

INTRODUCTION.

OF the birds illustrated in the present Monograph, so few species had been discovered in the days of Linnæus, that that great naturalist was induced to include them all in one genus, under the name of *Ramphastos*; but subsequent research in this branch of ornithological science having produced many additional examples, M. Illiger has with the greatest propriety arranged them under two distinct and well marked genera, applying the established term *Ramphastos* to the true Toucans, characterized by their large bills and square tails, and throwing the Araçaris, having graduated tails and less disproportionate bills, into a new genus, which he has denominated *Pteroglossus*, thus forming from the Swedish naturalist's limited genus an extensive family, the members of which are strictly allied to each other in general form and habits, constitute a group at once natural and well defined, and are no less remarkable for the peculiarities of their habits and manners than for their beauty of plumage, and in many species, though the enormous size of their bills may seem to contradict such an assertion, for the elegance of their form and movements.

In geographical distribution these birds are strictly confined to the tropical portions of America. According to the best information, they are a retiring and shy race, are mostly observed in small flocks or companies, and inhabit the dense woods and forests of that luxuriant country.

In their choice of food they are perfectly omnivorous; and although their elastic bill and delicately feathered tongue would lead us to conclude that fruits constituted the greatest proportion of their diet, we have abundant testimony that they as readily devour flesh, fish, eggs, and small birds, to which, in all probability, are added the smaller kinds of reptiles, caterpillars, and the larvæ of insects in general.