus sordidus* and *Artamus minor*. Like them it possesses a very extensive range of habitat, Mr. Robert Brown having found it at Broad Sound on the east, and Mr. Gilbert on the west coast; it is also a native of Timor.

In Western Australia, although a very local, it is by no means an uncommon species, particularly at Swan River, where it inhabits the limestone hills near the coast, and the “Clear Hills” of the interior, assembling in small families, and feeding upon the seeds of the *Xanthorrhæa*, which proves that insects do not form the sole diet of this species; with such avidity in fact does it devour the ripe seeds of this grass-tree, that several birds may frequently be seen crowded together on the perpendicular seed-stalks of this plant busily engaged in extracting them; at other times, particularly among the limestone hills, where there are but few trees, it descends to the broken rocky ground in search of insects and their larvæ.

It breeds in October and November, making a round compact nest, in some instances of fibrous roots, lined with fine hair-like grasses, in others of the stems of grasses and small plants; it is built either in a scrubby bush or among the grass-like leaves of the *Xanthorrhæa*, and is deeper and more cup-shaped than those of the other members of the group. The eggs are subject to considerable variation in colour and in the character of their markings; they are usually bluish-white, spotted and blotched with lively reddish brown, intermingled with obscure spots and dashes of purplish grey; all the markings being most numerous towards the larger end; they are about eleven lines long by eight lines broad.

The sexes are alike in colour, and can only be distinguished from each other with certainty by dissection. I have remarked that specimens from Timor rather exceed in size those collected on the Australian continent, and are somewhat lighter in colour; but these variations are too slight to be regarded as specific.

Crown of the head, neck, throat and chest grey, passing into sooty grey on the abdomen; space between the bill and the eye, the fore-part of the cheek, the chin, the upper and under tail-coverts jet-black; two middle tail-feathers black; the remainder black, largely tipped with white, with the exception of the outer feather on each side, in which the black colouring extends on the outer web nearly to the tip; wings deep grey; primaries bluish grey; under surface of the shoulder white, passing into grey on the under side of the primaries; irides dark blackish brown; bill light greyish blue at the base, black at the tip; legs and feet greenish grey.

The figures are those of a male and a female of the natural size.