PTEROPUS FUNEREUS, Temm.

Funereal Vampire.

Pteropus funereus, Temm. Monog. tom. ii. p. 63. tab. 35. fig. 4.—Gray, List of Mamm. in Brit. Mus. p. 37. Al-wo-re, of the Aborigines at Port Essington.

This species appears to be as exclusively confined to the northern portions of Australia as the Pteropus poliocephalus is to the south-eastern. M. Temminck gives the animal a very wide range, for he states that he has positive evidence of its existence on four other islands, namely Timor, Amboyna, Borneo and Sumatra. Mr. Gilbert's notes inform me that "it is extremely abundant in all parts of the Cobourg Peninsula; during the day it may be seen in great numbers suspended from the upper branches of the mangroves overhanging the creeks: while living it emits a very strong and disagreeable odour which is perceptible at a considerable distance; it becomes very active at night, and while flying about in search of food utters a loud, trembling, but shrill whistle." Frequent mention is made of this species in Dr. Leichardt's Journal of his Expedition from Moreton Bay to Port Essington, and despite of its disagreeable odour, it often formed for himself and party an excellent and welcome article of food. Like the other species, it feeds upon fruit and the honey of the various flowers; in one instance Dr. Leichardt found them feeding upon the blossoms of the tea-tree, and remarked that they were then more than usually fat and delicate, while those that had been revelling among the blossoms of the gum-trees were not so fat, and had a strong, unpleasant odour. So numerous did they become towards the latter part of the journey, that "twelve were brought in for luncheon, thirty more were procured during the afternoon, and at least fifty were left wounded and hanging to the trees; upon another occasion they were seen clustering in such numbers, that the branches of the low trees drooped with their weight so near the ground, that they could easily be killed with cudgels. In the neighbourhood of the river Roper, myriads were suspended in thick clusters on the highest trees, in the most shady and rather moist parts of the valley; they started as the travellers passed, and the flapping of their large membranous wings produced a sound like that of a hail-storm." Dr. Leichardt went the next day with two of his party to the spot where they had seen the greatest number, and while he was examining the neighbouring trees his companions shot sixty-seven, of which fifty-five were brought to the camp, and served for dinner, breakfast and luncheon, each of the party receiving eight: the animal here lived upon a small, blue, oval stone-fruit, of an acid taste, with a bitter kernel, growing on a tree of moderate size.

Considerable difference is found to exist in the colouring of this animal, but whether this difference is due to sex or age is at present unknown: the following are the descriptions of the two specimens now before me:—

In the one, the head, upper part of the body, the rump, and all the under surface is clothed with a thick, loose black fur, with a wash of deep chestnut between the shoulders; the centre of the back, and the arms, clothed with thin, shining, closely pressed black hairs. In the other, there is a wash of rufous round the eyes, and a broad collar of rich deep chestnut across the nape of the neck. In both the wing-membranes are deep purplish black; and the claws are black.

The figures are of the natural size.