

SCENOPŒUS DENTIROSTRIS, Ramsay.

Toothed-billed Bower-bird.

Scenopœus dentirostris, Ramsay, P. Z. S. 1875, p. 591.—Id. Proc. Linn. Soc. New South Wales, ii. p. 188 (1878).

ONLY the naturalist who has devoted his life to the pursuit of a particular study, and has spent long years in the determination to render his writings on the various interesting subjects he has so long been treating as complete as lies in his power, can imagine the feelings of satisfaction with which I contemplate my work on the Birds of Australia. The time which I spent in working out the birds of that country is one of the most pleasing recollections of a life spent in the pursuit of natural history; and I cannot but congratulate myself on the fact that the additions to the avifauna of that continent have not been very numerous since I published my last volume on its ornithology. At the same time it would be vain to suppose that the field is exhausted, when such extraordinary new forms as that which is figured on the opposite Plate continue to be discovered, constituting, as it does, the type, not only of a new species, but of an entirely new genus. No one who looks for one moment at the extraordinary doubly toothed bill of the present bird can doubt the propriety of Mr. Ramsay's instituting a separate genus for so anomalous a bird.

Nothing is at present known of the habits of this species, or if it really builds a bower; but Mr. Ramsay observes that, like the Catbirds, it clears a large space under the brushwood some nine or ten feet in diameter, and ornaments the cleared parts with tufts of gaily tinted leaves and young shoots. The only specimens yet procured were shot with a rifle by Inspector Johnstone of Cardwell; and the habitat is given as the Bellenden-Ker range and the dense brushes clothing the steep sides of "Sea-view range," on the north-east coast of Queensland.

The following is the description by Mr. Ramsay:—

"The whole of the upper surface, wings, and tail rich olive-brown, the inner webs of the primaries and secondaries blackish brown, their margins near the base buffy white; under surface of the shoulders yellowish buff, with remains of broken bars of blackish brown on the smaller feathers; the under wing-coverts yellowish buff, with cross bars of dull brown; under primary-coverts buff, crossed more distinctly with dull brown; under surface of primaries and secondaries dark ashy brown, the basal half of the inner margin buff tinged with a faint wash of light rufous; flanks olive-buff; abdomen buff; under tail-coverts olive-buff, each feather barred with two or more lanceolate marks of dull olive-brown, under surface of the tail dull brown; throat, neck below, chest, and the rest of the under surface buffy white, each feather margined with olive-brown, which becomes lighter and less distinct on the lower parts, and almost obsolete on the flanks and abdomen; on the throat and chest the margins are almost black, and tinged with yellowish olive on the sides of the neck and chest, and the buff central portion of a deeper tint; the under surface has the appearance of being broadly streaked with lanceolate marks of buff, which become more and more indistinct as they approach the under tail-coverts, becoming obsolete on the abdomen.

"Total length 11 inches; wing 5·7; tail 4; tibia 2·2; tarsus 1·2; hind toe 0·6, its claw 0·4, its width 0·25; inner toe 0·65, its claw 0·3; middle toe 0·9, its claw 0·35; outer toe 0·7, its claw 0·3; width of the sole of the foot 0·35; bill from gape 1·2, from forehead 1·1, from the nostril 0·6, height at nostril 0·6, width at nostril 0·5, culmen 1·1; upper mandible black, lighter at the tip; lower mandible blackish brown; gape yellow; legs and feet black, claws brown."

It is now five years since I received information of the discovery of this bird from Mr. Coxen, then Honorary Curator of the Museum at Brisbane, with a promise that he would get the loan of the mutilated skin and forward the same to me for the purpose of figuring in the 'Birds of New Guinea.' Almost immediately after the receipt of Mr. Coxen's letter, I read the sad news of his nearly sudden decease, a source of the deepest regret both to myself as a relative, and all persons who had the pleasure of knowing him. Besides the skin, the head of a second example was forwarded, which greatly added to the interest of the subject. We now anxiously await more examples.